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WHY OPTIONAL DOES NOT WORK:
AN ANALYSIS ON RECRUITMENT
THROUGH COLLEGE CONNECTION

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WHY OPTIONAL DOES NOT WORK:
AN ANALYSIS ON
RECRUITMENT THROUGH
COLLEGE CONNECTION

by

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Dedication

To My Family.

For mom and dad, the most incredible parents, role models, and supporters in the world. Your endless love, encouragement, and guidance brought me where I am today and crafted me into the individual I have become.

For my siblings Harvey, Yvette, and Adrian who have always been there for me. To all my nieces, nephews, and in-laws for your love, support and understanding especially when I had class, papers, or school trips and had to miss special events and outings in the park.

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WHY OPTIONAL DOES NOT WORK:
AN ANALYSIS ON RECRUITMENT THROUGH COLLEGE CONNECTION

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Supervisor: John E. Roueche

There is an ever increasing need to ‘Close the Gaps’ in higher education and increase college enrollment rates. Colleges have responded to this need through numerous recruitment efforts yet limited research exists on the successful components of model programs that have been established. This study explored components of College Connection, a nationally recognized recruitment initiative by Austin Community College. College Connection is geared toward increasing the college-going rate in central Texas by providing all high school seniors with the tools, support, and guidance to enroll in college. The research was conducted through a qualitative study of graduating high school seniors from two different high schools in central Texas. The study explored

whether students were participating in the four ‘required’ components of College Connection, and if so, were the ‘optional’ and ‘recommended’ support services at each of the high schools being utilized. It was also important to examine which of the student support services offered on the high school campuses were most helpful according to students. Factors that students perceived were preventing them from participating in enrollment activities were also explored. Additionally, themes and recruitment strategies that emerged from the qualitative interviews were collected and used as suggestions to refine current practice.

Background data on the participation rates, success, and retention of students who had participated in College Connection showed enormous progress in central Texas. This study, however, reaffirmed the idea that “students don’t do optional,” and it was essential to have students in all high schools participate in all of the enrollment steps. None of the participating students in this study attended any of the ‘optional’ evening or Saturday events held on their high school campus. The study went on to reveal that even the ‘required’ enrollment components at one of the high schools were not being required of all high school seniors. This prevented many graduating high school seniors from participating in enrollment activities and gathering college information as was intended. Furthermore, both high schools elected not to schedule any of the optional or recommended components the college had offered such as registration support, teleconferencing or campus tours. This study overall found that students who did participate in the required enrollment activities found the college support services to be extremely “helpful and informative.” It also became evident that the recruitment efforts

at both high schools had begun to establish a college-going culture where students were familiar with college enrollment steps and terminology, and all but one student mentioned they would be pursuing higher education after high school graduation.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Brief Historical Context on ‘Closing the Gaps’

There is an ever increasing pressure on community colleges to increase college enrollment rates in order to sustain economic needs. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) charged a committee with drafting a revised higher education plan in 1999. In 2000, the ‘Closing the Gaps’ report was released stating various goals and strategies that needed to be implemented in an effort to increase the number of students enrolled in Texas higher education institutions by an additional 500,000 by the year 2015 (THECB, 2008). After further analysis and growing demands by the state of Texas, that number was increased by an additional 150,000 students (THECB, 2008). Statewide goals included: carrying out of the state’s uniform recruitment and retention strategy and other efforts aimed at making college and university enrollment and graduation reflect the population of Texas; creating seamless student transitions among high schools, community and technical colleges, universities, and health-related institutions; and ensuring that all students and their parents understand the benefits of higher education and the necessary steps to prepare them academically and financially for college (THECB, 2000).

Community Colleges are often the institutions called upon to support state enrollment demands because of capacity limits at universities and the unique capability of community college to serve varying populations. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2009) identified community colleges as often being the access point for education and a catalyst for economic development. THECB (2000) explained that Texas is now a minority—majority state and “the state’s Hispanic and Black Populations have enrolled in higher education

at rates well below that of the White population” (p. 7). This was critical when considering the economic impact that an uneducated population would create. THECB (2000) emphasized that a shortfall in the number of degrees and certificates among Texas residents leads to a less educated workforce and higher poverty rate. Therefore, efforts have increased among Texas higher education institutions to recruit a new generation of students, specifically targeting Hispanic students whose population in Texas is surpassing the growth rate of any other race group. In response to 'Closing the Gaps,' colleges and universities had developed and implemented varying programs to meet enrollment targets and try to support the social, financial, and academic needs often deterring underrepresented students from enrolling. Zamani (2000) illustrated that “community colleges are often the primary vehicle of postsecondary opportunities for first-generation, low-income students and underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities” (p. 95) and therefore carry additional responsibilities. The ‘Closing the Gaps’ mandate was critical when evaluating the changing demographics of Texas and charging colleges with increasing college participation rates.

Origins of College Connection

College Connection is one of the largest growing trends in the future of community colleges and was specifically created in response to the State of Texas 'Closing the Gaps' initiative by leaders at Austin Community College (ACC). College Connection is an initiative that has caught on as one of the premier solutions to recruiting graduating high school seniors among Texas community colleges (College Connection, 2009). Since the state of Texas' goal is to drastically increase the number of students enrolled in institutions of higher education, ACC found a method to address those needs by creating a spinoff from one of their successful and

fastest growing programs, the Early College Start (Dual Credit) program. According to Dr. Luanne Preston, Austin Community College's Executive Director of College Relations, the administrative team gathered to brainstorm on methods that would most uniquely meet the needs of students at ACC by devising a plan to create a seamless transition between high school and college (L. Preston, personal communication, 2008). One of the successful components of Early College Start involved providing support on the enrollment steps at each of the area high schools for students who would be enrolling in dual credit. The student support services often included an information session for parents and students, support with the admissions application and pre-advising, administering of the college assessment exam, as well as academic advising to answer questions and offer support with registration. All of the enrollment steps were offered to all high school campuses in ACC's eight-county service area therefore adopting similar strategies to serve high school seniors was easier to replicate.

The Texas legislators have allocated funds for recruitment efforts through House Bill I and more recently additional "College Access Challenge Grants signed into federal law by the President on September 27, 2007" (THECB, 2009, p.8). More Texas institutions have been encouraged by THECB to implement new recruitment efforts, often times highlighting model programs such as College Connection and investing some grants for planning and implementation. The latest grant released by the THECB was a College Connection 2+2+2 grant that was structured with similar outreach activities, but included professional development for high school and college counselors to assist students through student support services (THECB, 2009). The College Connection 2+2+2 grants were established to continue to target high school seniors but also add four-year institutions into the partnership. Overall, College Connection has become an effort to target students who may not have planned to attend college, or may have

seen the possibility of entering into a college program distant or impossible. To achieve this goal, ACC established their program to provide 100% of all high school seniors in central Texas with an all-inclusive college enrollment support system. Similar to Early College Start, there are four required steps in College Connection including support at all high school campuses in the following areas: 1. Admissions Application, 2. Assessment Test, 3. Pre-advising, 4. Academic Advising, and a Graduation letter unique to College Connection (College Connection, 2009). Other optional support services offered to high schools included a senior presentation, a financial aid presentation, student life information, teleconferences, campus tours, registration assistance and other services, see APPENDIX V (College Connection, 2009). All of these efforts were provided to increase enrollment rates, provide information and support to students, and in an effort to begin creating a college-going culture.

Is College Connection Working?

College Connection (2009) highlights Austin Community College’s 2010 participation goals illustrated below to show that the college stood above their target participation goals in all areas minus one in spring 2009 enrollments. ACC’s specific ‘Closing the Gap’ goal was to

ACC 2010	Participation Goals	Spring 2009 Enrollment
Overall	Above Target 2010 Target: 35,374	Spring 2009: 36,601
African American	Above Target 2010 Target: 3,000	Spring 2009: 3,120
Hispanic	Slightly Below Target 2010 Target: 9,105	Spring 2009: 8,918

White	Above Target 2010 Target: 20,115	Spring 2009: 21,170
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(College Connection, 2009)

increase student enrollment by an additional 15,000 by 2015. Through supplements from House Bill I, and the collaborative efforts among all the school districts in central Texas, ACC surpassed all of the fall 2008 target goals (College Connection, 2010). By collecting longitudinal data of College Connection cohort groups, ACC allows both central Texas school districts as well as local colleges to gauge where central Texas high school seniors are ending up, in what directions they are headed, and track where students succeed and persist. Twenty-six school districts are currently served by the College Connection program, which accounted for every school district in central Texas with a public high school, addressing the needs of the entire ACC service area. In an effort to provide equal college access opportunities to both rural and urban high schools in the service area, College Connection made this effort a priority. According to Dr. Mary Hensley, Executive Vice President of College Operations at Austin Community College and creator of the College Connection program “the mission [was] to provide college exposure for every single student and assist them through the enrollment processes which were found to be the most intimidating components that and often deterred a certain percentage of students” from enrolling (M. Hensley, personal communication, April 21, 2008).

College Connection addresses the needs of the large population of students who graduate from area high schools with no specific postsecondary or career plans. The THECB data tracking has shown high success indicators, not only in college enrollment, but also in financial aid applications and awards as well as a celebrated increase in the enrollment of minority students who were identified as specific targets set by the ‘Closing the Gaps’ initiative. According to

THECB, 2008 reports, after implementing College Connection, participation in higher education increased in Leander ISD by 10%, a participation increase of 11% in Elgin ISD, 8% in Lockhart, 7% in Hays, 6% in both Pflugerville and Manor, and an overall increase in the number of students who participated in higher education in all but three of the ISDs in ACC's eight-county service area (College Connection, 2009).

Encouraging new students to enroll in college has always been a mission of community colleges and their visions have been carried out to grant new opportunities to as many individuals as possible. Over the years, many new initiatives and creative recruitment methods have been implemented at various community colleges in response to 'Closing the Gaps.' College Connection showed initial success by serving the needs of communities, attending to new populations, and addressing the changing demographics. After proven results from College Connection at Austin Community College, the mass recruitment strategies were replicated at various community colleges around the nation including the state of Florida, Maine, and Colleges in California (College Connection, 2009).

Community colleges who implemented College Connection after Austin Community College's program in Texas initially included: Alamo Community College District, Coastal Bend Community College District, Del Mar Community College District, Houston Community College District, and Victoria Community College but that number has since then increased to over 55 colleges (College Connection, 2010). THECB recommended that College Connection be implemented statewide. Many colleges in Texas are currently putting into practice forms of College Connection that were most suitable for their specific community. College Connection showed results of success and has been recognized with numerous honors and awards including

the 2009 Innovation of the Year award, as a semifinalist for the Excelencia in Education award, the Bellwether Award, and the THECB Star Award, (College Connection, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Although enrollment in higher education has increased in central Texas over the last five years, and enrollment is at its all time highest at ACC, approximately 64% of students in the San Marcos Independent School District (ISD) are still not enrolling in higher education. In Del Valle ISD 75% of graduating high school seniors are still not enrolling in higher education; 52% in Austin ISD, 44% in Round Rock ISD, and 52% in Jarrell ISD also showed that much more needed to be done to reach students not enrolling in higher education (College Connection, 2009). Although there have been increases in participation, the state of Texas is overall still below enrollment targets for 2010. This illustrated a problem when considering all of the social ramifications that exist by having an uneducated population, including a cycle of poverty. Perez (2008) identified that “Hispanics tend to have lower levels of education, lower wages and as a result rely more on state services” (p. 13).

Spellings (2006) reported that many students were not enrolling in college because of inadequate information and rising costs combined with a confusing financial aid system that spent too little on those who needed help the most. In reality, there are many barriers that prevented students from making it into class on the first day or getting lost in the admissions process, not having sufficient academic advising, and not being college-ready. Noeth and Wimberley (2002) concluded that primarily it is minority students who do not have sufficient access to support networks and informational resources to get students through the student services processes. Spelling (2006) further described the troubling and persistent gap between college attendance and the graduation rates of low-income Americans and their more affluent

peers. Offering enrollment processes that are required of all high school seniors in central Texas, ACC was able to reach all students included in intended targets. Unfortunately, some of the enrollment steps were optional or recommended and therefore not utilized by students who many have needed them the most. The purpose of study was to examine student participation in College Connection and determine recruitment strategies that could be refined to serve more students and further increase enrollment in higher education.

Enrollment gaps are especially alarming when considering the nation's growing population of racial and ethnic minorities (Spellings, 2006). The role and responsibility of admission and enrollment personnel in higher education has become increasingly critical for the success of institutions and the experience of the students (Grandillo, 2009). McClennan and Stringer (2009) pointed out that "the percentage of young people of color enrolled in elementary and secondary schools have grown dramatically over the past two decades and should be an indication of this century's college population," however, with current participation trends much more needs to be done to recruit, prepare and support students to transition into college (p. 84). According to Kinslow (2008) "we must continually re-think and challenge the structures we create" (p.23).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight on students' perception of College Connection, to find out which components were the most helpful according to students, and to identify whether there had been any obstacles that deterred students from participating in the ACC enrollment steps offered on their high school campuses. Even though College Connection targets 100% of high school seniors, this study analyzed why 100% of students were not

participating; and sought to determine if optional or recommended support services were the missing link, according to students. This study reported on the areas within support services that were the most effective and beneficial recruitment strategies so that colleges that had implemented College Connection could refine processes to better serve the students. Further refining of College Connection would hopefully lead to additional positive results, so state legislators could create policy and provide sustainable funding for this type of recruitment initiative.

The study was conducted through qualitative interviews of 22 high school seniors at two central Texas high schools within two different school districts. A high school counselor from each school was also interviewed. Furthermore, background longitudinal data on College Connection cohorts were examined to gain a more holistic understanding of the programs and its success measures. Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (2009) reminded colleges of the need to effectively connect with students by building relationships and creating visibility “in every contact with a student or potential student, starting with outreach to local high schools” (p.2). This study examined the support services offered at two high schools and evaluated students’ perception of the effectiveness of college presence on their high school campus.

Research Questions

1. Are high school seniors from two different high schools in central Texas participating in the required Austin Community College’s College Connection student enrollment processes? If so, how are the optional and recommended support services being utilized?

- a. According to student perception, how helpful were the student support services (example: Financial Aid, Advising, Information Sessions) offered on the high school campus?
 - b. What factors do students perceive prevent them from participating in higher education enrollment activities through Austin Community College's College Connection initiative?
2. What other themes and recruitment strategies emerged from the qualitative interviews of high school seniors that could be used to reach more students?

Methodology

The qualitative methods used in this study consisted of grounded theory using comparative analysis. Grounded theory provided a foundation of predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications (Glaser, Strauss, 1999). The study began by analyzing enrollment patterns from ACC's College Connection student cohort data for the last six years in addition to CCSSE data identifying areas of student services that traditional students found to be most important. This allowed the researcher to create predictions about which of the student services students favored, which they found to be most beneficial, and tried to identify in which areas students were most likely to participate; the interviews answered the 'why' and explored the subjects in greater depth. The qualitative interviews were conducted in small focus groups. The original intent was to conduct focus groups plus individual interviews but the researcher found early in the study that students who were gathered into small groups could help each other remember events and occurrences much easier by describing what had occurred at those events. This was especially helpful in cases where students were not familiar with the name of a service such as the name ASSET for the college entrance test. Students in one of the groups were able to

remember attending the senior kick-off specifically because one student mentioned getting “ACC pencils” which triggered the rest of the group to remember that it was the meeting where they received a course catalog, discussed degree plans and other information.

The study was conducted at two high school campuses in different independent school districts with graduating high school seniors. A total of 22 students participated in the study and were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences with recruitment processes held during their senior year. The objective of this study was to gain insight from students as to which enrollment services were most helpful to them, which recruitment strategies had been most effective, whether they faced any obstacles, and whether they attended optional activities. Additionally, a high school counselor from each school was interviewed to further understand the college events that were held at their schools. The student interviews were completed in designated meeting areas on each high school campus from a convenient sample of high school seniors during their advisory period. The focus of this study was to identify recruitment strategies that were working and those that could be refined to reach more students.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are important for this research study:

1. **College Connection**—is a recruitment initiative structured to help high school seniors transition into college. The college “provides hands-on assistance with the process of applying to college, taking a college placement test, and making important choices about degrees and schedules (College Connection, 2009).

2. **Student Success**—has various textbook definitions but for this study is defined as the successful transition from high school to enrollment in an institution of higher educational institution.
3. **College Readiness**—represents being academically prepared to place into college credit courses by satisfying the requirements of the Texas Success Initiative college placement cutoff scores.
4. **Closing the Gaps**—is a term derived from a Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s plan released in the year 2000 to increase the enrollment gaps in higher education.
5. **Financial Aid**— is federal financial support provided to qualifying students to assist in the funding of attendance at an institution of higher education. To determine eligibility for funding, students must begin the process by filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
6. **College Placement Exam**—is a required college entrance test that accesses reading writing and math to determine a student’s college readiness and is used to place students in the appropriate courses.
7. **Enrollment Management**—is described as “developing plans and analyses to shape student enrollment from the initial point of contact with students through graduation including marketing, admissions, financial aid, and academic advising” (Ritze, 2006, p.84).
8. **Student Services**—as referred to in this study are the enrollment support services that assist students through enrollment and into a higher education institution. Student

services components include but are not limited to: admissions, assessment, advising, financial aid, and recruitment.

Limitations

Generational differences among students as well as students' needs are continually changing, therefore recruitment strategies will continually have to evolve to best reach students and keep up with technological changes. The generalized need of one community may vary from the next; the strategies that were examined in this study may not be the appropriate methods of recruitment for other higher educational institutions. College Connection is a fairly new recruitment model and has limited literature published on the topic; however, there are vast amounts of literature on each component of the initiative which allows for a broad base of supporting literature. The growth and expansion of College Connection has been possible through the support and availability of various grant donors as well as supplemental support from House Bill I. Limited funding is cause for reservation to carry out similar functions. Colleges may also encounter limitations due to accessibility of resources and staff able to carry out specific recruitment strategies that are discussed in this study. Varied levels of support from the Board of Trustees may also be experienced which would change the outcome. Support for such an initiative needs to be an integral part of the college recruitment process because of the level of commitment of resources and staff the institution must invest. A professor from The University of Texas at Austin once said, "a study is as good as its researcher." The researcher has previous experience and knowledge of the initiative but is creating a segmented study using a qualitative approach and distinct constructs to limit any bias. According to AACC (2009), there are currently 11.7 million students enrolled in community colleges which accounts for 44% of students enrolled in higher education. A future question may be whether community colleges

could support an influx of enrollment from mass recruitment efforts across states with limited funding sources.

Delimitations

This study analyzed data from a single institution—Austin Community College and therefore provided the results and experiences from only one college. Only two high schools that were chosen to participate in this study from a large service area with over 55 high schools varying in size, resources, location, school districts, and demographics; results would necessarily change depending on which schools are studied. Austin Community College was specifically selected because of the length of time in which the initiative had been in progress and ACC’s role in developing College Connection. Using ACC above other colleges allowed for a greater pool of longitudinal data from the college which provided insight about the progress, structure, and performance from its inception. The study examined only the support services provided by Austin Community College’s College Connection staff and did not control for external factors of college support provided by high school counselors, faculty, or transition coordinators. The modified College Connection 2+2+2 initiative was also not evaluated as part of this study; therefore, student transferability into four-year institutions was not a component explored with the students. Sampling of College Connection cohort groups did not screen for students who had or were participating in the Early College Start or Tech Prep programs prior to beginning the College Connection enrollment processes, but students were asked to report participation in either of those programs on their student intake form given prior to each interview to monitor for themes. Students were not pre-screened on specific criteria with the exception of having to be seniors in high school over the age of 18. No prior screening took place intentionally in an effort to avoid introducing bias into the study by selecting students with commonalities.

Assumptions

It was assumed that students were not participating in any or very few of the optional components of College Connection. It is also assumed that there were internal or external factors in the students' lives preventing them from participating in the 'required' College Connection events. Based on national awards and recognition of College Connection, this study presumed that the initiative was reaching new student populations with different needs. Furthermore, this study believed that the most effective student services component provided within College Connection may be advising because of the level of individualized social interaction that takes place during advising as well as the opportunity for students to review options in higher education, consider plans for the future, and ask questions. Many assumptions derived from this qualitative study, but the constructs created allowed for non-biased themes to emerge. It was assumed that an individual or specific process may have been the indicators contributing to a student's enrollment into college; the student interviews allowed for assumptions to either become transparent or disqualified.

Significance of the Study

According to Goldrick-Rab (2009) as the cost of higher education increases, the economy declines, and competition at universities increases "students are more likely than ever to attend one of the nation's 1,045 community colleges" (p. A27). The study by Raby (2009) illustrated portrays the community college model as being able to offer a second chance for nontraditional students to achieve a higher education. Findings identified that "these institutions maintain a flexibility characteristic that enabled them to idealize and demonstrate in a practical way the means by which new generations could receive skills to ensure a stable employment that in turn

increased economic development, social prosperity, and improved social conditions” (Raby, 2009, p.3). According to Achieving the Dream (ATD) (2005), many community college students are achieving their goals, but many of them are not as successful because of financial difficulties, work or family responsibilities, lack of child care, transportation difficulties, or weak academic preparation. There are many factors that impede a student’s success in obtaining a higher education degree; this study examined the barriers facing students in two of the Austin-area high schools. According to student perception, students in this study would be able to suggest areas of the enrollment process that they or their peers had chosen not to participate in, or complete, or were confused about, and would be able to indicate which factors prevented them or helped them to enroll in postsecondary courses.

College Connection at Austin Community College was structured to provide support services for 100% of high school seniors. This study attempted to identify factors and suggestions for refining recruitment strategies by gaining a better understanding of students’ experiences. College enrollment is an important subject as colleges continue to search for unique strategies for enrollment management, recruitment, and response to state mandates. College Connection at Austin Community College is a national model and is being replicated across Texas and the nation; further analysis can help shape answers to many questions facing community colleges. This study attempted to identify the factors that most contribute to college enrollment as other colleges begin developing their own College Connection initiatives.

Chapter Summary

Goldrick-Rab (2009) emphasized that community colleges needed to be considered more in public support and policy debates because of their ability to educate and train America.

Providing support for “the most affordable and accessible colleges found within all communities...will put families back on the path to economic prosperity” (Goldrick-Rab, 2009, p. A27). Encouraging new students to enroll in college has always been a mission for community colleges, and their vision to grant new opportunities to as many individuals as possible is being carried out. Over the years, there have been many new initiatives and creative recruitment methods implemented at various community colleges in response to equity in statewide entry into higher education, as well as serve the needs of communities, attend to new populations, and address changing demographics. Conferences, best practice workshops, and close communication have given community college leaders great outlets for sharing new methods and deciding what practices are most suitable for their specific communities. This study examined additional factors that may increase enrollment efforts of one of the nation’s best recruitment models—College Connection. Collins (2001) identified that great companies are those who respond with thoughtfulness and creativity, driven by a compulsion to turn unrealized potential into results.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

It is essential to reflect on the trends of the late 1960's community college recruitment movement when a large influx of students enrolled in postsecondary education. According to Dr. John E. Roueche, Director of the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin, there was approximately one new community college being built a week (personal communication, 2008). It was not until recently when global competition is placed at the forefront of discussion and more research is available about how the economy was affected by individuals not pursuing higher education or work force training with reports like 'Closing the Gaps,' that we have again placed emphasis on recruitment and retention (THECB, 2008). As community colleges respond to reporting agencies and constituents pressuring them to 'Close the Gaps,' large scaled programs like College Connection are being implemented to bring about mass enrollments by targeting high school seniors and extending recruitment to reach new populations, as was done in the 1960's. College Connection is a fairly new initiative, but the components of the program are ideal practices of community colleges used around the nation. Austin Community College has combined successful student services support offerings and collaboration with high schools to assist high school seniors in the transition to college.

Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) assessed difficulties specifically in Latino student transition and found that many college administrators needed to develop programs to make the transition easier. Achieving the Dream (ATD) recognized that "the United States (U.S.) economy needs more people with postsecondary education; in particular, it needs to raise educational

attainment among low-income groups and people of color,” (ATD, 2005, p.1) which added to the critical nature of providing accessibility and support services to all students as early as possible.

Ritze (2006) explored “recent national trends—such as loss of status as the most highly educated nation, increasing diversity of the U.S. population, gaps in educational attainment and economic prosperity between whites and minorities, and the underrepresentation of minorities at each level of education—that point to continued importance of addressing inequality in American postsecondary education”(p. 83). In order to effectively assist all students through the education pipeline, educators must take into consideration the varying differences among student needs, backgrounds, and social differences to further understand areas to be improved. Santovec (1992) described that “successful programs to recruit and retain minorities share a common characteristic: they’re multidimensional,” (p.5) as with the enrollment components provided by College Connection. Student success recruitment programs must strengthen students’ academic skills, their ability to function in the campus environment, their self-esteem, and a sense of purpose and awareness of many cultures. (Santovec,1992)

Importance of Student Services

McClenney (2007) discussed the level of quality in student services provided for students as being essential to improve practices in ways that would increase student success in the first year of college, thereby improving course completion rates and strengthening student persistence. Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), a survey administered by CCSSE has been used to assess entering community college students all over the nation and goes beyond simply suggesting solutions by encouraging colleges to create plans of actions, and make data-driven decisions through their workshops as well as their thorough reports and resources

dispersed to all member colleges (McClenney, 2007); Austin Community College is one of those members. SENSE data offers additional support for students as they go through advising, where many students are lost in the process (CCSSE, 2008). Orianno-Darnall (2008) identified that a large majority of students decide not to continue on with their academic endeavors past the first semester. Enrollment trends show that an even higher number of students never make it past the front doors (McClenney, 2007).

Ritze (2006) found that “once students transfer from a community college to a university, their chances of graduating are equal to similar students who began at a university (p. 83-84). Ritze (2006) also emphasized that these important findings were positive results most pronounced for low income students and those with poor records of high school performance since they had to overcome additional obstacles. Therefore, more intervention needed to take place so that more students have an opportunity to successfully enroll and participate in postsecondary education. Dalton and McClinton (2002) described a student services provider as one that develops practical wisdom to provide a diverse group of students’ needs with support. “Practical wisdom permits one to imagine and foresee the likely outcomes of situations and make early interventions to avoid undesirable outcomes” for students with varying needs (Dalton and McClinton, 2002 p. 101). Student support service providers are the students’ first impression of what college represents. Success from student support services comes from developing a connection with the student; and the practical wisdom is a “deep conviction about what will and will not work in given situations based on accumulated experience and reflection” (Dalton and McClinton, 2002, p. 101).

Gleazer (2001) formulated that a community college’s mission needs to include various elements to be “considered superior” (p.15). Below are the areas of suggested criteria:

1. The college should be adaptable, capable of change in response to new conditions in demand or circumstances,
2. The college operates with a continuing awareness of its community,
3. The college has continuing relationships with the learner,
4. The college extends opportunity to the “unserved,”
5. The college accommodates to diversity,
6. The college has a nexus function in the community’s learning system.

(Gleazer, 1998, p.15)

All of these elements are in line for ‘Closing the Gaps’ in higher education and identifying methods to reach the “unserved” and underrepresented populations.

Roueche, Johnson, and Roueche (1997) explained that it was “critical to develop the elements of vision, values, mission, role and scope, and goals” in order for an institution to be most effective (p. 56). Austin Community College’s mission is to “promote student success and improve communities by providing affordable access to higher education and workforce training in its eight–county service area” (ACC, 2009). All high schools within the eight-county service area are provided with student support services through College Connection to all high school seniors during the regular high school day to reach the maximum number of students. This is critical when gaining an understanding of the scope of differences among the populations which are being served: varying races, economic backgrounds, college preparation, school performance, family support, confidence, urban residents, rural dwellers and many other.

Theoretical Framework

To increase college-going rates, institutions of higher education must focus on the wide

spectrum of high school student needs, abilities, academic preparedness, as well as variations in motivation. Kagan's (1990) theoretical framework discussed two main sources differentiating students success: (a) labeling theory, and (b) evidence that cognitive activity is interwoven with the environmental context in which it occurs. The role of this theory has had a profound impact on examining student behaviors and why they may be reluctant to try new things. Kagan's (1990) research evaluated the differences and needs between at-risk and non at-risk students where she identified that within classrooms there were distinct chronic low achievers who were labeled as students that were not going to succeed. Kagan (1990) described that being labeled led to being less likely to be nurtured into an environment of student success and created very different experiences. In an effort to give all students the opportunity to have access to a college education and bridge the transition between high school and college, recruitment strategies like College Connection target 100% of students to reach all populations and ensure that every student graduates from high school with a college acceptance letter (College Connection, 2009).

Laanan (2000) explained that student attitudes and perceptions about career, educational, and life goals differ among ethnicities and therefore change the climate of how students should be served. The type of support services which are most critical for underrepresented students vary. For example, financial aid "should strive for optimal assistance [for] students and there should be an increase of work-study and job placement programs" available upon enrollment (Laanan, 2000, p. 22). Beginning with information sessions offered to parents and students, every step of the recruitment process is important for a student's enrollment into classes. According to Laanan (2000), family support among minority students plays an important role not only in learning about career choices, but also in enhancing academic success; therefore, including family in participation is critical. Ravitch (1983) reminded us that increased enrollment

in higher education create conditions that “preserve democracy, eliminate poverty, lower the crime rate, enrich the common culture, reduce unemployment, ease the assimilation of immigrants to the that nation, overcome differences between ethnic and racial groups...and guide returning students into useful and skilled careers.”

Christenson and Sheridan (2001) eliminated the misconception that family involvement only makes an impact in the lives of underrepresented students. The reality is that all students could benefit from such support and the “achievement for average students would be elevated significantly if collaboration between families and schools were the norm” (Christenson, & Sheridan, 2001, p.49). This is one of the reasons why family parent nights, open houses, and regular communications are such a critical component to families being involved and informed of their student’s progress, opportunities, and educational pathways. High schools have different practices and expectations for family involvement; some have regular, scheduled functions with mandatory attendance, while others make functions optional. Some schools email parents almost weekly to keep them informed of events, resources, and even scholarships available, while other nearby school may not even have a valid phone numbers for parents on file. Submitting cell phone numbers and email addresses to schools for communication is usually optional yet has been noted as the best form of communication for most families. Federal and state funding has been set in place to create programs for bridging the gap of communication. One of the programs has created a five-step, strategic planning process, shown below:

- (1) Awareness-increasing community wide understanding of the need to strengthen and promote family involvement.
- (2) Commitment—developing shared commitments by families, schools, and communities to act jointly.

- (3) Capacity building—developing the capacity of families, schools, and communities to work together.
- (4) Knowledge development—identifying and developing knowledge of the use of programs and practices that successfully connect families, schools, and communities.
- (5) Performance improvement—supporting the development of appropriate performance benchmarks that assess progress toward greater family involvement through family, school, and community partnerships.

(Christenson, & Sheridan, 2001, p. 49)

As parents begin to understand the importance of participation in their students' education, they must also take into consideration attitude and create a positive environment. Parent's own beliefs and the message that they convey to their children are often what their children believe.

According to Christenson and Sheridan (2001) parents can have a profound impact on their student's educational progress if they incorporate the four A's element, "approach, attitudes, atmosphere, and actions" (p. 25). Becoming involved in a student's education, stressing the importance of education, creating an environment conducive for learning, and playing a role in a students' progress creates a positive impact on student performance and a student's own attitudes toward school.

Sowell (1993) reminded educators to take into consideration social factors hindering students but to also address the many other issues surrounding a student's educational progress. Pilarzyk and Wang (2007) described a model developed by the Strategic Planning and Research Department (SPRD), which evaluated student success initiatives by taking into consideration challenges that a student may encounter preventing them from being successful. The model, found in APPENDIX IV, began by exploring student background factors, then branched out into

any possible learning-related issues, projection participation, and/or life challenges that were all predictors of student outcomes (Pilarzyk, Wang, 2007). By exploring background factors, educators can gain a much greater understanding of “both traditional attributes such as gender, race, marital status and age as well as household income, current work obligations, family college experiences and reasons for attending college” (Pilarzyk, Wang, 2007, p. 92). Having a basic understanding of a student’s background was described as the first step to being able to address any learning-related issues or life challenges such as social, psychological and physical stressors (Pilarzyk, Wang, 2007). The Model for Evaluations of Student Success Initiatives also looked at program participation or interventions to measure for importance or satisfaction with various program intervention components (Pilarzyk, Wang, 2007). Many difficult obstacles have prevented student success outcomes, and although many interventions have been created to assist students, educators must take a holistic view of a student’s life and specific needs in order to have the most impact.

Minority Student Participation Model

According to Fields (1991), the Dawson Technical Institute of Chicago in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education devised a plan to increase recruitment and retention among minority students in Vocational and Technical Programs that went further than assisting students through enrollment practices. The Minority Student Participation Model evaluated the following eight components:

- (1) Recruitment
- (2) Intake/Admissions
- (3) Assessment

- (4) Counseling/Career Planning
- (5) Financial aid/registration
- (6) Program Placement/Retention
- (7) Job Placement
- (8) Follow Up Evaluation

(Fields, 1991, p. 13)

Although the Illinois State Board of Education model specifically targeted enrollment into vocational and technical programs, many of their enrollment support services mirror those of colleges around the nation. Fields (2001) described that the recruitment and outreach in this model were the cornerstone of all programmatic activities and included public relations, communications, outreach, and follow-up. The important factor to realize was that enrollment consisted of many steps where a student could become lost or confused at any point.

According to Fields (2001), student services' involvement was one of the factors contributing to successful enrollment. Involvement included having financial aid and registration representatives review financial and enrollment procedures with prospective students, mailing congratulatory letters of acceptance, and encouraging prospective students to begin the registration process while representatives were available (Fields, 2001, p. 11). This recruitment model went far beyond the normal scope of support offerings and offered services such as:

- Establishing support with community leaders, human service agencies, administrators, schools, or any place where contact can be made to bring awareness to potential students.
- Maintaining frequent contact with agencies by telephone.

- Planning workshops with community leaders and eventually with potential students.
- Seeking volunteers in the community to create a better understanding and mutual respect between the institutions and the community.
- Establishing a file on all contacts for future reference.
- Working with public relations personnel to prepare announcements, arrange appearances on television and radio on behalf of the institution, and occasionally write articles for local newspapers.
- Providing feedback to supervisors on progress and performance.
- Distributing flyer/brochures in the various neighborhoods, especially those surrounding the vocational institute.
- Working with students within the facility, asking them to inform friends and family members about the institutes programs.
- Seeking help from the task force of the college in communicating with the institutes target community, asking each member to take responsibility for contacting a certain segment.

(Fields, 1991, p.13)

One of the unique qualities of this model included providing advising before and after the assessment exam was offered, which allowed for information on what could be expected during the test and follow-up information on how to interpret and use test results to match a students' interests and career goals (Fields, 1991). Success came from establishing relationships and providing support through all stages of the enrollment steps.

Analytical Platform: Student Support Services

It is imperative to create partnerships with school districts to ensure that all high school graduates receive a college acceptance letter at the time of graduation and a viable option for entering college. College Connection (2009) discussed the one-on-one support given to students through the College Connection admissions process. Many colleges are using College Connection as a pivotal recruitment driver, not only to raise college-going rates but to create a college-going culture. Roueche, Richardson, Neal and Roueche (2008) explained that “recruitment has changed forever the manner in which community college reach potential students” (p. 21). Students have choices when selecting higher education options, and technology provides students with unlimited resources to gather information. Community Colleges are also using technology to reach new students and provide new outlets of access.

Admissions Application

According to Fields (1991), a proper enrollment model must consist of cross training departments to maximize the type of support services offered to students. Much like at Austin Community College, colleges are beginning to cross-train employees in all functions of student services: recruitment, admissions, assessment, financial aid, college placement, advising, and registration. By providing such professional development for staff, problems can be handled more quickly and conveniently (Fields, 1991).

Technology has also contributed to reducing the complexity of paper tracking and processing and has provided for a more efficient enrollment process. Magnum Publishers (1988) described the transition from a paper application to, at one point, mailing diskettes containing an admissions application. The application diskette was piloted at the University of Richmond but

only had limited returns because of the limited individual access to computers in 1988. This, however, was an indicator of future possibilities since all returned applications came from non-computer science majored students (Magnum Publishers, 1988). Times have changed, and access is more prevalent. According to the Internet World Stats (2009), there are approximately 1.67 billion people with access to the internet. CCSSE (2009a) cohort results show that 85% of students value the importance of computer labs. Even more surprising was that 55% of students reported participating in social networking sites multiple times per day, which becomes another avenue for recruitment when considering the social mediums this new generation is comfortable with (CCSSE, 2009a). Almost every college has now gone to a full online application process; this movement in technology creates efficient progress for staff and students while creating added accessibility for students to enroll from anywhere. Collins (2001) identified that how a company reacts to technological change is a good indicator of its inner drive for greatness versus mediocrity.

Recruitment

Grandillo (2009) concluded that college recruitment practices are increasingly integrated and coordinated throughout a college campus to maximize recruiting initiatives. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the majority of new jobs that will be created by 2014 will require some type of postsecondary education (AACC, 2009). The Perryman Group (2007) concluded from an extensive analysis of research that higher education proves to be beneficial not only to individuals, but also to society by improving health and financial prospects, creating a more productive workforce, and reducing demand for social services. If the state of Texas stays on track and meets the state wide goals projected in 'Closing the Gaps,' annual gains would include \$489.6 billion in total spending, \$194.5 billion in gross

state product, \$121.9 billion in personal income, and an increase of 1,023,281 permanent jobs by 2030 (THECB, 2007).

Perez (2008) emphasized that there was only one important notion tying together various social and economic benefits, and that was the completion of a college degree. College Connection is a recruitment initiative established to address the needs of communities, to meet the goals established in ‘Closing the Gaps,’ but also to address low college participation rates. E-3 Alliance (2009) is a central Texas regional collaborative focused on increasing economic outcomes by aligning educational systems with data pointing out areas of needed improvement, as well as strategies for collaboration. E-3 Alliance discussions surrounding P-16 alignment in Texas have incorporated the ACC goals: the continuation of partnerships between school districts and higher education, as well as seamless pathways for enrollment into post-secondary education. The problem of low college participation rates throughout the state of Texas were noted in the 1999 State Participation rates found in APPENDIX II. Results were presented to central Texas leaders at a 2008 E-3 Alliance Summit comparing various states’ college participation rates published in the 2001-2002 College Almanac (E-3 Alliance, 2009). In fall 2009, only 4.9 % of the total population of Texas was participating in postsecondary education, this is extremely low compared to the level of participation needed in order to sustain the economic development of a state as large as Texas (E-3Alliance, 2009). After the adoption of ‘Closing the Gaps’ and other state wide efforts the college participation rates in Texas rose to 5.6% in 2005, see Appendix III.

Sevier (2000) discussed that at the foundation of college-recruiting is the concept that a large pool of prospective students narrows into those who actually apply and an even smaller number of those who matriculate called the recruitment funnel. The funnel theory suggests that

starting earlier and lasting longer would assist students in moving through the funnel; with additional success by assigning enrollment managers with specific action plans, measurable tasks for recruitment activities, and a more involved marketing plan (Sevier, 2009). Collaborative work among student services offices would provide students with a comprehensive support system to advance through the entire enrollment process. Grandillo (2009) added that colleges needed to acknowledge that no one communication strategy works with all prospective students and that college recruitment in the twenty-first century needs to be individualized. According to Santovec(1992), some of the effective strategies in helping ethnic minorities be successful at the University of New Mexico included a college journey that began with recruitment and continued through to employment where staff members were even trained in human relations.

Fields (1991) emphasized that outreach must be considered an ongoing process between the institution and the community. Fields (1991) also identified that recruitment strategies must be implemented earlier in a student's high school career. Recruitment efforts at the City Colleges of Chicago were implemented as early as ninth grade because "many young people leave school just as soon as they reach sixteen years of age, which is the legal age for dropping out" (Fields, 1991, p. 13). Creating interventions earlier in a student's career would capture a larger breath of students before it was too late.

Assessment

According to Aragon (2000) increasing retention and learning success strategies for minority students included providing support services for students beginning with admissions, then concentrating on placement. An additional construct measured as a recruitment strategy was how students were performed on the college entrance exam and into which courses they were

placed into. Results seem to reflect the main topics being discussed in higher education with more than 50% of students entering community colleges placing into developmental education (Roueche, Ely, and Roueche, 2001). Various institutions such as Austin Community College and El Paso Community College provide assessment boosters to help prepare students for the assessment test since a large percentage of students place into developmental education courses. According to Roueche and Roueche (2008), college leaders need to address these issues and implement programs or provide assessment boosters that would support students.

Jalamo (2000) suggested that although “minority students appeared better prepared for college success than the generation that preceded them; their performance on achievement tests and persistence in college leaves cause for concern” (p. 7). Many colleges were not providing students with college review books, electronic resources, and in some cases preparation courses or software programs that were available. Unfortunately, many students do not use resources or understand the impact of college assessment scores. Jalamo (2000) emphasized that minorities students do not perform well on standardized assessment measures, and colleges should consider providing alternative methods of assessment. Options for assessment combined with communication regarding the importance of the college entrance exams and access to available resources could greatly increase success rates on assessments for all students.

Financial Aid

Fairweather (2009) illustrated the “increasing cost of attending higher education to students, their parents, and state governments as well as the effects of cost on access and questions about the long-term value of an increasingly expensive education are among the top policy concerns confronting American higher education” (p.27). Students and families are concerned about where to find the money to fund a higher education. Baird (2006) described that

an additional family financial concern includes the timeline on in which students receive their financial award letter is often very close to or after tuition deadlines, giving student little to no time to pay for courses. Fairweather (2009) explained that colleges and universities were also concerned about on how to finance education since “the cost to attend an academic institution for educating a student always exceeds the revenue generated by tuition and fees even in the most expensive private universities” (p.27). Safarik and Getskow (1997) pointed out that key advocates such the American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC) and the League for Innovation in the Community College informed policymakers on issues facing community colleges, yet that was still not enough. One item always on their agenda is the lack of financial resources allocated for community colleges considering their great responsibility. Individual state advocates also exist in specific states including Texas where the Texas Association of Community College supports issues facing all Texas public community colleges.

One of the other constructs of student support structure involves family and friend support of the students as well as the level of education of those individuals. According to Astin (1975), research on the “Theory of Involvement” and providing such support could have profound impact on a student’s future. This could be achieved through information sessions for students and parents where families could learn how to apply for aid, register for a pin number, learn about the various types of aid, and even gain knowledge of managing money in college. There was also extensive discussion on whether students were not successful because of economic challenges (Astin, 1975). The Federal Financial Aid process was described as a complex multi-step method with little guidance available from a family and friends support network: under these circumstances, funding a college education could be one of the greatest

barriers (Astin, 1975). Tinto and Engle (2008) highlighted that areas of improvement to promote college access and success include:

- More information and counseling about gateway courses before high school;
- Support to complete challenging coursework, given gaps in prior preparation;
- Greater access to rigorous college preparatory courses with well prepared teachers;
- Creating a strong college-going culture in the high school with adequate support from well trained counselors;
- And outreach through workshops for students and their parents about the financial aid process, especially filling out the Free Application of Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Grandillo (2009) reiterated the importance of financial aid as a recruiting and marketing tool and using institutional funds to augment federal and state grants and loan programs to support student enrollment.

Benefits of recruiting students through College Connection included zero cost to the school districts and high rewards for the students (College Connection, 2009). In addition to targeting college access, higher education institutions must also evaluate the financial constraints that prevent students from beginning courses or continuing with their college education (Saint John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000). College Connection addressed financial barriers by offering College Connection scholarships and offering financial aid events at every high school, staffed with financial aid specialists and supervisors, to provide students with financial award letters prior to graduation in an effort to assist students with planning. Support from the ACC District has been widespread, and new scholarships for College Connection students now come

from student and faculty/staff associations, private staff donations, large community events, various college fundraisers, and from the ACC Foundation.

According to Cronin and Horton (2009), college tuition is increasing, and student financial aid is limited, while more stringent markets are limiting the types of resources once used to fund a college education. Research shows that when there is a decline in the economy, there is an increase in enrollment into higher education. Cronin and Horton (2009) illustrated that enrollment into community colleges and other public institutions has risen by as much as 40 percent recently but warned that as college become unaffordable for some; the higher education bubble may soon burst. Therefore, further strategic planning is needed to financially support an influx of new students.

Advising

Gordon, Habley, and Grites (2008) described community colleges as having a predominant role in the advising rebirth because they are the portal of entry for many new students, including minority students and those with limited financial resources. Advisors assist students in selecting a major, creating a plan, and understanding their academic responsibilities better. Keeping that in mind, 90% of CCSSE 2009 national cohort survey results showed that students saw academic advising and planning of the highest importance above any other student service offering (CCSSE, 2009a). There are many components that make academic advising successful and beneficial for a student's college career. O'Banion (1994) illustrated the dimensions of academic advising as (1) exploration of life goals, (2) exploration of vocation goals, (3) program choice, (4) course choice, and (5) scheduling courses. Today, academic advising also includes many more components such as online degree audits, review of student records for planning, and even early alert systems that flag a counselor or advisor on academic

risk factors (SEAS, 2009). The increase of technology continues to revolutionize advising, teaching, and learning and allows faculty and staff to better assist students in assessing academic goals and planning for the future (Gordon, Habley, and Grites, 2008).

According to Fields (1991), students were uncertain about what they needed to succeed; they had transition/adjustment problems, and limited or unrealistic expectations about academic deficiencies. Fields (1991) further emphasized that student's indecision was matched with lack of planning. Proper academic advising was essential since "students lacked an active commitment to formulate a tentative career plan for education or do not know how to formulate such a plan" (Fields, 1991, p. 13). Fields (1991) identified that a counselor can highly impact a student's success in identifying and eliminating barriers and developing an individualized education/career plan. These strategies proved to be effective for minorities in the City Colleges of Chicago and an important element of outreach because of the "attitudinal skills" targeted (Fields, 1991, p. 13). Roueche, Richardson, Neal, and Roueche (2008) challenged colleges to recreate academic advising processes for students and properly utilize the "only on-going, one-on-one relationship students will have with a college official" (p. 12).

Financing Recruitment

Perez (2008) found that community college administrators usually have to fund state-wide programs from their own budget; Texas 'Closing the Gaps' initiative is one of those unfunded mandates. In Texas, House Bill I (HBI) was the new found solution to target areas that were left under budgeted yet essential for college success. According to HBI (2009), the purpose of the bill was to support the State's goals of 'Closing the Gaps' by ensuring the following:

- Enhanced college-readiness/workforce readiness in Texas,

- Increased student success in secondary school systems,
- Increased college-going culture in all schools,
- Increased higher education enrollments and student success,
- Decreased developmental education numbers and costs,
- And creating an educated/trained workforce to grow and sustain economic competitiveness.

(HBI, 2009, p.1)

House Bill I came at a time when colleges needed support the most because of the economic downturn, with recruiting students into college was at the forefront of educators' priorities, as well as the agenda of business leaders.

Fowler (2004) outlined the annual adoption of the federal budget, the roles of the Office of Management and Budget, and the process by which funds were classified as extensive and complex. This lengthy process had taught colleges to rely on secondary sources of income and to be prepared for limited or no funding at all. If state or federal funding was not available, a series of other creative methods could be used to fund recruitment programs, including reallocation of the budget to make recruitment a priority, submission of grants, extensive fundraising, or other external support.

Suitable funding for recruitment could expand resources and provide further accessibility for communities. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and most recently HB I served as major catalysts for the mission of assisting Texas colleges. ACC, through grants and similar support was able to purchase two Mobile Go Centers, and planned for a third. A Mobile

Go Center is a large trailer equipped with 25 laptop computers, printers, and a satellite with access to the internet which travels to remote areas, as well as elementary, middle and high schools, shopping malls, community centers, and any local events to provide access to college resources. The idea of the traveling Mobile Go Center was first created by the College for all Texans Campaign in an effort to address the needs of the ‘Closing the Gaps’ initiative and provide mobile access to college resources for specific areas. Most recently, this resource has been adapted in various locations to support the mission of the College Connection program. The use of this vehicle has also served as a recruitment tool because each Mobile Go Center is staffed with a driver who is cross trained in all student support services areas so that he/she may help students through the enrollment, financial aid, and advising processes.

According to Townsend and Dougherty (2006), the community college mission of open access for educational attainment is reiterated and now accompanied with a mission to change student demographics with limited state and federal funding. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, however, in 2009, requested that all Texas higher education institutions provide some form of College Connection, first with Texas Connection funds, then with College Connection 2+2+2 grants that were available to both two and four year colleges (THECB, 2009). THECB provided programmatic grants to assist colleges in establishing initiatives geared toward:

Awareness: Building awareness among high school seniors of the importance of a college education;

Participation: Increase rates of participation by providing higher education recruitment services including, but not limited to, admissions, financial aid, and enrollment.

(THECB, 2009)

In the 80th legislative session, community colleges served 54% of public higher education, yet received only 12% of the state allocations for higher education, according to ACC President, Steve Kinslow (Kinslow, personal communication, May 6, 2008). Community colleges have had to be creative to be able to support large recruitment efforts and strategies because often times the budget has to be allocated for more pressing matters. The top recruitment drivers of community colleges have shown a significant impact on the future of the state, the institution itself, the community, and students, so the budget authority's responsibility is to use resources wisely and find other means of effectively recruiting students.

Mass Higher Education

There are many questions and theories that arise from creating a focus on mass higher education. Palpfreyman and Tapper (2009) outlined various questions that may affect the structure of higher education.

1. How have national and, in some cases, regional systems of higher education responded to the rapid expansion of student numbers?
2. Do existing institutions expand to take up the increased demand?
3. Are new institutions created and, if so, how do these fit into the prevailing structures?
4. What impact has the arrival of mass higher education had upon our understanding of the purposes, programs and processes of higher education?
5. Critically, does mass higher education undermine institutional diversity?

(Palpfreyman and Tapper, 2009)

Fairweather (2009) explored the development of community colleges after World War II to create a universal mass higher education. Community colleges once again need to respond to mass recruitment in higher education to create a more educated society. This, however, would be a difficult task considering the constraints on financing higher education as well as colleges being able to maintain an influx of students with limitations on college resources and space. In Perez's (2008) study, a trend emerged among the four colleges evaluated. The high school seniors who were enrolled concurrently in a dual-credit course were much more likely to enroll into that institution. The colleges found that it was primarily the familiarity with the college campus and its processes that influenced dual-credit students to continue with their college courses. College tours and virtual visits of campuses also became important in helping students learn about colleges and become familiar with resources and amenities.

The reality is our society cannot afford not to create a culture of mass higher education and increase the number students enrolling in higher education. According to Stanley (1996) "career development competencies address changes over an individual's lifetime and greatly enhances the ability of a nation to have a productive workforce, the essential basis of economic development" (p.434). Goldrick-Rab (2009) reminded us that "located in neighborhoods across that nation, charging lower-than-average tuition, public two-year colleges have the potential to lead the charge to significantly increase the number of Americans holding college degrees" (p.A27). In efforts to recruit and expand resources for all students, community colleges are making mass recruitment a reality and expanding efforts throughout the nation by targeting barriers preventing students from entering into college.

College Preparation

Discussion from one of the primary emerging themes suggested that “89% of SENSE participants strongly agree or somewhat agree that they are academically prepared to succeed in college” (Talking Sense, 2008). Yet research shows that approximately 45% of community college students will not return after their first year (Talking Sense, 2008). According to a report by Libby Sanders, from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “success [can come] in numbers;” because of the results obtained by SENSE community colleges are implementing effective learning communities, and are encouraged to strengthen support systems, as well as other programs and educational sectors to create student success (Sanders, 2008). Tinto and Engle (2008) pointed out that even though the United States has one of the highest college participation rates in the world, large gaps persist in terms of access to, and success in, higher education. Tinto and Engle (2008) also discussed that we must focus our efforts on improving postsecondary access and success among populations who have previously been underrepresented in higher education, namely low-income and minority students, many of whom would be the first in their families to go to college.

According to Wilson (2009), even “student-loan borrowing is threatening the financial future of today’s college students” and therefore raising doubts among families (p. A1). Students fear that they cannot afford college. The solution would be to properly educate and inform students and their families that “about a third of graduates leave college with no debt and only about 65 percent of graduates owe an average of \$20,000” (Wilson, 2009, p. A18.) College debt, if managed responsibly, is considered to be good debt, and students may enter college with greater peace of mind if educated about how to finance a higher education degree. Morgan (1997) reminded colleges to value the past in order to make improvements for the future.

Students could serve as peer mentors to educate other students on not over-borrowing and strategies on how to access federal aid to eliminate the number of students discouraged from entering higher educational institutions because of financial fears.

Chapter Summary

Spellings (2006) reminded us that higher education has never been more important than right now. To provide students with at least one college acceptance letter at the time of graduation gives students a variety of options on whether to continue on with their education, begin workforce training, start a certificate program, or enter into the work force and return to school at a later time. Fields (2009) illustrated that even President Obama aspires to have a universal higher education. According to Aragon (2000), creating diversity among student bodies created enriched learning experiences for both students and faculty, leading to broader perspectives and promoting flexibility in thinking. Aragon (2000) agreed with literature pointing out that community colleges played a critical role in providing educational access and opportunity to a diverse student population. Fields (2009) specified that even though President Obama and Congress had provided “\$4 billion for job training, \$17 million for Pell Grants, and \$200 million for Federal Work-Study, colleges would still have to do much more in outreach to target students who typically don’t enroll” (p. A17). There is a unique pressure on community colleges specifically to find effective recruitment strategies that target and provide support to all students.

Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin (2006) concluded from research that only positive results come from recruiting a more diverse student body. Overall, four of the five propositions that emerged from Bowen, Kurzweil and Tobin’s (2006) review of literature principally described

why more needs to be done to search for opportunities and recruitment methods to target all students, especially underrepresented students.

- (1) The presumed educational benefits of diversity have been strongly affirmed.
- (2) Race-sensitive admissions policies have increased substantially the number of well-prepared minority students who have gone on to assume positions of leadership in the professions, business, academia, the military, government, and every other sector of American life—thereby reducing somewhat the continuing disparity in access to power and opportunity that is related to race in America.
- (3) The costs of race-sensitive admissions policies have been modest and are well justified by the benefits: most of the alleged negative effects of race-sensitive admissions are, on examination, seen to be minor or non-existent.
- (4) Progress has been made in narrowing test score gaps between minority students and other students, but gaps remain—and so does the need for race sensitive admissions policies.

(Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin, 2006, pp. 142-147)

Bowen, Kuzweil and Tobin (2006) concluded that the “stubborn social realities” will not be gone in 25 years but it is essential for taking race into account when providing opportunities for all (p. 160). The research concluded that college is no longer for a selected few; as the number of individuals enrolling into college increases, so does the need to provide them with added support, primarily students with no support system and first-generation students. Lassiter (2007) identified access as being the “force that lets all of us exchange, interact, and participate; and the more it grows, the more it expands our universe of possibilities” (p. 25).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Malaney (1999) expressed that there is not enough research conducted on student affairs mainly because of “the time and resources of Institutional Research Offices to meet the needs of the entire campus constituency” (Malaney, 1999, p.3). To gain a better understanding of the student affairs offered on high schools campuses that were most beneficial for recruitment and assisting students through the enrollment processes, this study provided perspective on the students’ experiences through a qualitative study aimed at graduating high school seniors from two central Texas High Schools. Through a partnership between ACC and all of the central Texas school districts, enrollment services were offered to all of the area participating high school seniors. Longitudinal background data from ACC provided information on progress within ‘Closing the Gaps’ since the inception of College Connection in central Texas. CCSSE data was also collected from ACC traditional students and used as a comparison in this study to contrast areas of student support services found to be the most important for students as compared to the perspective of College Connection high school student participants from this study.

This study was conducted through a qualitative research method using grounded theory. Results from background data were used as foundational information to understand the impact of College Connection. That information was then complemented with information obtained from the qualitative interviews of students to attempt to gain knowledge about student perspectives and identify student services’ processes that were most useful to students in increasing higher education participation. The information found in this study may be beneficial for colleges implementing similar recruitment initiatives and colleges looking to explore new recruitment

practices. According to Simmons and Gregory (2003), using a grounded theory approach can significantly improve the practice of working professionals.

In each step of the analysis, the qualitative data collected was used to address the research questions below; however, ACC background data was able to provide exact figures on participation for part one of research question number one.

Research Questions

1. Are high school seniors from two different high schools in central Texas participating in the required Austin Community College's College Connection student enrollment processes? If so, how are the optional and recommended support services being utilized?
 - a. According to student perception, how helpful were the student support services offered on the high school campus? (Example: Financial Aid, Advising, Information Sessions)
 - b. What factors do students perceive are preventing them from participating in higher education enrollment activities through Austin Community College's College Connection initiative?
2. What other themes and recruitment strategies emerged from the qualitative interviews of high school seniors that could be used to reach more students?

In the qualitative grounded theory approach, various interview questions were posed of the high school seniors from both high schools. This study was conducted to gain a broader perspective of student support services most useful to students and barriers that may be preventing high school seniors from entering a postsecondary education. According to Barbour (2008), this type of study provides extremely rich data with enormous potential for comparison

Research Design

The design of the research was critical in establishing the credibility and success outcomes of the data collected, interpreted, and used. According to Creswell (2009), the question of validity may arise when conducting a qualitative study. This is why comparative analysis was used as part of the grounded theory method conducted in this study to support the data. Existing College Connection cohort data also provided background information for the approaches and theories used in the study. Grounded theory provides us with predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications (Glaser, Strauss, 1999). Research question number one was partly answered with College Connection background data that tracked student participation by school district. The second part of the question was answered by asking students who participated in this study “which if any ACC events they had participated in” as well as a series of follow up questions that described what occurs at each event in case the students were not familiar with the student services functions by name. Part two of research question number one was regarding why they were not able to attend some of the required, recommended, and optional events. The premise of this study was to gain a better understanding of student perception; however, the high school counselor from each high school was also interviewed to determine facts about which support services were offered, and to explore their perspectives on recruitment strategies that could better serve the students on their high school campuses. The high school counselors interviewed served as the lead contacts for ACC services at their perspective high schools and were therefore most familiar with all of the stages of planning.

An approach of data collection often common for qualitative research includes small and intimate discussions with focus groups of different sizes to gain insight, experiences, and student perspectives on subjects that a quantitative study alone would not be able to provide. A great

deal of comparative analysis was provided in this study to determine the differences between the two participating high schools, and between the student services activities elected to be offered by each of the participating high schools.

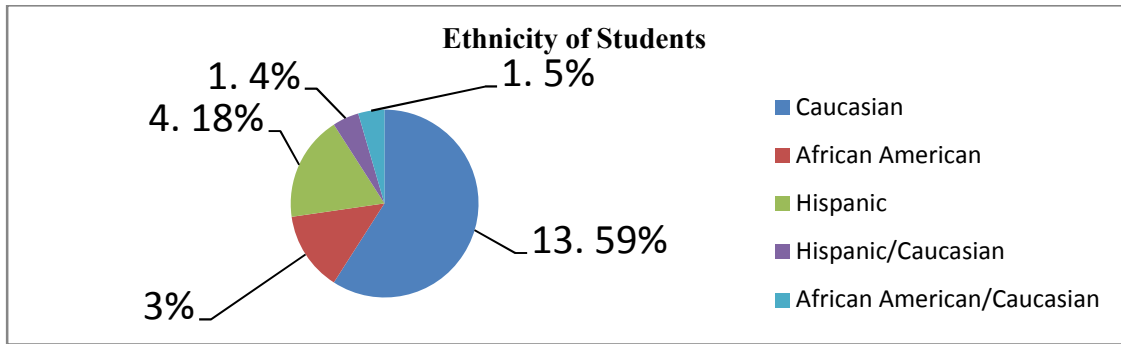
According to Glazer and Strauss' original 1967 study, comparative analysis studies can be conducted on groups of any size and can provide validity by providing comparisons and further examination of findings (Glazer, Strauss, 1999). The interviews were conducted with varying sized groups which allowed for different group dynamics. An interview protocol was created for this study to establish a comfortable environment where students were able to pose their opinions in a safe environment, reducing the possibility of group think, as well as any external biases. Interviews were conducted using Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures and by taking into consideration the integrity of the study. Due to the time constraints of high school students' school schedule, interviews were scheduled to take no longer than 45 minutes and were conducted in a professional manner protecting the privacy of students. Qualitative themes that emerged were used to identify indicators of successful practices in student services, and to offer suggestions for refinement of processes to create higher participation rates in postsecondary education. Barbour (2008) explained that focus groups are extremely valuable tools to understanding decision-making process and are especially effective in studying professional and group processes.

Population, Site, and Sampling

The population in the study consisted of high school seniors from two different school districts located in geographically different regions; a high school counselor from each participating high school was also interviewed. The study was conducted at Jarrell High School located in Jarrell, Texas, and Round Rock High School located in Round Rock, Texas. Students

were selected from a convenient sampling of high school seniors in their school advisory periods where students were granted an allotted portion of the school day to work on college activities, study for courses, or work on assignments and therefore allowed flexibility for students to participate in the focus groups.

Students were selected randomly from a convenient sample of students in their advisory period at Jarrell High School and non-core classes at Round Rock High School. High school senior over the age of 18 were the only targeted population recruited to participate in the study. Besides age and grade classification there were no other requirements to participate in this study. The target number of students at each school was 12 students and that was exactly how many were interviewed, but because of age qualifications, two students were disqualified and removed from the findings. However, there were transparent and recurring themes that emerged from the data collected from the 22 students who did actively participate in the study. The researcher felt it was appropriate and more than sufficient to continue on with the findings from 22 students instead of the original 24 high school seniors targeted. A total of 22 students, 13 males and 9 females, participated in the study. All but one of the 22 students interviewed indicated they were college bound. Another particularly unique finding from the students was that more than half of them were planning to begin college in the summer semester of entry as opposed to the traditional fall semester when the majority of incoming freshman begin college classes. On the following page is a chart representing the breakdown of the ethnicity of students who participated in the study which is similar to the overall demographics at each high school.



Student Interview Characteristics

The interviews were conducted with a random but convenient sample of high school seniors at Jarrell High School and Round Rock High School who had participated in Austin Community College’s College Connection activities throughout their senior year in high school during the current academic year. Interviews were conducted in the Spring semester to ensure that all or most of the ACC’s services had taken place on the high school campuses. The interviews were conducted in a designated meeting room at each high school during accessible times that would not interfere with students’ class time.

Jarrell High School

Jarrell High School was one of the two high schools in ACC’s eight county service area asked to participate in this study. Jarrell was selected specifically for its geographical location, college participation rates, and because the school shared some commonalities with the other high school in the study, including the year they began participation in Austin Community College’s College Connection program. Jarrell High School is located in Jarrell, Texas, 38 miles north of Austin, Texas, and serves a county population of only, 1449, according to the 2008 census. Jarrell High has a total of 226 students in grades 9-12 and a current senior class comprised of 61 students; 12 of those students participated in this study. According to school

family (2010), the average class size at Jarrell High School is 14. With an 11:1 student –teacher ratio, Jarrell High School poses a unique opportunity to provide individualized attention to students (School Family, 2010). According to the Texas Education Agency (2009) accountability ratings report, Jarrell High School achieved exemplary status in 2009. The high school offered an average of four dual-credit courses per semester, from Austin Community College, integrated into the beginning of each school day. A large percentage of high school juniors and seniors participated in Austin Community College’s Early College Start program. A total of 38% of the students at Jarrell High School qualify for subsidized lunch. The ethnicity breakdown of students in grades 9-12 at Jarrell High School was comprised of 64% Caucasian students, 31% Hispanic, 3% African American, and 2% other. The school is located in a rural environment with limited resources. The high school is located approximately 27 miles away from Temple College and 30 miles away from the nearest Austin Community College campus. Jarrell, however, lies in the ACC service area but is outside of the ACC taxing district.

Round Rock High School

Round Rock High School was the second high school invited to participate in this study. Unlike Jarrell High School, which is the sole high school for the school district, Round Rock High School belongs to a large school district comprised of five other high schools (Round Rock Independent School District), and will have a seventh high school campus opening in Fall 2010. Round Rock High School is substantially larger than Jarrell High School with a student body of 2401 students, in grades 9-12, larger than the total population of Jarrell, Texas. Round Rock High School is located in Round Rock, Texas, one of the largest and fastest-growing suburbs of Austin, Texas. Taking into consideration its large student body, it was surprising to find Round Rock High was able to provide a 16 to 1 student-teacher ratio (School Family, 2010a). The

student ethnicity breakdown of Round Rock High School included 60% Caucasian, 24% Hispanic, 9% African American, 4% Asian American, and less than 1% Native American. The total number of subsidized lunches accounted for 23% of the student body; however, a problem with this calculation among high schools across the nation is that a large percentage of students never apply for lunch qualification (School Family, 2010a). The Texas Education Agency (2009), stated accountability ratings for 2009-2010 school year rated Round Rock High as acceptable. Round Rock High School is within the ACC taxing district, which means that students enjoyed a reduced tuition at ACC. An ACC Round Rock campus will open fall 2010 and will be the largest campus in the ACC district.

Student Services Teams

According to Austin Community College (2009), the ACC service area spans 7100 square miles, in an eight-county region, and College Connection serves 57 high schools. ACC has designated various student services teams to properly service each high school in such a large geographical region, where high schools may be as much as three hours distant from another. One of the community college's missions is attending to the communities' needs. Mindful of each school's differing populations and specific needs, ACC created cross-trained groups of staff in each of the student services area to manage a region within the service area. By selecting individuals from ACC campuses in the high school's vicinity, ACC staff members were able to begin building relationships with local students. The College Connection ACCerlation Team serves both Jarrell and Round Rock High Schools, and although each high school has stark differences, all of the same services were offered to both high schools. Having the same ACC staff for each of the participating high schools was one of the characteristics controlled in this

study to ensure that students at both of the high schools were receiving the same type of information from the same individuals.

Dual Credit/Tech Prep Participation

This study collected data participation in ACC's two primary college preparation programs at high schools: Early College Start (dual credit program) and participation in the Capital Area Tech Prep Consortium (CATCP). Students self-identified their participation in either program. Credit-in-escrow signifies the college credit that students could earn during high school by participating in CATCP; however, credit was added to their college transcript only upon enrollment and registration into Austin Community College, giving students an incentive to enroll at ACC for at least one semester and collect the credit.

An incentive for students who had participated in the Austin Community College's Early College Start dual credit program was not having to duplicate enrollment steps in College Connection that they had already completed for dual-credit enrollment. For example, all participating dual-credit students would already have already filled out an ACC admissions application, and would have become TSI complete, or provided qualifying test scores to take a specific course. During College Connection activities, students have the ability to verify TSI status apply for financial aid, or be excused from participating in other College Connection activities scheduled at their high school.

Coding

According to Jones (1985), "a great deal of analysis is concerned with 'coding' the data into categories" (p. 58). Jones (1985) suggested "deciding upon categories in advance" but also allowing categories to "emerge out of the examination of the data" (p. 58). This study went

further in its analysis by following a grounded theory approach using three levels of coding to thoroughly analyze the data. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), a researcher must first begin with “open coding” which consists of “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” and “qualifying those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions” (p. 195). This strategy was used on the raw data taken from interviews at both high schools. Each high school was initially coded separately to determine if different dimensions surfaced within each high school; the two data sets then were brought together. Frequently recurring subjects, words, and phrases were noted by the researcher and sorted into categories characterized as dimensions.

Once the raw data taken from the interview transcriptions were separated into categories, the strategy called “axial coding” was used “to relate minor concepts to broader level concepts” which assisted in reorganizing and refining the categories found then “listing subconcepts under [them]” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 93). Jones (1985) described that reorganizing and recoding allowed for clarity and structure of the data collected. Finally, the strategy called “selective coding” allowed the researcher to round out the concepts collected from the data to create a “central phenomenon of the study” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 14). The central phenomenon of the study, or, in this case, the overarching themes were offered as suggestions and strategies for refining recruitment activities.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study consisted of a multi-step process, and was followed consistently to not compromise the grounded theory approach. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), there are eleven steps to consistently analyze data beginning with the initial stages of the data collection.

1. Data Collection and Analysis are Interrelated Processes
2. Concepts are the basic units of analysis
3. Categories must be developed and related
4. Sampling in Grounded Theory proceeds on theoretical grounds
5. Analysis makes use of constant comparisons
6. Patterns and variations must be accounted for
7. Process must be built into the theory
8. Writing theoretical memos is an integral part of doing grounded theory
9. Hypotheses about relationships among categories should be developed and verified as much as possible during the research process
10. A grounded theorist need not work alone
11. Broader structural conditions must be analyzed, however microscopic the research

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990)

According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), the “carrying out of procedures of data collection and analysis systematically and sequentially enable the research process to capture all potentially relevant aspects of the topic as soon as they are perceived” (p.6). This builds the foundation for a solid grounded theory study. The primary data source for this study came from qualitative interviews conducted with high school seniors from Jarrell High School and Round Rock High School. The secondary source of data came from the researcher’s notes as well as personal communication with high school counselors from each high school. Furthermore, existing longitudinal ACC data was used to compare and complement the themes that emerged from the study to expand on the understanding of participation at each of the selected high school. ACC CCSSE results were also used for comparison to identify whether students’

perception of important student services offerings were matched with those of traditional Austin Community College students.

Chapter Summary

According to Barbour (2008), “qualitative research can make visible and unpick the mechanisms which link particular variables, by looking at the explanations, or accounts, provided by those involved” (p.11). This chapter described the methodology used in this study to carry out a thorough grounded theory approach. The methods in this study allowed the researcher to dissect the data in an effort to improve recruitment strategies offered to high school students who typically are not enrolling in institutions of higher education. Ivery (2005) described it best by reminding colleges that “investing in a child’s future makes a difference” (p.11).

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter consists of findings from the researcher's reflection notes and qualitative interviews conducted at two central Texas high schools from two different independent school districts. This chapter offers an overview of the processes used in the study and the variables accounted for in the data collection as well as background enrollment data from Austin Community College to provide participation figures from both school districts. This chapter provides us with the high school students' perception regarding impact, efficiency, and helpfulness of the College Connection program in their personal preparation and college decision-making process. In addition to impact, this chapter also explains students' perspective on mandatory and optional college services available to them. Lastly, this chapter reveals themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis.

A total of twelve focus group questions were used in the interviewing protocol to assist in facilitating the discussions, establishing a level of comfort with students, and gaining a better understanding of the student's background and familiarity with college enrollment processes. The two primary research questions and sub-questions are addressed in the latter part of this chapter. Research question one addressed whether high school seniors in both of the selected high schools had participated in the required Austin Community College's College Connection student enrollment processes. The study also explored how the optional and recommended support services were being utilized. As a follow-up question, the student's perception on the helpfulness of the student support services offered on their high school campuses were investigated and the students were asked to discuss which components were most useful to

them. The second follow-up question for research question number one explored the factors or obstacles that students perceived had prevented them from participating in higher education enrollment activities offered at their high school. The findings of research question number two explored other themes and recruitment strategies that emerged from the qualitative student interviews and personal communication with the high school counselors. Research question two also explored components of College Connection and other recruitment activities that could be implemented or refined to possibly reach more students. All interviews concluded with an overview of the objectives and goals of Austin Community College's College Connection program.

Limitations

According to Morgan (2004) "program development efforts use focus groups to learn more about the potential targets of these programs in order to reach them more effectively" (p.266). All student interviews were conducted in small focus groups to allow for an exchange of ideas and dialogue among students and to help students remember specifics from college events they may have attended. However, conducting the study through focus groups limited the researcher's ability to achieve the depth of discussion and candidness that comes from one-on-one interviews. The size of the student group varied, which changed the dynamic of the discussions. Morgan (2004) found that "a smaller group gave each participant more time to discuss her or his view and experiences on topics in which they all are highly involved, on the other hand a larger group contains a wider range of potential responses on topics where each participant has a low level of involvement" (p.278). For this reason, both large and small groups were interviewed to account for varied responses.

Supporting Background Data

Efforts were being made across the state of Texas to increase the number of students participating in higher education. ‘Closing the Gaps’ charged all colleges in Texas with the responsibility of increasing the number of students who enter into college by an additional 650,000 by the year 2015. Each college had specific enrollment targets to meet in order to reach their ‘Closing the Gaps’ goals. According to College Connection (2009), the college exceeded each category of their 2010 ‘Closing the Gaps’ targets as noted in the chart below. The chart represents the overall College Enrollment in 2008 for all students, and then breaks out enrollment by ethnicity showing the 2010 target goals and how they have been surpassed by each target in the fall 2008 headcount.

ACC 2010 Participation Goals

Overall	Above Target 2010 Target: 34,340	Fall 2008: 35,798
African American	Above Target: 2010 Target: 2,640	Fall 2008: 3,978
Hispanic	Above Target 2010 Target: 8,620	Fall 2008: 8,846
White	Above Target: 19,800	Fall 2008: 20,754

Source: Austin Community College, 2010

According to College Connection (2009), 8,846 Hispanic students enrolled into ACC for Fall 2008 which accounted for more than 200 students above targeted 2010 participation goals.

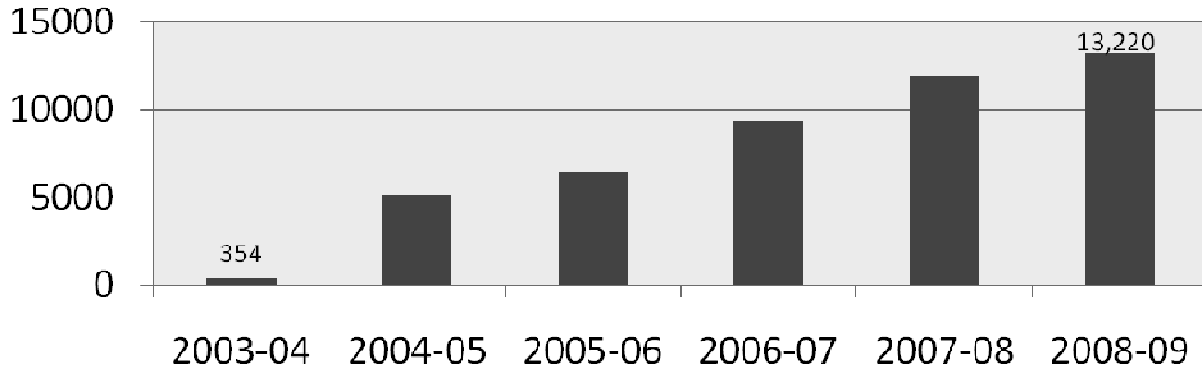
Many individuals in higher education have been curious whether College Connection is working (K. McClenney, personal communication, 2009). For this specific study, the information below characterized background enrollment data from graduating high school seniors from both school districts. The data describes students who enrolled in Texas Higher Education institutions and the change that occurred after one year of College Connection activities. According to College Connection (2009), in the Round Rock Independent School District, which was comprised of 4 high schools at the time, 47% of their graduating seniors were not found in higher education in the Fall following high school graduation in 2006; by 2007 three percent more students were found in higher education in the Fall following graduation. According to 2006 figures for Jarrell ISD, 50% of their graduating seniors not attending college; in 2007, 52% of the graduating seniors did not enroll in college (College Connection, 2009). Intervention through College Connection and a strong collaboration with the school districts will most likely increase college-going rates, as has been established with school districts that began participation in the initiative earlier. The institution, however, has also seen an increase in all levels of participation, success, and persistence as well as many other positive effects noted in this chapter (College Connection, 2010).

Positive Effects of a College-Going Culture

According to College Connection (2010), the following four graphs represent the outstanding successes central Texas high schools and local colleges have seen since the inception of ACC's College Connection initiative. The Central Texas Futures Project (2009) also reported that 2009 high school senior respondents "reported that they had submitted financial aid applications and that they had thought about college for as long as they could remember" (p. 13). The research found that the large number of respondents "focusing on pursuing further education

[was] encouraging” (p. 13). Efforts on integrating college student services within the central Texas high schools have seen the positive effects of establishing a college-going culture.

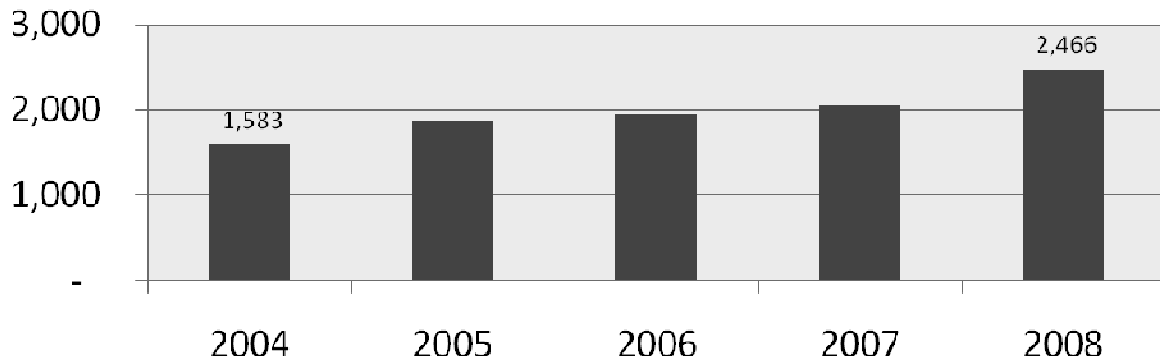
ACC Applications from Central Texas High School Seniors



Source: College Connection, 2010

According to College Connection (2010), applications by high school seniors have increased by 3,635% in all central Texas High Schools. According to the table above, only 354 students filled out an ACC application with ACC support services on a single high school campus in 2003-04. The number of students who filled out an ACC application through College Connection support services on the high school campuses in the 2008-2009 school year rose to 13,220.

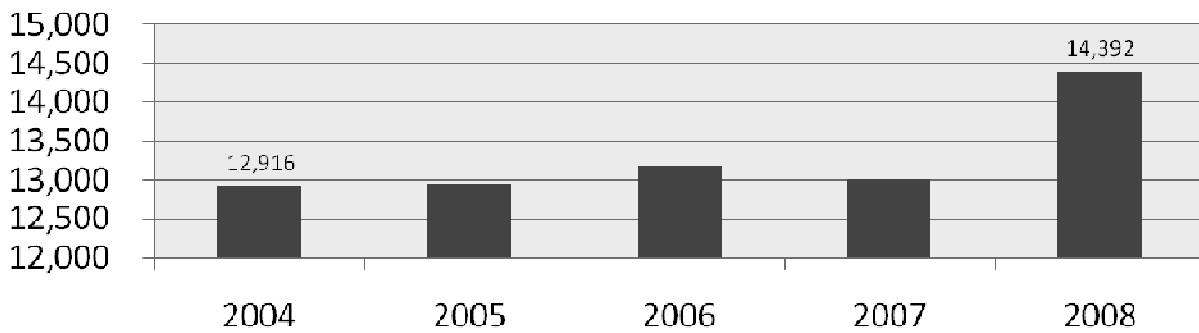
ACC Enrollments Directly After High School



Source: College Connection, 2010

The number of high school seniors who directly enrolled into ACC after graduation from all central Texas high schools increased by 56% over five years (College Connection, 2010). The College Connection table above shows that only 1,583 high school seniors from all central Texas high schools enrolled into ACC directly after graduation in 2004. The number of students who enrolled into ACC directly after high school graduation in 2008 accounted for 2,466 of graduating high school seniors.

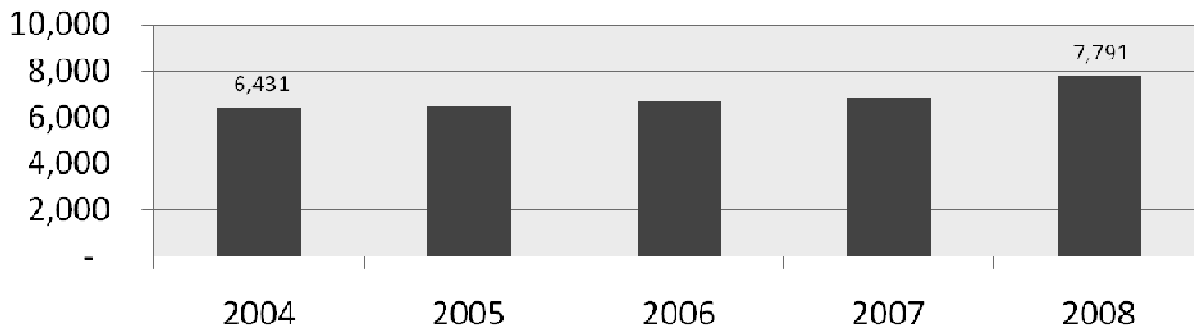
Area High School Graduation



Source: College Connection, 2010

Central Texas high schools have also seen positive effects in the number high school students graduating. According to College Connection (2010), there has been an 11% increase in graduation rates in area high schools. The number of students who graduated from area high schools in 2004 was 12,916 students (College Connection, 2010). The number of graduating high school seniors rose to 14,392 students in 2008 (College Connection, 2010). An increase in high school graduation rates may be one of the indirect positive effects of bringing a strong college presence onto the high school campuses, especially considering the discussions surrounding the vast amount of career and training options available in postsecondary education as well as the “the more you learn, the more you earn” message.

College/University Enrollments Directly After High School



Source: College Connection, 2010

Furthermore, there has also been an overall increase in the number of central Texas high school seniors enrolling in a higher educational institution directly after high school graduation. According to College Connection (2010), the college-going rate increased 21% in four years. In 2004, only 6,431 graduating high school seniors enrolled in either a college or university directly after high school graduation, while in 2008 there were 7,791 students who enrolled directly after high school graduation (College Connection, 2010). The tables above illustrate that not only have there been enrollment increases at ACC, but there have been positive results throughout central Texas area high schools, colleges and universities.

College Connection Cohort Persistence

High participation rates not only in higher education but in high school graduation rates demonstrated efficacies in the recruitment strategies being taken onto high school campuses. ACC found a successful strategy to support student success by increasing support staff and targeting 100% participation of high school seniors on each area high school campus. The table below illustrates that the College Connection persistence rates exceeded those of ACC students that did not enroll through College Connection.

	Enrolled Fall 2009	Enrolled Spring 2010	Return Rate
College Connection	2,179	1,678	77%
All ACC EXCEPT College Connection	38,069	24,758	65%

Source: College Connection 2010

According to College Connection (2010), ACC has also experienced significant impact on other programs and partnerships including “leverage for grant funding for summer bridge” and enrollment increases in the Early College Start dual credit program of “a 167% increase from 2004-2009” (p. 22). Tech Prep has also experienced an enrollment increase of 109% of those students collecting college credit from 2003-2008 (College Connection, 2010). According to College Connection (2010), students who have participated in the College Connection program and enrolled at ACC were majority-minority and persisted at higher rates than ACC’s overall population. Students were also averaging 73% passing grades which accounted for a grade of ‘C’ or better. There has been an overall positive effect in college recruitment, success, and persistence; according to College Connection (2010), a “college going culture is becoming the norm” (p. 15).

Themes and Sub-themes

Walker (1985) suggested that “qualitative research can help interpret, illuminate,

illustrate and qualify empirically determined statistical relationships” (p. 22). There were 20 original themes that emerged from the student responses in this study, after further analysis those themes were broken up into five main themes containing two subthemes which differentiate the variances in characteristics found within each theme. The initial group of 20 codes were categorized into smaller groups and then once again reorganized and divided which helped further represent the trends that surfaced. The table below displays the themes and subthemes that emerged from analysis of the data.

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2
Austin Community College	Association with ACC	Informative and Helpful
Student Services	Financial Aid & Advising	Admissions Application & Transferring
Obstacles	Not Sure/ Didn't know	Pending/Follow Up
Influencers	Parents & Friends	High School Staff: Counselors & Teachers
Areas of Improvement	Mentors/ Relationship Building	More meetings & Smaller groups sizes

Austin Community College Theme

According to the student participants, when they thought of Austin Community College,

they associated with the college a friendly and familiar face, a place they could take dual credit, the college where they could claim their Tech Prep credit upon graduation, where they could save money and time, and one of the local colleges that had a lot of campuses. Throughout a student's senior year of high school, ACC becomes much more than that; ACC becomes part of their college preparation, their guidance as to what options are available upon high school graduation, and a group of staff who visit them to discuss what could be and how to get there. Therefore, it came as no surprise that one of the most frequently brought up subjects when discussing the topics of life after high school, college-choice, and experiences of a student's senior year, was the name Austin Community College.

'Austin Community College' was an apparent theme; however, should be duly noted were subthemes within specific categories. For example, students' perception about Austin Community College was not about the buildings, course offerings, or even the multiple campuses. Instead the two subthemes that emerged from the theme 'Austin Community College' was students' 'association with ACC' and the fact that ACC was seen as 'informative and helpful' to the students. Please see Appendix IX for charts illustrating students' comments about Austin Community College.

Student Services Theme

It was apparent that students at both Round Rock High School and Jarrell High School were very familiar with college terms such as COMPASS, Apply Texas, ASSET, core-curriculum, admissions application, college entrance test, advisors, and recruiters. Students identified financial aid and advising as the two most important enrollment steps. The third student service area that students brought up most often was the admissions application, and the

fourth was the concept of transferring to a four year university or transferring credit in general. Please see Appendix X for a frequency chart of the student services that the student participants most frequently mentioned during the interviews.

Obstacles Theme

An immediate discussion on the topic of ‘obstacles’ emerged when student participation in college enrollment activities offered on the high school campus was discussed. When asked if students would attend optional activities they firmly said “no” or “doubt it.” When students were asked if they attended the after school or Saturday financial aid sessions held at their high school, they all said “no” for a variety of reasons including that “afterschool [was their] time” [student #7] and there was consistent mention of participation in “extracurricular activities, and transportation barriers on non-school days,” by the majority of students. However, the most frequently used excuse was “not knowing or not finding out about the events” that were taking place on their high school campus.

A large majority of the students were familiar with the college enrollment processes but were not clear on why they were doing them or what they meant to the students. When asked about events that they had participated in only months before, they could not remember what was discussed, what the purpose was, or what useful information they should have taken from the events. This reinforced the idea that students need redundancy, reminders, and follow-up. The obstacles theme was the most apparent theme because of how frequently students initiated talk of barriers at both high schools.

Subtheme II in the obstacles theme identified college tasks pending for students in their enrollment into college. When discussing student services, many students noted that they still

needed to fill out the FAFSA, primarily because none of the students interviewed had attended the financial aid events scheduled at their high school. Students also brought up the concept of follow up and discussed wanting a more frequent interaction with ACC staff. Many students described a very useful information session but said that ACC staff “didn’t come back for a long time so students that had questions or wanted to turn in paperwork forgot about it” [Student #16]. Students also said that when a long period of time occurs during which a topic is not discussed, students forget about it or put it in the back of their minds and delay completing the required enrollment tasks. A sense of follow up activities and more ACC meetings requested was a common theme at both high schools. Please see Appendix XI for a list of the obstacles that student felt they were encountering in high school.

Influencers Theme

Students identified four top influencers in their lives who had supported them, offered suggestions, and helped them throughout their college preparation. Those most frequently mentioned were high school counselors, teachers, parents, and friends. According to the students, counselors were the most often mentioned influencer in their lives. Various staff members were mentioned specifically by name, but it was primarily the high school counselors who were identified as the people to which students could go if they had questions about college. The high school staff members next most-credited as being a top influencer included high school teachers, primarily college prep teachers and English teachers. After high school staff, the second highest college supporters identified were parents, specifically mothers. Many students felt their mothers offered them suggestions on which college to attend. Friends were mentioned third most often but were described as influencers who offered much of the decision-making, available options, support on college processes, guidance on life choices, college choices, and learning about what

to do and how to do it. Even though a student's peers were not mentioned as often as parents or counselors, they seemed to also have a meaningful impact on a student's decision-making process. Please see Appendix XII for a list of the influencers most commonly mentioned by the participating high school seniors as individuals who had made an impact regarding college choice and preparation.

Areas of Improvement Theme

The fifth and final theme that emerged from the interviews resulted in 'Areas of Improvement' that students identified for ACC and for their high school campus. Approximately five or six large ACC enrollment events are scheduled on each high school campus during every academic year, yet the number one item that students asked for was "more meetings." They could not get enough of ACC and wanted to receive even more information on specific majors, students' experiences, individualized interaction with college staff, and mentorship opportunities to "learn what college was like" [student #1]. Students also frequently mentioned that more meetings would allow for smaller and more engaged group sizes. Students emphasize that the large group sizes at College Connection events were an issue in helping them get the specific information they needed to attend college.

Several other suggestions arose from the interviews including the need to start before the senior year so students can start thinking about college earlier, and find out about all of the degree opportunities available. As mentioned by Fields (2001), students need exposure to guidance and opportunities as early as possible to fulfill the need for more time to think about options because of the risk of a percentage of students dropping out before they reach their senior year. As discussed in the obstacles theme, students were also interested in receiving more notice

and additional advertising about scheduled events. Students seemed to think of dual credit often when ACC was discussed, and because of this many students discussed wanting more availability of summer classes on their campus. Offering dual credit to more students would allow them to become enrolled prior to their senior year and begin taking college classes earlier. Similar to student responses, a suggestion offered by one high school counselor was to add an ACC day at each campus where students could see demonstrations and hear from different disciplines about the course options available. The high school counselor mentioned that it was difficult to take seniors on campus tours but to feature ACC for a full day at the high school would be possible and could target all high seniors (personal communication, 2010). Please see Appendix XIII for a list of additional suggestions offered by students at each of the participating high schools.

Student Characteristics

Students 1-12 were from Round Rock High School and students 13-22 were from Jarrell High school. Students were selected from a convenient yet random sample of high school seniors that varied in demographics, aspirations, characteristics, background, and even involvement in high school. When analyzing the themes that emerged from the interviews, it became equally important to understand the subjects themselves and their interests and opinions. In order to provide students with the support and proper tools needed to get into college it was important to understand their challenges, ambitions, and external influences.

Student #1

Student #1 was a single mother who had dropped out of high school once before and was returning to high school to seek further education and a better life for her and her baby. She

mentioned that education was especially important to her because the baby's father would not be a part of their lives. Her ambitions were to become a registered nurse and obtain training from Austin Community College. Unlike many of her peers who were involved in college prep courses and extracurricular activities, she never had a chance to participate in anything. When asked if anyone had provided her with any college support or encouragement, she felt there previously had been no one in her life and she always had to rely on herself. What this student most desired was the advice of student mentors who had recently been through the college and could describe what it was like. She also looked forward to receiving assistance on the ACC Admission application when ACC was scheduled to return because she was having her baby when ACC came to assist students through the application section the first time. This was one of the important reasons for scheduling ACC make-up days. Student one feared the application was "too complicated," as she had heard from her cousin who chose not to fill out the application because she "got lost" in the application process. Student one was a Hispanic female.

Student #2

Student number two was a quiet yet ambitious student with a goal and a specific plan on how to get exactly what she wanted. Student two was persistent that one day she would become a lawyer and have a political science background. She hoped to attend New York University law school and said she would go to Baylor Law as her backup plan. She planned on enrolling immediately into a university but felt that she would like more information on financial aid because she felt it was "so complicated." Student two had a strong support network made up of her parents, counselors, and friends all supporting her with college guidance. Student two was a Caucasian female.

Student #3

Student number three would like to attend Austin Community College for two years then transfer to Texas State University. Student three felt the counselor has been able to provide college support. Student three also felt that financial aid was the most important student service and wanted more information in that area. This student felt that ACC staff were very helpful and would “check up on [him] during the admissions application” or if any student needed assistance. This student never participated in college prep courses, dual credit courses, or other college activities. Student three felt he received a lot of great information from ACC directly but wanted “additional meetings with the college” because he said he still had questions, and felt he and his peers “were not thinking about college” when ACC had previously visited their high school campus. The student service component he felt was most important was financial aid, but he did not attend the financial aid information session because he said it was “optional.” Student three was an African-American male.

Student #4

Student four was not sure where he wanted to attend college after high school but was hoping to go to The University of Texas at San Antonio. This student had participated in dual credit with ACC so had already enrolled. He felt his mom had been his biggest college supporter and had been able to provide him with information and suggestions he needed. What this student most would have liked component of College Connection was a student mentor to give him a better understanding of “what college is like.” This student felt the most important part of in the college enrollment process was getting information early so that a student would not have to stress over “deadlines.” Student number three was an African American male.

Student #5

Student number five had very strong opinions about Austin Community College from his previous experience trying to enroll into dual credit during his sophomore year. Since he had difficulties with getting different answers to his questions from high school staff and the college, he mentioned he felt “confused” and “frustrated” as to which part of the college entrance exam he needed to retake and which papers to turn in. He decided to give up and dropped the idea of participating in dual credit. The following year, he received a high score on the Texas assessment of knowledge and skills (the state exit-level test on which a passing score is required to graduate from high school) giving him exemption status and allowing him to enter dual credit courses without having to take the college entrance test. He was the only student interviewed from both high schools who felt that not 100% of high school seniors should have to go through the College Connection process and that resources should instead be redirected to students who would definitely be attending ACC.

Student number five did, however, feel that financial aid was the most important student service and was “what was stopping the most amount of students from going to college or at least the college they want to.” Student number five said he was reluctant to fill out the ACC application for fear that they would sell his information. At the end of the interview, as with all groups, the purpose of College Connection was explained to the students; student number five expressed a strong realization of the intention of the actual intention of the program, and wished he had known about the promise of a lifetime acceptance, with the ability to return to ACC and take courses during the summer. Student five feared that the only thing that may be stopping him from graduating would be not passing his dual credit course, which he planned on using to satisfy one of his high school requirements. Student number five strived to attend The University

of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) because he said “it would be much cheaper than The University of Texas at Austin.” Since UT Dallas is the most expensive college in the UT system, it became obvious that this student needed more advising, guidance and information about all of his college experiences and opinions. Student number five was a Caucasian male.

Student #6

Student number six seemed to be very timid and quiet, and she mentioned she had never thought about college until the summer before she started her senior year when she was asked what she was going to do after high school. This student strived to be a dental hygienist but only because her aunt’s friend had mentioned it would be a great profession. Student six said she was hoping to attend the University of Denton because that was where her aunt’s friend suggested she go. This student followed many of the suggestions expressed by her peers in the focus group and seemed to be easily influenced in what to think. Student six also said she felt “financial aid” was the most important student service but “didn’t attend” the financial aid day on the scheduled Saturday morning at her high school because it was not required. Student six feared not graduating because she had not passed the TAKS test. Throughout the interview, this student mentioned she also had felt reluctant to fill out the ACC application or attend the information session because she didn’t know what it was for. She wished she had more meetings with ACC and was able to meet with staff earlier in her high school career to explore options and begin thinking about college at an early stage. Student six was a half-Hispanic, half-Caucasian female.

Student #7

Student number seven was one of the most confident and informed students who participated in the study. He had participated in the Automotive Technology program at his high

school, so he had been recruited by colleges and technical trade schools to begin their automotive industry programs throughout his senior year. This student was certain that he would be following a career in high-performance engineering and would be attending a trade school in Pennsylvania to receive this training. This student had many interactions with college recruiters and was very informed on the college process but mentioned that the recruiter from Pennsylvania “visited [his] home and took time to get to know [him].” This student was aware of more college programs, courses, and meetings offered at his high school than any other student and felt he was “more informed than others” because he had served as “an office aid in the counselor’s office.” Student seven regretted not being able to take a campus tour of ACC’s automotive program for lack of transportation, which he had tried to arrange on many occasions. Like most of the other students, student seven feared not knowing how to pay for college and felt the most important student service was financial aid. Student seven was a Caucasian male.

Student #8

Student eight planned “on attending ACC for one year then transferring to Texas State.” Student number eight was not planning to attend college at all prior to her junior year but was placed in a college preparation course at her high school called Preparing All Youth for Success (PAYS). It was in this course that her teacher discussed with her all that ACC had to offer and that ACC may be a great choice for her. Student eight decided from then on that she would pursue an education at ACC. She had since called ACC to inquire about getting financial assistance; she also “took the COMPASS” and created a plan of what she wanted to do and how she wanted to get there. Student eight went on a college tour to Texas State where she felt it may be a great place to go afterwards since she found that her “classes at ACC would be transferable to any public Texas university,” a statement with which almost all of the students seemed to be

familiar. Student eight said she would have liked more visits with ACC and follow up so that she could gather more information on steps she still needed to complete such as registration. She was grateful to have her high school counselor's help to gather more information about ACC and connect her with the proper individuals. Student eight was a Caucasian female.

Student #9

Student number nine had one goal in mind and that was to become a professional basketball player. All of his college choice decisions revolved around positioning himself to have a better chance of being recruited into the professional league one day. Student nine had no backup plan or other career plans as he knew he wanted to play sports, and said it was very important for him to get into The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) because the "highest number of students were draft from that school." If he did not get into UT Austin, he was prepared to go to any other small college and attempt to transfer into UT Austin at any point. The student's main influencers included his high school basketball coach, who had him enroll in basketball camps and provided him with advice on how to prepare for transfer into UT Austin; his high school teachers helped him "keep on top of essay writing for college applications." Student eight remembered reviewing "statistics of all the people who had attended ACC then were able to transfer to 4 year universities." Student nine would be visiting one of the ACC campuses in May 2010 with his PAYS course and a small group of his peers. Student nine was an African American male.

Student #10

Student number ten was very informed about college opportunities and the types of enrollment steps that she would need to enroll in college. She planned on attending Houston

Community College for two years then hoped to transfer to Texas State for their teacher preparation program. She also participated in the PAYS class and took a tour of Texas State University. She was nervous about not yet applying for financial aid and said she learned about the importance of it from ACC. She described the steps on how to go to college and discussed that ACC had given her a big book with all of the degree plans and courses that were offered. She like all seniors had received an ACC course catalog. Student ten wanted to attend the financial aid Saturday presentation offered after high school by ACC but said she was “not able to secure transportation which was also a big issue with many other students.” Student ten was certain that more students would be attending ACC if they knew about the college enrollment activities offered on their high school campus. She mentioned that having such a large school created a communication problem and only small number of students became aware of resources or functions held at the high school. Student ten identified as a half Caucasian and half African American female.

Student #11

Student eleven was also an athlete and was focused on being part of a track team after high school graduation. She wanted to attend any 4-year university or any community college but “only if it has a track team.” Student eleven described financial aid as being one of the most important student services needed yet was not able to gather information on filling out the Free Application for Financial Student Aid because she said she had “track meets or practicing” during scheduled events. She mentioned that her mother was also never able to attend Saturday information meetings either because she was supporting her at track meets. Student eleven did participate in all of the ACC enrollment activities including the information session, and took the college placement test but did not remember what was discussed at any of the events. She only

described “being in a large room” where she “talked to [her] friends.” She had many goals but not a clear understanding of how to achieve them, or what types of courses she would need, and mentioned on many occasions that she had forgotten all information that was given to her the semester before. Student eleven needed relevancy, reminders, and extra support on achieving her goals. Student eleven was an African American female.

Student #12

Student twelve was very friendly and felt he knew a lot of information about ACC from his friends who were current students. He felt he understood why he was going through the ACC enrollment steps; he felt they were “helpful” and would like to have even more interaction with ACC staff. Student twelve said what he would like more than any other service was to have “an advisor or counselor that was assigned specifically to [him] who [he] could call anytime [he] had a question.” Student twelve planned on attending ACC for one year then hoped to transfer to UT Austin or the University of North Texas. Student twelve received a lot of assistance from his high school counselor and two friends, who have guided him on the costs and resources at ACC, which had sparked an interest in him to learn more about the services ACC offered. He especially wanted to know what classes he had to take after his ACC classes; he mentioned that he wished there was a degree plan or a discussion where he had “someone to help with what classes [he] needed for each major in each degree plan for both two-year and four-year schools.” Student twelve looked forward to attending advising with ACC in a few weeks. Student twelve was a Hispanic male.

Student #13

Student thirteen had a lot of college support from her mother and her high school

counselor. She planned on attending the University of Mary Hardin Baylor (UMHB) where she took a college tour recently. She felt that all of the ACC enrollment activities had helped her prepare for UMHB “especially setting up a FAFSA pin number.” She was very impressed with the fact that she was able to discuss her “test scores and college interests” with “one-on-one service from ACC.” Student thirteen felt that academic advising was the most important student service because she “learned what courses [she] needed to take.” This student said she would have never attended any activity that was scheduled outside of the school day because extracurricular activities were important to her. She felt particularly happy with the service provided to her by the mobile go center, where she felt students were engaged and it was “better than having the information session in a classroom” because of the resources available on board. Student thirteen was a Caucasian female.

Student #14

Student fourteen was determined to become a doctor. He understood that he would be attending college for “many years” and had therefore “taken advantage of as many dual credit, advanced placement, and Tech Prep courses as possible to get ahead and save [him] money.” He would be attending Texas A&M University in the fall semester but felt that the ACC processes really “provided [him] with a lot of information” he needed. He felt that the most important student service was advising, especially because beyond “required courses” they “also talked about financial aid.” He did not attend the financial aid presentation because he had sports practice but asked his parents to go; he, unfortunately, said they didn’t discuss with him what was covered at the meeting. Student fourteen was very confident and comfortable with all of the college enrollment processes and valued the information session led by ACC. He however wished that they had “brought more recruiters and had smaller group presentations,” so he could

have asked more questions. Student fourteen appreciated the advice on resources such as “scholarships and deadlines” that ACC had shared with him and felt it was valuable information for any student entering college. Student fourteen was a Caucasian male.

Student #15

Student fifteen seemed to be the least engaged student who was interviewed in this study even after numerous attempts to gain a better perspective on his experiences with the college efforts at his high school. This student immediately stated that he would be going to the army. At one point, he decided that he would be attending ACC after finding out more information from the College Connection services; however, after talking to an army recruiter he felt he should enlist instead. Student fifteen discussed each of the ACC events at his high school and mentioned that he did not listen to what they had to say because they were “addressing a large group and not [him] specifically.” He later mentioned it was also because he had decided that he would not be attending college. He felt there were too many students at the ACC events for only three staff members so felt it was unorganized and “they wouldn’t be able to help [him] specifically. He referred to college as a business, “a business out to make money.” At one point, he mentioned that his TAKS scores were not high enough to enter college. He also mentioned that he regretted not taking dual credit. He felt his College Connection “advising session was too short;” he mentioned they “glanced at [his] TAKS scores, talked about something shortly, and it was over.” It was obvious that this student needed extra time, planning, mentorship, and an opportunity to clear up any misconceptions he had about college. He said he felt that “nobody had ever supported the idea of him going to college.” Student fifteen was a Caucasian male.

Student #16

Student sixteen was eager to become a chef one day and was looking forward to going to Austin Community College. He had a very positive view of the College Connection activities and how they helped him prepare to get into college. He said “ACC was very helpful” and felt that the most important student service was “financial aid.” He, however, was not able to attend the financial aid night because it was scheduled afterschool. He felt there should be cookies and soda available at all of the college events to keep students keep engaged and focused on talking about their college plans. Student sixteen felt he had received a lot of support and encouragement about college from his family and friends but found the solutions on how to get there from ACC. Student sixteen was a Caucasian male.

Student #17

Student seventeen was very informed on the ACC processes and also felt that all of the activities had given him a lot of information about what he needed to complete. He mentioned that any follow-up questions he had he would direct to his mother who had recently been through nursing school and was a big supporter of him going to college and getting the information he needed. He also said he felt pressure to go away to college because his “father was giving [him] the boot,” so he would probably be attending a school far away, mostly likely Texas A&M. He was confident in his information about ACC because he said he had enrolled through dual credit so all of the information from College Connection was used as extra time to discuss options for college. He aspired to be an accountant one day. He was familiar with the core curriculum as well as various career paths and found ACC taught him about “easy ways to get credit and save money.” Student sixteen was a Caucasian male.

Student #18

Student eighteen seemed very intelligent and confident yet slightly disconnected from the college enrollment processes that he needed to complete to achieve his college and career plans. This student was very adamant that he and “his parents had already mapped out everything” yet seemed amazed to hear about all of the different options and opportunities discussed by ACC including “useful information on programming and engineering” and opportunities on taking CAD and C++ courses. He felt all the information he received was helpful but very redundant to what he had learned through other colleges and his high school counselor. He also mentioned that his “mom was also attending college,” so he was getting information and support from her as to which classes he needed to take. He mentioned what he would most have wanted was all of the topics that were discussed by ACC to be put in writing, so he could refer to them when he needed to. He planned on going to the Navy after high school graduation, but college was at his forefront. Student eighteen was a Hispanic male.

Student #19

Student nineteen was a very confident and vocal eighteen-year-old who had taken steps to prepare him to go to college. He would be attending Texas Tech University and had done a lot to “get classes out of the way” by taking evening courses at the ACC Round Rock Center. He had also begun planning his college freshman and sophomore year to maximize the number of classes that he could satisfy, but he said he wished he had known he was able to take summer courses as well. He found ACC to be “helpful because they covered everything.” He felt he had been informed of everything he needed by ACC prior to his senior year. He found taking the ACC COMPASS test, getting the FAFSA pin, and filling out the Apply Texas application

prepared him for college. Student nineteen was very familiar with college terms and also the steps he needed to accomplish to be successful. When it came to optional activities such as financial aid night, he said he “didn’t even tell [his] parents about them.” He felt he particularly got a good grasp from ACC on “the differences between scholarships, grants, loans, et cetera and how to apply” during the information session. Since he was a college-going student who liked to plan early, he would have liked College Connection activities to be “more personal” and cover specific criteria on majors. Student nineteen was a Caucasian male.

Student #20

Student number twenty planned on attending UMHB where she planned to study Elementary Education. She felt the UMHB college recruiter had the strongest influence on her decision to go to that specific college. She found the steps with ACC to be very helpful in determining how to apply, why to enroll, and filling out the FAFSA. This student seemed very comfortable with the thought of college because she had participated in many dual credit courses from ACC and had also gone through many of the steps early in her high school career. She would like to see smaller groups in college events, so she could ask more questions, but overall found ACC to be especially helpful in determining “what classes were transferable to UMHB.” College Connection “advising and dual credit were very beneficial” according to the student. Student twenty was a Caucasian female.

Student #21

Student twenty one was a very calm student in his demeanor and attitude about what he needed to do and how to prepare for college. He found the high school counselor to be one of his biggest supporters with regard to going to college. He was happy that all ACC events were

scheduled during the school day because he said he “doesn’t go to things that take up personal time”; therefore, this was not a student who would do optional programs. He, like many of the other students that had participated in dual credit for several semesters, seemed nonchalant about the idea of going to college and enrolling in college because he had “already experienced what college was like.” He did feel that ACC had been very helpful in helping him get prepared. Student twenty was a Caucasian male.

Student #22

Student twenty-two would be attending “ACC for [her] basics and then transferring to the Art Institute for Photography.” She found her mom, dad, and high school counselor to be her greatest college supporters. She had gotten a jump start thanks to ACC activities and “started to look at classes to take at ACC in the fall semester.” With the enrollment activities, she applied to ACC, had been advised and “feels pretty good” about the process. What helped this student feel the most special was “being called on the bus to receive information.” Oftentimes, selected students are pulled out of class to meet with colleges; she was proud that ACC had called her out of class. Student twenty-two was Caucasian female.

Analysis of data

Jones (1985) described that the analysis of qualitative data is a “process of making sense, of finding and making a structure in the data and giving this meaning and significance for ourselves and for any relevant audience” (p. 56). The research question and sub-questions asked in this study were answered and justified through student perception from high school seniors at two different high schools and personal communication with a high school counselor from each school. The answers were based on their experiences with the Austin Community College’s

College Connection services offered on each of the high school campuses during the 2009-2010 school year. The responses below will address each of the research questions posed in this study.

Research Question I

Question number one asked if high school seniors from two different central Texas high schools were in fact participating in ACC's required College Connection enrollment processes. If so, the question also inquired as to whether the optional and recommended support services were being utilized. According to Austin Community College (2009), both Jarrell ISD and Round Rock ISD had both been participating in College Connection since fall 2006. Data showed that, between the 2007 and 2008 school years, 74.1% of Jarrell's high school seniors had completed the ACC admissions application, and 50% of the students went on to enroll at ACC (ACC, 2009b). According to the current 2009-2010 high seniors interviewed in this study, 100% of them filled out the ACC admissions application. In Round Rock ISD, only 29.3% of the district's total graduating seniors filled out the ACC admissions application, and 40.2% of the students went on to attend ACC in the 2007-2008 school year (ACC, 2009). Only 58% of the students in this study from Round Rock High School reported that they had filled out the ACC application for the 2009-2010 academic year. The researcher found that 'required' ACC enrollment steps are offered as optional events. Jarrell High School, on the other hand, has a much smaller population, so their approach was to pull out the entire senior class at one time.

According to the participants from Jarrell High School, 100% of them reported that they participated in the ACC senior presentation which served as the information kick-off for College Connection activities to be held at the high school during that school year. No students from Jarrell had participated in ACC campus tours, registration, Financial Aid night, teleconferencing,

student life, or any other optional activities. Besides the senior presentation, the high school reported that only the financial aid presentation was offered to students as a joint event with Texas A&M. Additionally, the financial aid presentation was optional and offered in the evening was sparsely attended. Many of the students reported that they had visited Texas A&M, Texas State University, and Mary Hardin Baylor. When asked if the Jarrell high seniors had ever been taken on an ACC campus tour, the school reported that they only go to four-year schools, and there are too many ACC campuses to visit one (personal communication, 2010). The students in this study said that they would not attend any optional or out of school events because of extracurricular activities, work, and because they were “optional”.

Similarly, Round Rock High School student participants also reported that they would not attend any meetings or events planned outside of the school day for reasons similar to those listed by Jarrell students, except four of the Round Rock students also named transportation as one of their barriers. One student at Round Rock High School mentioned that an ACC campus tour was scheduled for May; however, it was limited to only to his PAYS class. According to the high school, two optional financial aid days are offered at the high school as district-wide events. Half of the students in this study reported that they didn't know financial aid presentations were even available to them. The other half of the students explained that letters had been sent out, and that there were announcements, however, none of the students in this study participated in either of the optional financial aid presentations. The senior presentation was also offered to students at Round Rock High School; however, only half of the students said that they attended, and even then only two of those students recalled what was discussed. No other optional or recommended activities are offered at either of the schools besides the events mentioned.

A recommended but optional service that both high school counselors mentioned would be very beneficial for their students was the registration portion so that students could take the next step by enrolling into classes (personal communication, 2010). Holding a registration day at the high school would allow for ACC's support while students register over the phone or by web, in case they had any questions. Guiding students through registration would also encourage students debating whether or not to sign up for classes with an extra level of commitment by creating a schedule. Since ACC offers "early bird" registration which allows students to view the schedule and register far in advance, students could elect to register for both summer and/or fall courses.

One of the conclusions from research question number one was that not only do students not do "optional" but that the two high schools had elected not to offer the "optional" support services. College Connection activities are tailored individually so each high school elects which ACC services they would like to offer besides the four required enrollment events, and then those events are carried out by the college. Students in this study said they "would like to go on a campus tour," and have "more ACC meetings." The student's perception was that they "didn't know" what to do after they went through all of the required enrollment steps and still had questions. The most common theme that emerged was "what's next, what do I do; I would like more meetings; I'm not sure what to do next; we met with ACC, but we forgot about that because it was last semester." If more optional activities could be implemented as required activities during the school day, it might be that extra little step to help students get into college.

Sub-question A

Research question number one additionally offered two sub-questions titled A and B.

Question A explored how helpful the student support services offered at the high school campus were, according to student perception. According to the students, the ACC events that they had participated in were “very helpful” as almost all students mentioned. Others students specifically said “they were pretty helpful, ACC, the community, they really helped me get a foot into the college experience” [student #16], and “the information was really helpful, basically it went over everything I needed” [student #19]. Other students mentioned ACC components were helpful because they were held at a convenient time and the advising component was made to be individualized. “It didn’t take time from other things, so it was really helpful in that aspect” [student #18], “I liked it; they made it really personal” [student #22], and “as a whole, it has helped out a lot” [student #21].

It was evident that students from both high schools felt the ACC services they had participated in had been helpful whether or not they planned to attend ACC. One student who would be attending one of the local four-year colleges indicated that learning all he needed to do to prepare for college, he “learned from ACC” [Student #14]. Another student mentioned, “it was most helpful when we went into [the ACC Go Mobile] and applied because I don’t think I would have done that” [Student #20].

Sub-question B

Question B explored the factors that students perceive may be preventing them from participating in higher education enrollment activities. Students at Jarrell High School seemed to have more external influencers, such as Army recruiters; two of the students said they had thought about going to college, but after talking to the recruiter decided to enlist instead. Fortunately, all of the Jarrell High School students said they had attended the required

enrollment activities offered during the school day. Students at Jarrell said they did not attend the financial aid information session for the following reasons: “it was offered in the evening, had to work, had practice, in lots of extracurricular activities,” and one student was “taking ACC evening dual credit courses” [Student #19].

When exploring the factors that students perceive may be preventing them from participating in higher education enrollment activities at Round Rock High School, students overwhelmingly mentioned “I didn’t know about it.” According to the students, the number one issue preventing them and their peers from ~~not~~ participating in college activities was poor communication at their high school. Students did say that their counselors tried hard to get information out by making announcements, or as one student mentioned, “I got a notice in the mail” [student #6]. However, students talked about high school announcements often being an unsuccessful way to reach students, since students are allowed to talk to their friends during announcements in most classes. A few other students mentioned that they had had classes in rooms where speakers are broken, so they never heard announcements. Students went so far as to suggest that more “signs need to be put up; teachers could announce events in their individual classes; envelopes could be passed out at school; and that often events are only offered to students enrolled in PAYS and not everyone else” [student #7]. A second barrier students mentioned was that if they had heard about an event and were interested in attending, they had to go individually and sign up at the counselor’s office to receive a pass in order to be pulled out of class. Some of the students reported that they forgot to go and sign up often, so had to miss college visits that they were really interested in attending, and had heard about.

Research Question II

Research question number two explored any other themes or recruitment strategies that emerged from the qualitative interviews that could be refined to reach more students. One surprising discovery was that all of the students interviewed at both Round Rock High School and Jarrell High School had a plan for what to do after high school graduation, and not one student mentioned work or being undecided. Of the 22 students who were interviewed, 20 of them said they were planning to attend a community college or university immediately after high school graduation, which was progress in itself. One of the two students who would not be attending college immediately after high school did plan to enroll after his service in the military. Of the diverse mix of students represented in the study, many mentioned they were not planning to go to college or had never even thought about college until some individual, event, or external influencer put them on track to higher education.

Five Themes

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, five major themes and several subthemes emerged from the interviews. The five overarching themes were: Austin Community College, Student Services, Obstacles, Influencers, and Areas of Improvement. Within each of the themes several sub-themes began to emerge through the patterns in students' perception and experiences with enrolling into college.

Austin Community College

Students frequently mentioned Austin Community College and described a familiarity, a sense of comfort, and an association with ACC. Students also said that ACC events had been helpful and informative for them. Even though dual credit was never mentioned by the

researcher, students brought up dual credit on several occasions and said that was ACC. They described saving money and time, and had a lot of surface-level information about ACC, like the ability to satisfy core courses. One of the common occurrences at both campuses was students saying they wish they “could meet with ACC even more.”

Student Services

According to CCSSE (2007) data collected of traditional ACC students, they listed advising, financial aid, and transferring credit assistance as three of the four highest-ranked student services that were most important to them (Austin Community College, 2009b). The only student services that did not surface as it had in the CCSSE results was the importance of computer labs, but that was primarily because the guided questions did not elicit information about services on a college campus, only pre-enrollment services offered at their high school. Consistently with CCSSE results from traditional students, the College Connection participants in this study also said that financial aid and advising were to them the two most important student services. Students also frequently talked about another important student service which was an interest in having more information about transferring to a four-year college. All but two of the students who spoke of attending a community college discussed transferring. That same population also discussed completing their “basics, core curriculum, or a few classes” but never brought up an interest in receiving an associate degree. Students mentioned that ACC and their high school counselors had discussed transferring possibilities with them. Many of the students said they would be transferring to a four-year school after completing one or two years at a community college, so they were familiar with the concept of transferring. Although financial aid was one of the most important student services for the students interviewed, and all but one of them planned to attend college, none of them attended the optional financial aid presentations

offered on their campus. One achievement was that all of the students interviewed had filled out at least one college application.

It was important to note that a barrier that existed between high schools and colleges was a difference in terms used at the different levels of education. Students who participated in this study however were surprisingly already familiar with using terms such as “apply online, FAFSA online, transfer, admissions application, dual credit, COMPASS, ASSET,” and even the fact that they “liked having events in the mobile go unit” which was the ACC trailer filled with computers supplied to help students fill out the online application. Students at both Round Rock High School and Jarrell High School, however, did not recognize the term ‘College Connection’. Both of the counselors interviewed mentioned that the ACC services brought onto the high schools were synonymous with ACC but not the ACC initiative that brought them there. Therefore, more marketing and branding may be needed if colleges are interested in students becoming familiar with the programs’ names as well as the services. Students were comfortable discussing that someone in their lives whether it was ACC, a high school, or a parent, had helped them determine what to do after high school graduation.

Obstacles

The third theme prevalent in this study was that ‘Obstacles’ still existed even with the extra support services brought to the two high school campuses. The most commonly used terms in this study were “I’m not sure; I didn’t know” and “I don’t remember.” Many of the students discussed being given information, talking about various topics, and hearing that events were taking place but either forgetting to pick up a pass to go to the event, or in most cases, not remembering anything that had been discussed at the events they had attended because it had

been long ago. Some of the students discussed being in a large gym or classroom with all of their peers and recalled it being “noisy.” There was recurring mention of the information sessions having too many people which “caused them not be able to listen, be distracted, not to be able to see the PowerPoint, not receive a packet because the line was too long” [students #9,10, #11].

Students said they were appreciative of services brought to them by ACC, but they also mentioned that they got a lot of great information, and then didn’t see or hear about ACC for a long period of time afterwards. Many students repeatedly mentioned that they “would like more meetings” and “further follow up” on the topics discussed right after information sessions so they could ask questions, turn in paperwork, and refresh their memory on the topics that were discussed. Follow-up meetings were the number one service students who participated in the interviews were interested in seeing more of because they had pending questions.

Influencers

Parents, counselors, teachers, and friends were the highest mentioned influencers in the students’ college-choice, how to enroll in college, and the students’ perception about what college was like. The students mentioned that these influencers had also guided their decision to go to college and offered suggestions about which college to attend. What varied between the two schools was that Jarrell students had a lot of external influences such as a high military recruitment and campus tours to four-year universities that many of the students ultimately chose to attend. The Round Rock students, however, discussed many internal and familiar influences, primarily their high counselor and their PAYS teacher, or their English teachers, because all students were required to discuss college options and write college essays during English classes. Providing college information and enrollment steps to parents, providing

professional development and training sessions for counselors and teachers, and bringing in students to provide testimonials could serve as additional reinforcements for creating a college-going culture.

Areas of Improvement

Theme five represented all of the ‘Areas of Improvement’ that students had concerning providing college access, being more available, and offering support in specific areas. The most commonly discussed suggestion was that they wanted to have people in their lives who built relationships with them and individuals who “sincerely cared” about their progress. Many of the students brought up that they hoped that the college staff members, and recruiters, “really wanted them to go to college” and “not just seem like they [were] doing their job.” In two occurrences students said they felt that being provided college opportunities “was a money thing” [students #5 and #15]. The students linked the information obtained in college admissions applications linked the information with what and had the misconception that information was being sold to third parties. This finding served as a reminder that in rather serving 100% of the student body there will be some students who will not understand the college processes and the reasoning behind the need to provide more information than ever before.

Mentorship was also brought up frequently by the students; they discussed wanting someone specifically assigned to them who that they could call when they had questions. A few students also discussed their friends currently enrolled in college talking to them about “being able to go into a college office anytime they wanted and talking to a college advisor to plan and get advice”; this seemed very appealing to all of the students [Student #12]. Both high school counselors also mentioned a component that was most successful in many of their programs, one

being Upward Bound, was having a mentor with whom they could talk to one-on-one, have lunch with once a semester, and whom they feel like they could trust (personal communication, 2010). Another type of mentor relationship brought up by the students was the possibility of student mentors. According to the student's perspective, they also wanted to hear from someone who had "just been through the process and was enrolled at ACC." Students were very curious to learn about what college was like, and they felt that other students could tell them best. The students in the interview discussed wanting the "honest true- life accounts of what to expect when they go to college" [student #1].

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the findings from the study addressing students' perception regarding their experiences of enrollment services offered on their high school campus. Whether or not students were participating in optional, recommended, or required student services offered at their high schools was also explored. Finally, a description was provided of the five themes that emerged from the study which were: Austin Community College, Student Services, Obstacles, Influencers, and Areas of Improvement; all five themes contained specific subthemes. Based on interviews with high school seniors at two different high school in central Texas and one counselor at each campus, all the participants felt that the ACC services had been helpful and were helping them prepare for college. The overall conclusion was that they would like to see even more of ACC at their high schools, and that the required student services steps are really optional, which was why participation at events was not higher.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2008), ‘Closing the Gaps’ data now shows that “Blacks and Hispanics represent about 54% of Texas’ 15-34 population, but only 39 percent of those students [enroll] in Texas higher education.” Although the number of students enrolling into two and four years schools has increased significantly, the state is still slightly below its intended ‘Closing the Gaps’ target, and a large percentage of graduating high school seniors across the state are still not enrolling in higher education. Austin Community College developed an initiative called College Connection to respond to ‘Closing the Gaps’ in higher education and has committed to provide full enrollment services on high school campuses across central Texas. This study provides the students’ perspective through a qualitative study designed to gain insight about how to further refine student support services offered at two central Texas high schools.

Study Overview

College Connection is directed toward increasing the college-going rate in central Texas by providing high school seniors with tools, support, and guidance on how to apply and get into college. All services are free of charge to the school districts and are provided to students on their high school campuses. A qualitative study was conducted at two of the participating high schools in central Texas from two different school districts. A total of 22 students participated in the qualitative interviews. Researcher’s notes, and communication with high school counselors at each of the participating high schools also became part of the research collected. Background

enrollment data and participation figures from Austin Community College provided a holistic view of the impact that College Connection has had on central Texas.

Austin Community College has collected longitudinal data from College Connection cohorts over the past seven years of the program's existence. Data showed annual increases in enrollment at ACC, a positive effect on participation in dual credit and Tech Prep, increases in central Texas graduation rates, increases in the amount of applications submitted, and even improvements in persistence (College Connection, 2010). This study, however, provided the student's perspective through a qualitative study to identify whether students were taking advantage of college support services offered on their high school campus, to explore the reasons why participation varied in required segments, recommended and optional events, and to gain insight regarding other obstacles, ideas, or themes that emerged from interviewing students who had recently been through the College Connection processes. The purpose of this study was to identify student support services that could be refined to enhance recruitment strategies.

Research Questions

Below are the research questions explored in this qualitative study. Both research questions were addressed by interviewing 22 graduating high school seniors who had recently participated in the College Connection services. The students came from two different high schools that varied in size, and were from different schools districts. The two high schools, however, were serviced by the same ACC student services team, which created consistency in the comparisons of services and information offered to both of the high schools.

Research Question #1

Research Question I addressed whether high school seniors at two high schools in central

Texas were participating in the required Austin Community College's College Connection student enrollment processes? If so, how were the optional and recommended support services being utilized? This study found that all high school seniors were pulled out of class to attend the required College Connection events at Jarrell High School including the recommended senior kick-off presentation. Two evening financial aid presentations were offered to students at Jarrell as optional events but had very little attendance. The study also found that the required College Connection events offered at Round Rock High School were in fact offered as optional events to students who were interested in attending ACC. All interested students signed up at the counselor's office to be pulled out of class for each event. The recommended senior kick-off presentation and financial aid presentations were also offered as optional events and varied in attendance. No optional student services such as registration, campus tours, or student life were elected to be offered by either high school. This study found that 100% of the students interviewed did not attend the evening or Saturday financial aid events scheduled at their respective schools, yet the majority of the group identified financial aid as the most important student service to them.

Research question one offered two sub-questions to find out how helpful the student support services being offered were to the students, and to find out if there were any factors preventing students from participating in enrollment activities. Sub-question (A) found that students who did participate in the events found them to be very helpful. Various students felt they had obtained lots of great information. The students felt advising and financial aid were the two most important student services offered and would like to see financial aid presentations offered during the school day. A few students said they would not have filled out the Apply Texas application if they had not been pulled out of class to do so. Many of the students said that

they had not planned to go to college, or had not thought about college prior to their senior year. Students overwhelmingly felt that the one-on-one advising was very helpful and personal, and they appreciated discussing test scores individually. Students did, however, mention that they would like to discuss degree plans more in-depth.

Sub-question (B) explored factors that may have prevented students from participating in any of the College Connection activities. Students mentioned that they did not attend any afterschool or Saturday events, and stated the following reasons:

extra-curricular activities including practice, events, and meetings, work, transportation, student's personal time, poor advertisement for afterschool events, mother said no, grandmother said no, and friends didn't go.

College Connection's optional activities, including campus tours, registration, teleconferencing, student life information, and registration were not being utilized at all by either Jarrell High School or Round Rock High School students. Students were not even aware that those services existed. Students at Round Rock High School felt they were not attending ACC events or other college events at their high school because they "didn't know about them." Almost every student brought up that they felt there was a communication problem at their high school preventing them from hearing about events. They also mentioned that a second obstacle existed, since students had to remember to go and sign up at the counselor's office for each event that they heard about and wanted to attend. Many students discussed forgetting to sign up to go and hear events. The collective wisdom of Dr. Hunter Boylan, Dr. Kay McClenney, and many other scholars is that "students don't do optional"; students in this study confirmed that optional offerings of even the most useful and transformative activities will go unused.

A few students did state they had the opportunity to participate in similar activities but with other colleges. Round Rock High School students stated that activities such as campus tours were offered only to a limited number of students enrolled in a college preparatory program called Preparing All Youth for Success (PAYs). Jarrell High School students interviewed recalled visiting locations such as the University of Mary-Hardin Baylor, Texas State University, and Texas A&M-College Station, but none had heard of opportunities to visit ACC, even though many of the students discussed having hopes of becoming a chef, photographer, taking C++ classes, learning about ACC programs offerings, and wanting to complete their core curriculum at ACC. Both counselors in charge of ACC activities were asked if they offered ACC tours and replied “no.”

Research Question #2

Question number two explored other themes and recruitment strategies that emerged from the qualitative interviews. A total of five themes with two subthemes each surfaced from the data analysis. Theme one was labeled Austin Community College, which was a topic that was continually addressed by the students. The students most frequently brought up feeling an association with ACC either through a friend or parent that had attended, if the students they had participated in dual credit or tech prep, or an association with ACC because of the senior year activities such as the admissions application. The second topic brought up the most by students was that they had found the student services that they were able to participate in to be very “informative and helpful.” Students said that participation in the events helped them to prepare for college whether they planned to attend. Theme two was called student services where students most frequently discussed the importance of financial aid and advising to really help them figure out a plan for college. They additionally brought up their participation in filling out

the admissions application which meant a lot since they were told they would have life-time enrollment at ACC. Within the student services theme, a concept that was frequently brought up was transferring to a four year school after attending ACC for a year or two, but a degree completion at ACC was never discussed.

The third theme was labeled ‘obstacles’ and the type of obstacles that were brought up the most were that students did not know about events held on their high school and those who that did attend did not remember because it had been long ago. Students felt they received a lot of great information but were pending many of the steps to fully help them enroll such as registration and filling out the FAFSA. Students stated they would like to see more follow-up to sessions held with ACC and more individualized attention to help them finish the process they started. Theme five described the influencers in a student’s college preparation experiences. Students stated parents and high school counselors as the main influencers with high school teachers and friends also contributing with suggestions and referrals to schools. The fifth and final theme that emerged from the study was called ‘Areas of Improvement’ because students had a lot of ideas that they felt would have helped them be more engaged and help them make college preparation easier.

Students at both schools discussed interest in more meetings and smaller groups sizes so they could get to know ACC staff better, ask questions, and have more individualized attention. Students felt that having mentors or an assigned academic advisor that they could call or email if they had questions would make a difference for their path. Relationships were brought up as a function that would create a bond and additional level of trust with the students. One student described a college recruiter that had a personal visit with him, and gave him “a great deal of information and made [him] feel special.” He felt every student should receive more of that

“level of attention” even if it’s at the high school for a short period of time, because of this experience with that one counselor this student would be attending a college in Pennsylvania [Student #12]. He knew the recruiter’s name, email, and phone number and knew he could call him anytime. It became obvious that many students found the ACC events to be helpful, yet there was still need for more personal attention and additional follow-up needed with students.

Recommendations

The researcher found, from the student interviews, that students who mentioned they had taken dual credit or Tech Prep courses seemed to be more confident and less intimidated than the other students about the concept of college. Those students were also more familiar with the college language such as ASSET and COMPASS exams, FAFSA, admissions application, core curriculum, and seemed to have a better understanding of degree plans and the requirements of college. Additionally, those students had all received college credit and acknowledged the amount of time and money that had been saved. Therefore, a strong recommendation would be to increase student participation in dual credit and Tech Prep on high school campuses by offering more courses, as well as a variety of courses that appeal to a larger base of students. After all, the more students who complete enrollment through dual credit during their sophomore, junior, or senior year will not have to participate in senior enrollment activities allowing college and high school staff to concentrate on students who need extra support.

The researcher also learned from the students in this study that “students don’t do optional.” Currently the registration, senior kickoff, and financial aid presentation which are critical components to getting students enrolled into courses, and have courses paid for, are all currently recommended or optional enrollment components offered to the high schools.

Therefore, the majority of high schools elect not to offer optional components. The recommended activities that are offered by the high school, are offered at night or after school when students are less likely to attend. The number of students who fill out an admissions application is highest across area high schools because it is one of the required components offered during the school day. A strong recommendation would be to add registration support and financial aid presentations as part of the required components. These extra components should be renegotiated with school districts when establishing new program agreements.

Adding a senior kick-off presentation would ensure that more students learn about the ACC processes taking place throughout their senior year and give students an initial opportunity to begin having dialogue with a college. Secondly, offering financial aid would give students the financial guidance and preferably filling of the FAFSA would allow students to receive a financial award letter as early as possible. Finally, by minimally adding registration to the required events, staff could help students with the last step to successfully enroll into classes. Early bird registration would allow staff to help interested students through both summer and fall registration.

The researcher also found that students were not exposed to degree offerings, resources, or state-of-the-art equipment used by many college disciplines on community college campuses. The researcher found that the students from both high schools were being taken on college campus tours but only to four-year universities. Students were even bused to out of town colleges yet were not aware of the offerings at campuses that were only miles from their homes. A recommendation would be to expand college tours to also visit local community colleges where approximately half of the students will attend at one point. Furthermore, taking students who traditionally are not sent on college tours to visit campuses would reinforce the message that

they, too, are also college-bound. College tours expose students to a variety of resources. The researcher found remorse from students interviewed who mentioned that only specific students were chosen to attend campus tours. This becomes a labeling effect which needs to be eliminated to allow all students to have an opportunity. According to Dr. Hunter Boylan, the Director for National Developmental Education Studies, “students don’t know what they don’t know” and that “students can only name approximately 20 careers of the over several thousand,” so a campus tour could be a great experience for discovering what colleges have to offer (H. Boylan, personal communication, 2010). Many of the students in this study mentioned they would be attending Texas State University, University of Mary Hardin Baylor, or Texas A&M, and all of those students had taken campus tours to those specific campuses. Students said that was one of the main reasons they chose to attend those specific schools. The power of campus tours cannot be underestimated and should also be a required event.

An additional recommendation would be to offer an additional college prep course required for all high school seniors. Students at Round Rock High School experienced positive effects from participation in their high school PAYS course, and college students were also seeing positive effects from college preparation courses. A required course where students have a section of time set apart to complete college enrollment activities, college readiness preparation, and a study period to address overall academic preparedness and skills is essential. This course would also be a great avenue for meeting with students in smaller groups. High schools could elect to offer Psychology 1300, a college study skills course, for dual credit. This would allow students to receive college credit early, prepare for college, and ACC could support that mission financially since all dual credit courses held on high school campuses are free to area school

districts and tuition is free for students. Offering this course on high school campuses would allow more students to be informed and involved in college preparation at an earlier stage.

An unexpected theme that emerged within the obstacles that students discussed was poor communication. A strong recommendation would be for high school staff and college staff to reevaluate the modes of communication and marketing to students. Many students in the study mentioned that they did not attend college activities offered during the school day because “they did not know” about them. Increasing the level of advertising at the larger high schools with more banners, announcements, and personal notes or invitations for each of the students with their name on it would help make the students feel special. This would also spread the word that an event was going to be held and reinforce the college-going message. Another priority to address the issue of students not attending required events would be to offer trainings for all of the high school counselors and for college staff to be invited to speak briefly at teacher inservices to explain to faculty the college resources and course offerings. This study found that the main influencers in students’ lives were high school counselors, teachers, parents, and friends; by establishing relationships with these individuals they, too, could become college advocates. With more training and information, high school staff may be more willing to sell the college message, and create conversations about degree offerings.

Implications for Practice

Implications of the findings from this study may provide Austin Community College, other community colleges, high school staff, and state legislators with students’ perspective on how to better support and recruit high schools seniors. By implementing suggestions from this study, stakeholders may find methods to more effectively connect with high school students in

their specific community and provide them with the tools for enrolling and preparing for college entrance.

Austin Community College

It is apparent that ACC has had proven success with College Connection and has had the opportunity of refining services and practices throughout its inception, yet there is much more to be done. Although college-going rates are on a rise, a large percentage of students in central Texas are still not attending college. By implementing the strategies recommended from the findings of this study, ACC may be able to reach more of their intended target of 100% of high school seniors. An immediate start could be to make services that are currently recommended become required to allow for the missing part of the puzzle which allows students to register, apply for financial aid, and visit a campus. By making mandatory the student service offerings mentioned above the program it would address student's number one request of adding more meetings. This would also allow college staff to follow up with students on pending steps in the process, paperwork, or questions. More visits by the same staff would also indirectly build relationships because the ACC staff would become familiar faces that the students would get to know over time.

The four required College Connection components were selected because they allow students to apply into the college, obtain test scores, and meet with an advisor over course options and planning. If not all of the students are required to attend those events, then schools are at risk of missing students who could really benefit from the information including students who would be attending a four-year university and could learn about their options with saving money and time by taking summer courses or co-enrolling at a community college. This study

found that the required components at one of the schools were only offered as optional. A reinforcement of the importance of the required components needs to be established with school districts so that all students can the information they need to be successful.

Other Community Colleges

Other colleges interested in joining the more than 55 others who are implementing College Connection would be encouraged to replicate Austin Community College's model and adjust any components necessary to best serve the needs of their specific communities. For example, El Paso Community College has adopted Austin Community College's College Connection model but provides high schools with a theater dance group to spread the college-going message and initiate each senior kick-off event with high energy, motivation, and mentorship. Other regions could see the positive effects of a college-going culture as seen in central Texas. This study found that College Connection provided results, and if executed properly with added support for students, this would be a viable recruitment strategy for their community.

Policy Makers

In a time of economic constraints, lawmakers need to make educated and data-driven decisions to maximize the support needed in our education system. With budget shortfalls, colleges are not able to concentrate on innovative practices such as College Connection; instead, they are planning layoffs of much needed staff or eliminating other programs in place to support students. As responsible fiscal agents, lawmakers need to support two concrete decisions and invest in strategies that are working. According to THECB (2009a), 1,299,000 students enrolled into colleges and universities in Texas in 2008, although this is below statewide "Closing the

Gaps” targets, statewide efforts are making an impact on the college-going rate, and this total is higher than ever before.

Decision #1: Trust and invest in community colleges. Community colleges play a vital role in our communities and serve as an economic driver and an education system built with an ‘open door’ concept to train the workforce, provide basic and adult education, and create viable educational options for students at all levels.

Decision #2: Create legislation and provide sufficient funds so that College Connection may be implemented in all community colleges around the nation. Data show that College Connection is working; according to student perception “College Connection has helped them...prepared them...and provided them with the tools they need.” Students in other communities deserve to have the same type support network and access to resources as is provided in central Texas and now many other regions. Other colleges would need funds for planning, implementing, and sustaining this comprehensive initiative until institutional funds could be secured; therefore, a financial investment would be essential.

Future Studies

There are many components, personnel, and logistics that come together to create the functions of College Connection, and because of this, there could be countless studies and variations on the topic. College Connection is also a very new and upcoming initiative that has come to the forefront of the national community and has received a lot of attention, numerous honors, and awards yet has had very little published on the topic. There is much to learn about the fairly new initiative that has shown high success in such a short period of time. Four specific studies have been recommended which could be useful for practitioners and researchers alike.

Suggestion #1: An analytical study of College Readiness in central Texas since the inception of College Connection would be beneficial. This study could be conducted by disaggregating college test scores by school district or high school and accounting for socioeconomic status, gender, test preparation, and any other appropriate variables to account for academic preparedness when entering college.

Suggestion #2: A future study could also provide an individual focus for each of the College Connection components to derive at the recruitment and retention strategies used by staff on the high school campuses that most effectively connect with students. One of the limitations of this study was that only one community college was evaluated. Researchers and practitioners could gain a better understanding of recruitment strategies by evaluating practices at a variety of community colleges. It would also be beneficial to follow colleges that had established the College Connection 2+2+2 to see if the partnership with four-year universities was creating the seamless transition intended by the state for them to have.

Suggestion #3 A third study could explore the persistence of College Connection students through their first semester, first year, second year, completion, transfer, or completion of their desired academic goals. A better understanding of the longitudinal data collected by ACC of the retention, completion, and success rates of College Connection students could allow future implementations of the initiative to maneuver resources appropriately.

Suggestion #4 This study was able to gain insight from students at two specific high schools. Further studies could explore student's perception and experiences with College Connection from the other 57 plus high schools in Austin Community College's eight-county

service area. This study is only the beginning to fully understanding the recruitment drivers that are most effective in creating a college-going culture.

Conclusion

The motto at Austin Community College is “start here, get there,” which seems all too appropriate as the districts carries out its mission to provide 100% of area high school graduating seniors with the support and resources to enter college. By taking student support services onto every high school campus in the large eight county service area, ACC is breaking ground by eliminating barriers. ACC is providing options and opportunities by allowing students who may not have otherwise had the opportunity to meet with academic advisors, financial aid specialists, admissions staff, and so many others, to plan their futures. All but one of the graduating high school seniors who participated in this study planned on attending college immediately after high school graduation. The Central Texas Student Futures Project (2009) similarly reported that 91% of high school seniors in central Texas reported that they planned to attend college directly after high school. There has been a shift in attitude and responsibility towards attending college as found in this study. Now colleges and high schools need to commit to a program of required activities to capture this emerging momentum as well as all students,

APPENDIX I: ABBREVIATIONS

AACC: American Association of Community Colleges

ACC: Austin Community College

ATD: Achieving the Dream

CCSSE: Community College Survey of Student Engagement

SENSE: Survey of Entering Student Engagement

HB 1: House Bill 1

ISD: Independent School District

IRB: Institutional Review Board

TACC: Texas Association of Community Colleges

THECB: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

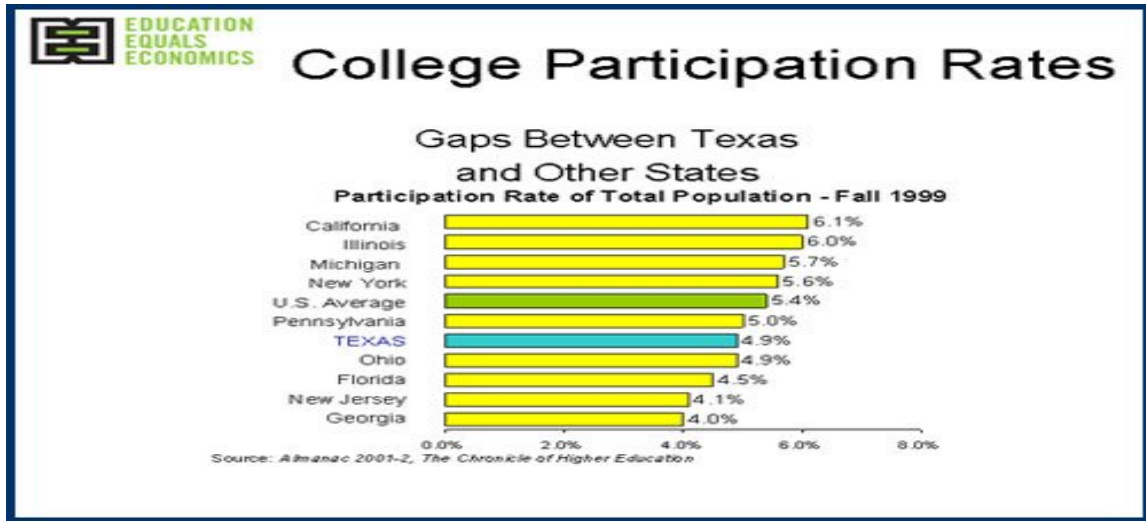
QUAL: Qualitative Study

US: United States

RRHS: Round Rock High School

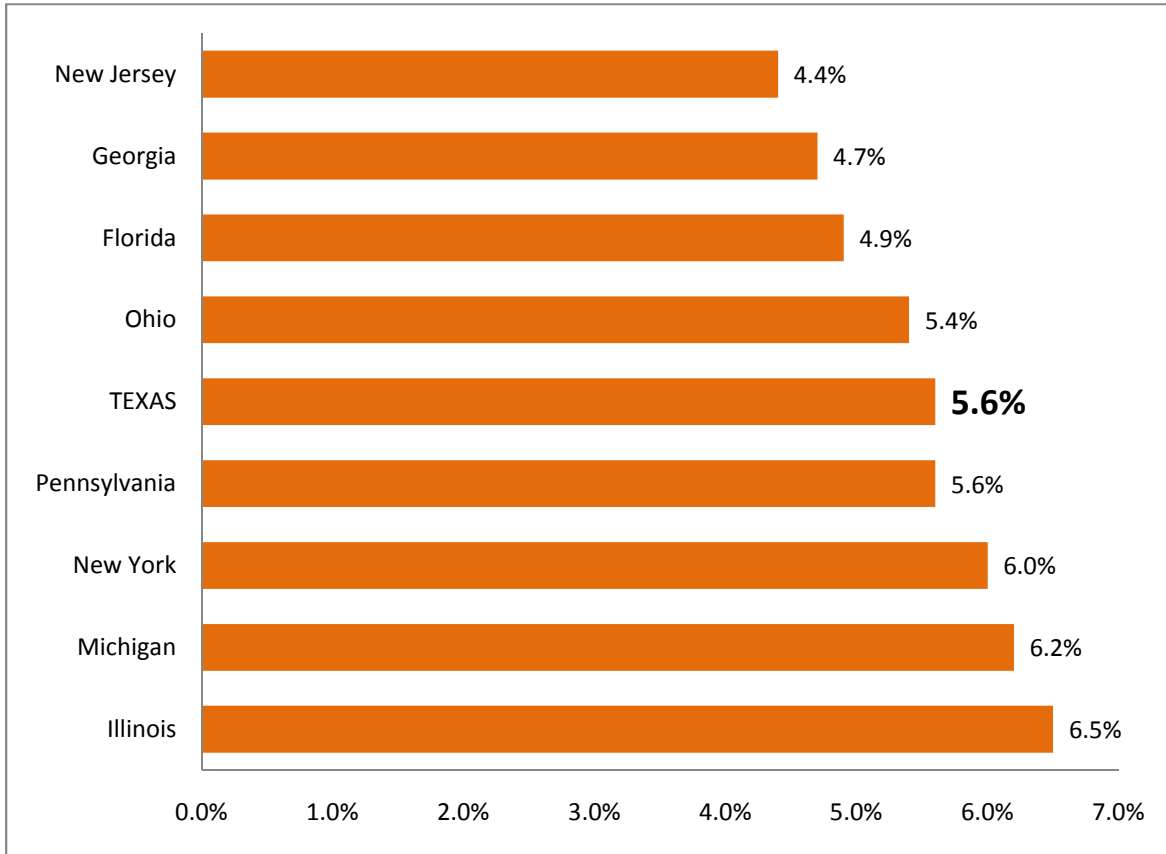
JHS: Jarrell High School

APPENDIX II: 1999 COLLEGE PARTICIPATION RATES



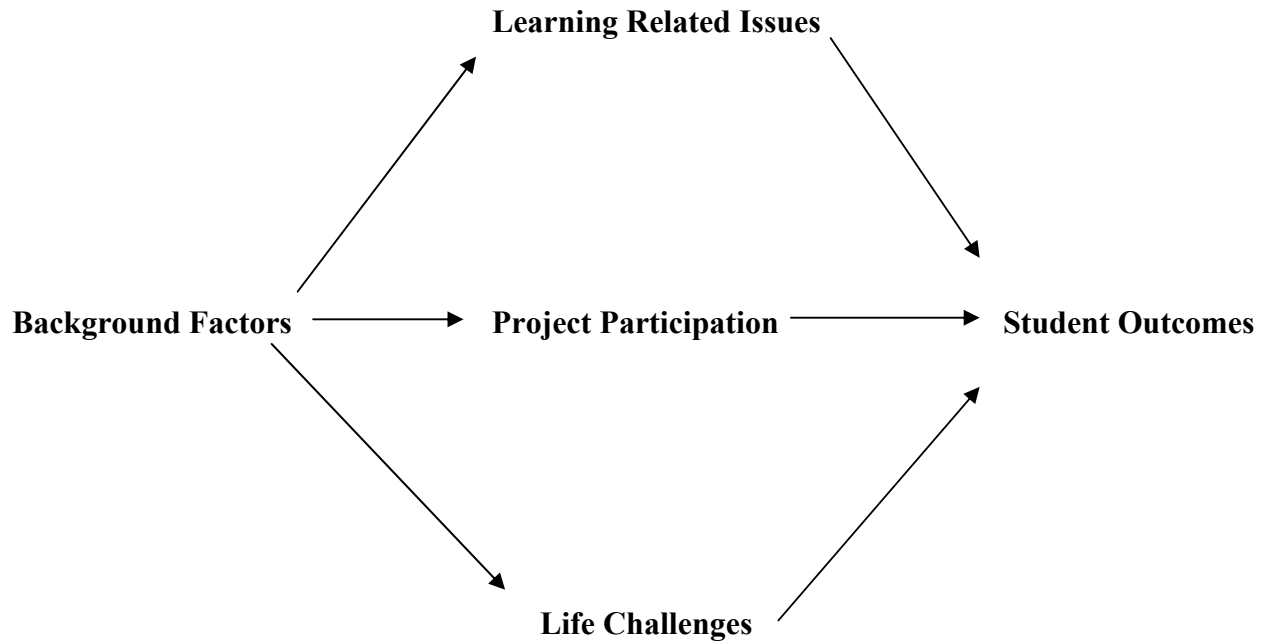
(E-3 Alliance, 2009)

APPENDIX III: 2005 COLLEGE PARTICIPATION RATES



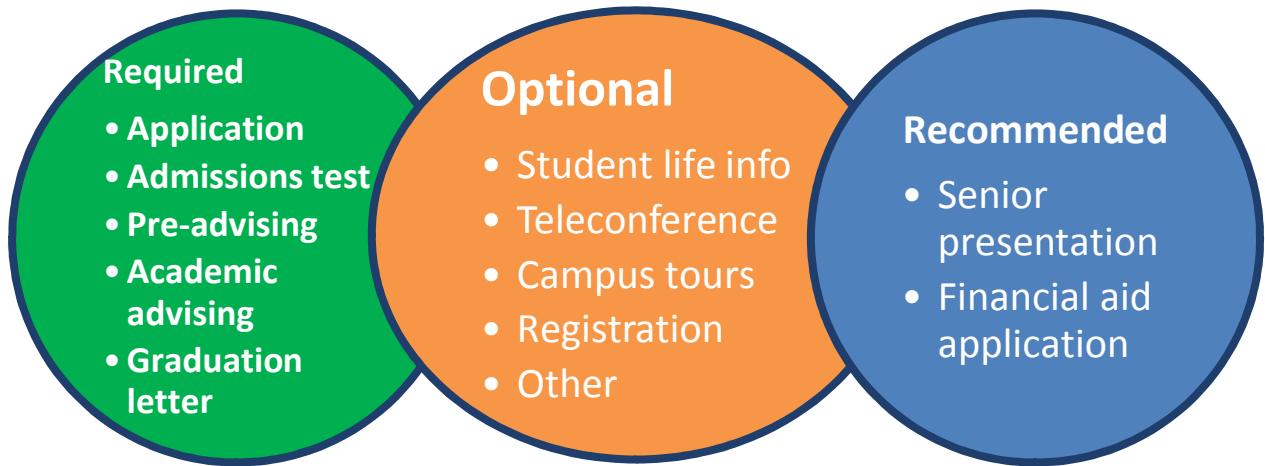
(THECB, 2008a)

**APPENDIX IV: WORKING MODEL FOR EVALUATIONS OF
STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES**



(Pilarzyk, Wang, 2007)

**APPENDIX V: AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S
COLLEGE CONNECTION MODEL**



(College Connection, 2009)

APPENDIX VI: STUDENT PROFILE SHEET

Name: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Expected Graduation Date: _____

1. **Have you every dropped out of high school for a period of time:** YES or NO

2. **Please circle any of the programs that you have participated while in high school:**
 - Dual Credit/ACC's Early College Start
 - Advanced Placement (AP) Courses
 - International Baccalaureate (IB) Program
 - Tech Prep Courses

3. **Please indicate which Austin Community College's College Connection enrollment steps you have participated in? (Please select any that apply)**
 - College Connection Information Session
 - Austin Community College Admissions Application
 - COMPASS testing
 - Academic Advising with Austin Community College
 - Financial Aid Information Sessions held by Austin Community College
 - Austin Community College Campus Tours
 - College Connection meeting geared towards Parent Meetings
 - I have not participated in any College Connection activities
 - I am not really sure what College Connection is?

4. Please list any other Austin Community College activities you may have participated during your senior year:

5. Which college enrollment services do you feel are most helpful to you. (Please select only one response)

- Financial Aid
- Admissions Application
- Academic Advising
- COMPASS testing
- Did not find any of the services above beneficial
- Did not receive any of the services above
- Other (please indicate) _____

6. Do you plan on enrolling in College:

- a. The summer after I graduate from high school
- b. In the Fall semester
- c. In the Spring semester
- d. After a year
- e. More than a year after high school graduation
- f. Maybe in the future
- g. Not planning on enrolling into College

7. Who has been your biggest supporter(s) in going to College: _____

8. Please include anything you would like to share about your experience with ACC's College Connection activities on your high school campus.

APPENDIX VII: COUNSELOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What can you tell me about your experiences with College Connection?
2. What college support programs are available at your high school?
3. What are the events and/or services that you feel most prepare student for enrolling into college?
4. Do you feel students are familiar with what College Connection is, name of program, student services available to them? What are the specific modes of communication to inform students about events?
5. Which enrollment processes (that you observed) do you feel have been most helpful to students? Which enrollment process (that you observed) did not seem helpful at all?
6. Are your students provided with the option to take campus tours to ACC or other local colleges, if not, why not?
7. Please look at the College Connection Model (sheet provided), does this school elect to offer any of the optional or recommended services available by ACC. If not, why not?
8. What do you feel about the College Connection that could further be refined to better service more students?

APPENDIX VIII: STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many of you are planning on going to college? What are your plans after high school graduation?
2. What college support programs are available at your high school?
3. What have you done to prepare for college?
4. Who can tell me what College Connection is? Does anybody have a different idea?
5. Who has participated in the Austin Community College's College Connection activities this year? Tell me about your experiences with the college enrollment process?
6. What enrollment processes have been most helpful to you? Which enrollment process did not seem helpful at all?
7. Do you think going to college would benefit you? What do you feel would help get you into college?
8. Has anybody of anything prevented you from participating in college activities or receiving the information you needed?
9. Who has been your greatest supporter in obtaining college information?

APPENDIX IX: AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE THEME

Sub theme I: Association with ACC- Round Rock High School
I'm going to ACC for the first year
I plan on going to a community college for a year (one with a track team)
Going to Community College for a year to get my 30 college hours
I want to go to ACC for about a year
I had called ACC to see how I can get into that and like financial wise and stuff
They have ACC connections here. They take ACC to you instead of you have to go to ACC.
If you apply to ACC you can always go to any other college.
They (ACC) gave us statistics of all the people who went to ACC.
I should go to ACC then transfer
I'm going to ACC a year or maybe a semester then transfer
I have two friends that go to ACC, my best friend goes to ACC
I know that once you're in ACC you have your own advisor and counselor and that person helps you plan
They(recruiters) talk about all the things, well if you come to ACC you can do this.
We apply to ACC even if you're not going there
With me, on ACC we've heard a lot of stuff about it, especially in English
ACC has come in and talked about their automotive program
My friend went there for about a year and a half..you meet a lot of cool people and as long as you pay attention and get everything done, then everything is golden.
I took dual credit last year
And ACC, I heard you get credit points that you can transfer into Texas State Colleges
Dual Credit is where you can take classes at ACC to receive high school credit.
ACC had two days when people came in to get passes
PAYS went to Texas A&M College Station but not ACC (Student wanted to go to ACC to learn about automotive program)
Last year I wanted to do my summer class at ACC.
Plan on going to ACC. On the internet I as looking up stuff at ACC as an RN.
I want to go to ACC for 2 years then transfer
We all had to register or apply to ACC
My cousin is going to ACC

Subtheme I: Association with ACC- Jarrell High School
I'm going to ACC, I want to be a chef
We have AP programs and ACC here
I think they're building a Round Rock ACC Campus
I would come back to ACC during the summer
I want to get through all of the core classes, I might as well go to ACC and get rid of the easy ones
I did some testing at ACC.
Yeah I thought they were pretty helpful, ACC, the community really helped me get my foot in hole into the college experience, and they helped me get a few credits out of the way
Even the steps like applying for financial aid, like signing up for classes-- I learned that through the ACC experience
Try to get as many kids as you can into ACC, they kind of had me going towards ACC.
ACC came at the beginning of the year
I plan to go to ACC first to get the basics out of the way
I have been looking online at ACC and looking at all the classes I can take
I have gone to visit ACC twice
We heard about it when ACC came
I think everybody applied to ACC
They gave me a list of classes I took through dual credit ACC and what they will count at UMHB
When ACC came here, like whenever we would go into the bus, they called for me too, that was nice
They made me feel pretty good about going to ACC
I'm talking night classes at ACC

Subtheme II: Informative/Helpful- RRHS
College Connections- Yeah I am, I know they do all that
College Connections-ACC College Connections is there
I know it's like they take ACC to you instead of you have to go to ACC
They come to school and you can sign up for classes if you want or take it to them
I remember they had a power point where they gave us information
They just told us what they were going to do,
Where you can go to college if you apply to ACC you can always go to any other college
They gave us statistics of all the people who went to ACC
I remember that
They talked about how they want us to go to college and they wanted us to go to college
They want us to go to ACC since its close. They gave us this big book
Yeah and a folder with contact numbers
They taught me how to apply and financial aid
I filled out a card and it has a user name so they can call you back
We all listened
That one day we sat and talked about going to ACC
They talked about all sorts of degree stuff
I knew about it
I heard about it
I heard about it through PAYS...and that's how I found out about it
She'll give you the information without a problem
They talked to the juniors about them coming the following year..what was going to happen in our senior year
They talk about options
Get information and good feedback
I use him to see how much I'm going to use, as a base (friend about costs)
They talk about all the things well if you comet to ACC you can do this
They announce if you want to go to college, the college comes here.
My aunt's friend told me about it
We heard a lot of stuff about it especially in English
ACC has come in and talked about their automotive program
Counselors do talk about dual credit
Campus tours- yeah, I've heard about it
The high school counselors were telling us what to do
They informed us on what classes we could take and what degrees you could get
The counselors here helped with recommendations and stuff like that
Info Session- It was really helpful
Info Session-From what I heard it wasn't a bad presentation it was pretty good I heard
Counselors Office- you can come in and get information here any time

Info Session- It was good
Info Session- they explained it well
Test Exemption- without the test to stop me it made it pretty simple for me to sign up.
Admissions Day- They had a lot of help there so people would check up on you
Suggestions and a good way to approach certain things

Subtheme II: Informative/Helpful- JHS
They had us in a room one time when we talked about all sorts of stuff
We talked about the different ways to apply for it, basically what it does and what it covers
I already knew a lot
Will do a lot of stuff throughout the senior that gives you more and more information. Like handout packets
We get the same information overlapping over and over but that's not a bad thing
Gather the information before advising, I can see the basics for what was essential for the application
They gave me information on financial aid and what I could get when I go there
I think they are building a round rock campus
Admissions Day- It was very helpful
Admissions Day- they helped us get our pin number for FAFSA
Admissions Day- Very helpful
Admissions Day- Yeah Helpful
I think the Pre-advising was helpful for me
Pre-advising- Career choices, so it was pretty good
Pre-advising-I guess I hadn't known that it was going to be helpful
Pre-advising- It was really helpful, basically it went over everything I needed
Basically she gave me a lot of useful information corresponding to programming and engineering
It was helpful
It actually helped me a lot understanding where I needed to go
It gets redundant but it helps us understand what we need to do because of that
Redundant but not necessarily impractical
I can see that they helped a lot of people
It seemed like it would have been useful to me if I hadn't already had that
It was pretty helpful (pre-advising)
As a whole it has helped a lot
Oh yeah and just get stuff done, apps and stuff
Parents thought it was fairly informative (Financial Aid night)
Yeah I thought they were pretty helpful, ACC the community really helped me get a foot into the college experience
I do like what they do now when they come..they try to help you there
The redundancy really helps
(advising) It helped with what kind of class I had to take
The advising!
Yeah, it was a lot easier than being in a classroom (mobile go presentation)
Advising- I liked it, they make it really personal
When we actually went in there and applied because I don't think I would have done that
Advising- helpful
Advising-that was helpful, they signed us up for dual credit
It didn't take other time from other things so it was really helpful in that aspect
They come out here and like help us
They want to help you get there

APPENDIX X: STUDENT SERVICES THEME

Round Rock High School
College Visits and Stuff
SAT, Application to ACC, Financial Aid, Financial aid form
How to Apply and Financial Aid
I did the Application
FAFSA
SAT and all that stuff
Applied to different colleges and applied to ACC
Scholarships, wrote a lot of essays and SAT
Applied to Colleges and called ACC
College Admissions Application
Apply Texas then enroll at ACC
Signing up for colleges and stuff
Info Session
TAKS scores
ASSET
TAKS scores
COMPASS
Admissions
Visit Colleges
SAT
Info Session in the lecture hall
Essays, applying for college and college visits
Essays for Colleges, we apply to ACC
Fill out Apply Texas application
ACC comes in (info session)
Enrollment, district reps come to your house for one-ones, scholarships, jobs
Applications for ACC
Financial Aid online
Financial Aid
People came in for two days (info session) discussed core curriculum and transferring
COMPASS and admissions
Application Stuff, Advised, Test, ASSET, Forms
TAKS exempt
Financial Aid
Financial Aid
Financial Aid
Financial Aid

Register or Apply-- Apply for Texas
Application
Already registered (dual credit)
ACC packets & pencils (info session)
Financial Aid
Financial Aid
Financial Aid
Paper work
Community college for a year then going to Transfer to Ohio State
HCC for about 2 yrs. And then I want to go to Texas State
ACC for about a year, Get all my credit stuff and then transfer to like Texas State
Statistics of all the people who went to ACC then were able to go to all sorts of other schools
She said I should go to ACC then transfer
I'm going to ACC a year or maybe a semester and then transfer

Jarrell High School
AP Programs (College Credit)
Dual Credit and Pre-advising
Applications and financial Aid
Admissions Application
Admissions Application
Admissions Application
Admissions Application
Admissions Application
ASSET
College entrance paper pencil test or computer test-took it sophomore year
Parent financial aid night
General financial aid
General financial aid
Pin Number for FAFSA
FAFSA thing
We all attended that event (Information Session
Small little Sessions (advising
Pre-advising
Career paths, ordered your college curriculum (pre-advising)
Career choices
What classes you should have taken
Ask those types of questions
Asked me what I wanted to do (advisor)
Went over everything I needed like basic classes...anywhere I go I needed C++ and Java
TAKS scores
Understanding where I needed to go (advising)
Sheet on what you needed to be interested (degree plans)
Application process
Helped me pick out my courses (advising)
They sent me a packet with a lot of stuff (recruitment)
Dual Credit
Advising sessions, Financial Aid
Applications and stuff
4 participated in dual credit out of 6
Took COMPASS
AP/Dual Credit Classes tests- save several thousands
Dual Credit Classes Tests
Steps for like applying for financial aid, like signed up for classes
Want kids to go to college (recruitment)
Waiver for Math
What kind of classes (advising)
How to apply and what to put on your application
Advising

Set up an account and pin (FAFSA)
College day tours
Applied
FAFSA
Going to go to the campus
FAFSA
Applied to ACC
Applied
Applied
Dual Credit
I might change my mind and go there later and get credits and transfer them to a four year school
I want to go to ACC for 2 years then transfer over to Texas State
I want to get through all of the core classes, I might as well go to ACC and get rid of those easy ones
Get your credits out of the way really
Going to ACC to get the basics out of the way then I'm going to the art institute for photography
They gave me a list of what classes I took through dual credit ACC and that they will count at UMHB

APPENDIX XI: OBSTACLES THEME

Obstacles- RRHS
I had a track meet
It was Early in the Morning
Easier during the school day because on Saturdays transportation-Big Time!
Yeah Transportation
There's lots of things going on Saturdays
Mom could go but she's with me at track meets
I know a lot of kids didn't know about it
I told my mom and she said no, we have things to do (Financial Aid Saturday)
They are big with dual credit students but not the rest of the students
Only certain students will be allowed to go and if you want to go you have to go with the counselor and sign up
You have to hear about it, it's not like posted somewhere or a big announcement, if you don't hear about it you're out of luck
I don't feel a lot of kids don't go because they don't know about it
A lot of kids would go but we don't hear about it
I took my test late for the application so I have to wait a year
Too much time to do one thing, if we feel it's hard we'll blow it off
Yeah cause things turn us off easy.
My friend...she was able to sign up...like in the end of July (Registration)
(Info Sessions) everyone's in there and all your friends are there so everyone is like "hey what are you up to?"
When you're sitting by people who are talking you're not paying attention, it's such a big class you're not paying attention
You're trying to see the PowerPoint but you're up in the bleachers
They never talk about how you do it, they say call us.
If you go to the website they also don't give you a lot of information, you only get information if you go there.
No, that's the downfall, its only the PAYS program (College Tours)
(College Tours) Last year everyone who had a permission slip could go but this year there are so many in PAYS.
Only Ms. Gill takes students on tours but she can't control the whole senior class by herself.
She has chaperones but they are available only sometimes so nobody else can go since we have a big class
Moving to Austin the living expenses would be way too high for me
He said it's a pain having a job and college, makes it hard for anything
It's been a while so I'm not sure; it's been since last year....so I don't remember.
Those events they hold here, only the people who have come into the counselors office and get a pass to those sessions because it's not mandatory
That's one problem we have here, if you hear about it, you'll see signs but not really pay attention.

I don't even get my report cards at home so I don't get any other information at home either
Two year degree, its 48000 school so I would have definitely gone but since it's on a Saturday they don't advertise it well
When you're walking with friends you don't pay attention to what's on wall
They have announcements but most rooms have messed up speakers and nobody cares and everyone talks
Driving. My grandma didn't want to go and I didn't have my license at that time.
PAYS went to Texas A&M College Station but not ACC
The only thing that can stop me is not graduating from high school. I need to get five credits before high school.
For me TAKS test because I didn't pass Math but I retook it last year.
For me, it's my dual credit class because its government and that a high school graduation requirement.
TAKS scores weren't high...I got a 2 on my essay.
When I took it (ASSET) they told me I took the wrong one so I would have to take a whole different test, it was confusing
It was hard to get a straight answer from ACC or my school so I forgot about and this year started over
I tried it my sophomore year but signing up was too complicated.
Yeah it was hard (enrollment steps)
Yeah it was complicated and they told me I needed at least a high school on SAT, ACCT and I was just thinking Uhhhhh. No--you get lost really easy.
It was still kind of complicated but without the test to stop me it's made it pretty simple for me to sign up
Financial aid, that's what is stopping the most amount of students from going to college or the one they want to.
Focus is on a big group when they could focus on the ones that want to go there and help them a lot more, dual credit is complicated that could be fixed.
Yeah School is not good with announcements
Some people don't want to stand in line for a packet if they are contemplating it so they say I'll get information another way, but they don't.
With ACC, they don't have enough people to get you the information you need when you're getting your dual credit information for example
When you throw something in front of a kid, you freak out and you just want to walk away from it and not do it.
I was going to but nobody told me exactly what to do they just handed me a form and them um, but I just didn't do it.
They hand you a stack of stuff, but I thought what do I do if I have questions.
I constantly had to go from one source to the other from ACC to school to ACC to get little snippets of information to figure out what to do.
Running back and forth does not make you want to do things
I never thought about college until the summer of junior year going into senior year
I didn't know what college I wanted to go too, I barely had an idea of what I wanted to do when I got older

As a freshman they told me what you wanted to do later, then sophomore year you think I'll think about it junior year, then you wait until your senior
yr then they think "oh now I only have a month where I'll have until next semester when I need to get into college. Then people take a year break
before they go to college and then they don't want to go.
After school, they're out of school so they would say "I'm going home"
Uh they (Students) think it's not that important
I wasn't here because I was on homebound, I just had the baby.
(Info Session) It was big because all of the seniors were there
Financial Aid because it is so uh..complicated
(More meetings) there are only like 1 or 2 in a year and its usually early when nobody is thinking about college
My cousin is going to ACC but she didn't want to fill out the paperwork because she didn't get it (Comprehension)
The baby's daddy is not going to be there.
If you're really interested in college she'll give you the information
I went to the UT one and the guy just talked to us (said negatively as if the student wanted more)
They came back weeks and months later a lot of kids forgot it
ACC, they don't have enough people
It was hard to get a straight answer from ACC or my school so I forgot about it and this year started over.
PAYS- 30 in one class for one teacher

Obstacles- JHS
They had three people to 150 students, it was unorganized
It was like tons of people to 3 people (ACC information Session)
Basically they just looked at my TAKS scores wasn't in-depth or anything, it was pretty short (Advising)
I'm not really into ACC, I didn't pay attention
They give you a bunch of different options but they all led to the same place, like general info.
Yeah, I'm kind of in activities and that makes me miss a lot
I would miss a lot
Yeah like earlier in the year I was in cross country, so we had to practice bright and early in the morning when I had to go to college class.
After running for 10 miles you're not really...it's hard to sit there in a class and stay awake.
I have to drive to Austin to do that night class
Yeah but there don't have the classes I needed now, I need more foreign language and this school just doesn't have it
Our teacher was bragging that she couldn't get a teacher certificate so she went to go teach at ACC
We went over the same information that we went over during the day just with the students
I mean it's like a business, they want to make money and so
When you get one person presenting for a whole bunch of students. If a handful of those students don't understand they might get their
money answered but I mean not in-depth
So they 're going to be stuck not really understanding and they will spend the rest of that presentation thinking what does that mean and
not paying attention to the rest of the stuff
It is a lot of information to take in
If you bring in like 60 kids it's not very helpful
More oriented towards that person Instead of like being superficial
My parents didn't tell me anything but I really didn't ask
Wouldn't attend if it wasn't during the school day
I have cheerleading, I don't think I would do any optional stuff, sorry
We set up an account and pin but didn't fill out the whole thing
I feel that as if though we're not told enough not to do something
We went over the same information that we went over during the day just with the students
I mean it's like a business, they want to make money and so
When you get one person presenting for a whole bunch of students. If a handful of those students don't understand they might get their
money answered but I mean not in-depth
So they 're going to be stuck not really understanding and they will spend the rest of that presentation thinking what does that mean and
not paying attention to the rest of the stuff
It is a lot of information to take in
if you bring in like 60 kids it's not very helpful
More oriented towards that person Instead of like being superficial
My parents didn't tell me anything but I really didn't ask

Wouldn't attend if it wasn't during the school day
I have cheerleading, I don't think I would do any optional stuff, sorry
We set up an account and pin but didn't fill out the whole thing
I feel that as if though we're not told enough not to do something

Subtheme I: Not Sure/ Didn't Know-RRHS
(Future Plans) Uhm
(College) I know I'm going to college but I'm not sure where, I think UTSA
(College) Uhm..going to college
(College) Not sure which
(College) I think I'm going to go to ?
(College) I think I want to go to UTSA
(College Activities at your School) I don't even know
(College Activities at your School) We had to register or apply, I don't know, just during English we went in there and did it
(College Activities at your School) Uhm I have no idea
(College Activities at your School) I really don't know
(College Activities at your School) What do you mean
(College Activities at your School) Dual Credit?
(College Activities at your School) Enrollments..district reps..summary..credit points..transfer. That's all I can remember.
(College Activities at your School) You have to know what colleges you were going too. I didn't know what college I wanted to go too I barely had
an idea of what I wanted to do when I got older.
(College Activities at your School) I just remember that one event in English
(College Activities at your School) I think they have programs here on Saturdays
(College Prep) I don't know, Uhm, Uhm
(College Prep) Uhhh, I applied for like stuff (Hesitation)
(College Prep) Uh, I don't know, I think that's it
(ACC Admissions) I don't remember it
(ACC Admissions) I think I did something, may it was for ACC or Texas State
(ACC Admissions) Even if we're not going to go see just enroll anyways, I think that was about it
(ACC Admissions) I honestly don't remember, like I could have because I remember going in to sign for colleges and stuff but I don't remember if it was ACC or anything.
(ACC Admissions) Where you did apply Texas that ACC sign up?
(ACC Admissions) Apply to ACC even if we're not going there, not sure why we do that.
(ACC Admissions) I didn't want to give them my information because I don't want to give my information to a third party.
(ACC Admissions) Yeah (helpful to know what ACC is doing with information)
(Info Sessions) I really can't remember last semester
(Info Sessions) I think I was there
(Info Sessions) I can't even really remember
(Info Sessions) Its possible but I don't remember
(Info Session/Senior Kick Off) I remember going but don't remember what they talked about
(Info Session/Senior Kick Off) I've never even heard of those
(Info Session/Senior Kick Off) No we didn't do that, oh yeah it was good, well I don't remember

too much of it, yeah because it was like in the beginning of the school.
(Info Session/Senior Kick Off) We didn't have that here, oh ..they informed us on what classes we could take
(Placement Test) No I haven't but I'm not sure why
(Placement Test) I took it, was it the same thing that you take before dual credit?
(Placement Test) No I haven't even heard anything about it
(Placement Test Notice) No, I could have been out
(Test booklets) I couldn't even tell you.
(College Connection) Sounds Familiar but don't remember
(College Connection) If they had something like that it must have been a long time ago)
(College Connection) I haven't heard anything a about it. I don't think I've ever heard of that ever in my life.
(Financial Aid Event) I didn't even know about it
(Financial Aid Event) I know a lot of kids didn't know about it
(Financial Aid Event) "They sent a letter home" They did?
(ACC services) I don't remember ACC services, I can't put in mind when they've come. I remember other colleges but I ACC I don't remember.
(ACC Services) I don't know if their districts one one-on-one and you can do application, you can go to the office...It's been a while so I'm not sure
(ACC) Is it something that is going to help me out or will I have to go to another college.
(Purpose of College Connection) I always thought it was like a money thing, like the more students that are signed up by graduation the more
money they get.
(Purpose of College Connection) See why didn't anyone just explain it like that year they need to tell us what you just said, they need to
tell us the why.
(Purpose of College Connection) Oh- (realization moment)
(Purpose of CC) They tell you to do stuff sometimes but not sure what you're doing it for, and after you do it, you don't hear back about the
information and you're like okay I did that, I don't know why
(Purpose of College Connection) It's kind of like a slap in the face, you're kind of like huh, if you're going to do something they're going
to know the reason why.
(PAYS) They'll need more people and they'll put you in it and you don't really know that it's about until you get in the class
(College Events) I feel a lot of kids don't go because they don't know about it
(College Events) A lot of kids would go but we don't hear about it
(Acceptance letter at Graduation) No
(Acceptance letter at Graduation) No
(Acceptance letter at Graduation) No
(Acceptance letter at Graduation) No
(Acceptance letter at Graduation) No
(Acceptance letter at Graduation) No

(Acceptance letter at Graduation) No
(Acceptance letter at Graduation) No
(Dual Credit) I was going to but nobody told me exactly what to do they just handed me a form
(Dual Credit) I thought what to do if I have questions

Subtheme I- Not Sure/ Didn't Know- JHS
(Placement Test) I think
(Placement Test) I'm not sure what that is because I just moved here
(ACC) Isn't there like three different campuses
(ACC Services) I didn't know
(College Connection) Uh? (student shrugged shoulders)
(College Activities at Your high school) ?
(College Prep) I applied to Angelo State then I changed my mind
(College Prep) I don't know when, like setup and actually enroll
(Optional Events) I don't think so
(Optional Events) I can't really remember
(Info Session/Senior Kick-off) I think we went to that, I don't remember really
(Info Session/Senior Kick-off) Don't remember
(Dual Credit Classes) Didn't hear anything about those summer classes
(Dual Credit Classes) Latin during the summer, I might liked to do that and I just didn't hear about that

Subtheme II: Pending/Follow Up-RRHS
I haven't done the FAFSA thing, I need to get on that
I called ACC to see how I can get into that and like financial wise and stuff but I haven't taken like the FAFSA or anything
They gave us a day when they would come back and if you have your papers filled out
They didn't come back the next day they came back weeks and months later a lot of kids forgot it
I was like whatever, it's not that big of a deal anymore
I got to agree with her, it was just like that day, they talked and it's over and done with
College Enrollment- they talked about it and then leave it alone
I will come back when I have to
Subtheme II: Pending/Follow Up-JHS
When there is something to do be done we'll actually take care of it
No, not yet
Like deadlines, deadlines
Yeah like how often you need to reapply for certain things, renewable ones and stuff
Get it done in high school when it's offered
I don't know when I like setup and actually enroll

APPENDIX XI: INFLUENCERS THEME

Round Rock High School
Basketball Coach
Some Colleges Contacted me..Devry
Track Coaches
A lot of counselors...Ms. Taylor
Ms. Taylor
Ms. Taylor
Counselors have always been very helpful
She's the only person I talk to about it (Counselor)
(She doesn't procrastinate (Counselor)
(She's the ACC person here (Counselor)
(She knows more..if you have questions ask her (Counselor
Ms. Gill (Teacher)
She's always talking to kids (Teacher)
(She's helpful (PAYS Teacher)
Yeah Ms. Gill, she's great (PAYS Teacher)
She still asks me today, how's ACC? (Teacher)
She checks up on everybody (Teacher)
She says you might as well do this (Teacher)
Ms. Gill helped (Teacher)
Two Friends
My best friends
Advisor or Counselor
My friend
My aunt's friend
Counselors
My friend Chris
Wyotech District Rep.
My English teacher
Counselors
Family
My daughter
Family, teachers, and friends
My parents and my brother
Family
Counselors and myself alone
My girlfriend
Ms. Taylor (Counselor)

Ms. Taylor and Ms. Gill (Counselor and Teacher)
Ms. Gill and Pays
Mom, Me, and Track
Parents
English teachers
Counselors
My Cousin
My daughter
My parents and the counselors
Counselors
My mom
She helped me with recommendations (Mom)
PAYS (Named 16 times)

Jarrell High School
Counselors
Administrators
My brother
My mom- she's going to college right now
My mom- just graduated from nursing school
Recruiters
My parents
My mom
Mrs. Tennyly (Counselor)
Mrs. Tennyly (Counselor)
Mrs. Tennyly (Counselor)
My friends and family
My dad, stepmom, and friends
My parents as well as my counselor
My family and friends
Mom
My mom
Parents
Mom and Dad
Upward Bound Directors

APPENDIX XIII: AREAS OF IMPROVEMENTS THEME

Round Rock High School
Come more often
I agree with coming more often
I feel they come every month or every two months (asking for more follow up)
Or every three months
Definitely put up a dang sign that says we're coming on this day
Put thing on the announcements
They should come more often, when people come more often you get to know them more
You want to get more into it, and if they come more often they're not coming because they have to, but because they want to help us out.
Yeah more interactive
You want good information and details and not just talk about it every three months
Yeah come more often and relay information better, posters
Let all teachers know so people can know each class period. They more they tell us about it the more the likely we are to come
Elaborate more on how to get in, how to apply for financial aid, what classes are available, when can we go, just that's its easy not that its long and hard
They should have your own advisor and counselor
Financial Aid during the day (4 agreed)
Stop forcing people to do stuff they don't want to do. They could be helping someone that wants to go to ACC..concentrate on dual credit that is complicated
I say get ACC out there a lot more. Get it out there so more people know about ACC.
If they want to come up here they need to have a stack of envelopes give them to students, and give it to their parents
They should get it out and say hey we're going to be here next week. Little ideas just to help you remember
More information
The more information the better. Give out information packets when you walk in.
Or give it to people who really want it
Get their name out, or advertising.
ACC they don't have enough people
Focus more on dual credit
Have a website to help more on step by step on dual credit or signing up for ACC
(Info sheets) In front of a packet if you need help here is a website, here is a phone number to call someone, little things that would be helpful to start to help finish it through.
I think ACC could help us more if they were more integrated into the school activities....give schools all the information they needed
They need to have a list of this is what you need form your counselor this is what you need to get from your principal. They need to make it plain and simple, this, this, this, this

I think they should make us think about college before our senior year, because I never thought about college until the summer of junior year,
...They should make us think about it sooner.
Yeah, earlier planning
If they have them after school people aren't going to want to come because they don't want too or because after school activities or track.
They wouldn't attend if it was out of school.
In the mornings, you don't want to do it and not toward the end, but if you should do it right during the middle right after first period.
Yeah because people are awake and are actually like thinking I have a long day ahead of me so I can go gather some information.
Do a PowerPoint, get it nice and sweet and to the point.
Let them know that it can save you money and save you time and people might understand it a lot more.
I would say like have people that actually went to the college, not just representatives but people that went there.
I think people who come to the school who have already been through it would be most helpful
(Student mentors) Yeah!
Tell them to tell the truth and not to be all fake about it
Not like all...what you want to hear
More meetings
More meetings
Same type of information but more because there are usually only 1 or 2 a year...
Have sessions more now when everyone is kind of...you know deadlines and stuff.
(Help) filling out your paperwork. They don't really help you too much in the library.

Jarrell High School
I would say bring more recruiters
It should be more people more representatives to talk with smaller groups so that things can be more in-depth
I kind of like cookies and soda idea
I think they should bring snacks
Yeah I would be more engaged if they had snacks
Address more people at once when the questions are there. Putting things in writing like the questions students have would be helpful
Make things more comprehensive, like more oriented towards that person
(specific to your major) yeah that's what I mean
Maybe have us fill out a survey before they come and then like the campus people review it and bring like people from that specific group
ACC should be more into showing you how their college is better than others, that their college offers more than the others.
I would like summer classes
Instead of taking the whole senior class together, they would do like half and so they can ask questions
Summer classes on our campus
More information about summer classes
Simple things like how to apply and where to find them so you don't get scammed like \$50 (Scholarship information)

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VITA

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