

SUPPORT PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE THE TRANSITION OF HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS TO A POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

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SUPPORT PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE THE TRANSITION OF HIGH SCHOOL
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Abstract

SUPPORT PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE THE TRANSITION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO A POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

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The transition from high school to college can be the biggest challenge any student will encounter. Being college ready is a process that must start at the beginning of high school. Over 70 percent of college graduates go on to a postsecondary education within two years of graduating high school, and over half will earn a bachelor's degree (Kirst, & Venezia, 2004). The most important piece of evidence is over 50 percent of students entering college are enrolled into at least one remedial course (Kirst, & Venezia, 2004). In order for students to be college ready, there are many steps that must take place over a course of four years during high school.

The first step for high school students to begin to prepare for college is to have them involved in a credit-based program for college bound students. There are different types of credit-based programs, depending on their skill level. After the student has the knowledge and are prepared for college, the student must be knowledgeable of the life style changes that will occur during their college career. The student will go through many stages during their college career and understanding the programs and services on the college campus will ease the transition from high school to college.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Postsecondary education is now essential for success in the labor markets. Many students that graduate high school are encouraged to attend college and be prepared for the future. An issue that is on the rise is high school graduates are not college ready. The main focus of the high school curriculum is making students college-eligible, in other words making them meet the admission requirements (Conley, 2005). High school teachers and staff play an important role in guiding the student to be prepared for college. The gap that has arose is that once students are admitted, they are not college-ready, indicating they are not prepared to meet the requirements for an entry-level college course, such as math and English (Kirst, & Venezia, 2004).

There are many factors that are involved with the transition from high school to college. Students are not prepared for the class-room environment, change of living standards and the emotional/behavioral issues that may evolve during their first year of college. The key to a successful college education is for the student to seek help when needed. There are many services and programs on college campuses for students to utilize to enhance their transition to college. The types of programs that are available to high school students include; enhanced programs for students who are above the high school curriculum standards, in which can take advantage of earning college credits before entering college, enrichment programs to better prepare students for college and programs for disadvantaged students. All of these types of programs vary between states, but one particular program, Admission Possible, now referred to as College Possible, is based out of Wisconsin and has been one of the most successful programs in the past three years (Admission Possible Program, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

To what extent do support programs make the transition effective between high school and a postsecondary education?

Definition of Terms

Transition: The college transition is a transformation from dependence to independence, from being a mere product of one's upbringing to being a responsible individual who makes real choices ("The Transition to," 2009).

Support programs: A program is information to help students prepare for postsecondary success and to help guide them to continue their success during their first year of college (Conley, 2005).

Postsecondary education: defined as a provision of formal instructional programs with a curriculum designed primarily for students who have completed the requirements for a high school diploma or equivalent. This includes programs of an academic, vocational, and continuing professional education purpose (Kirst, & Venezia, 2004).

Delimitations of Research

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrman Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville over a period of sixty days. Primary searches will be conducted via Internet through EBSCO Host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite. Key search topics include: "First year college students", "high school to college transition" and "programs for first year college students".

Method of Approach

A brief review of the support programs that are available to high school students which include: programs for high talented students, average talented students and under-represented students. A review of literature related to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of support programs that enhance the transition of first year college students. The findings will be summarized and a recommendation will be made.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Effective strategies to promote college success

The transition from high to a post-secondary education is one of the biggest challenges a student may encounter. Increasing student's knowledge of what it takes to succeed in college requires an ongoing effort by everyone involved. During the high school years, there are many areas of focus that can help the students be prepared to succeed at college. The big four dimensions of college readiness are: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, self-management skills and knowledge about postsecondary education (Conley, 2005).

When the student is entering college, the professors need the students to be able to think and expand on what they learn. Students entering college are more likely to succeed if they can formulate, investigate and propose solutions to non-routine problems (Conley, 2005). College preparation continues to emphasize coverage over depth. Professors assert that students who research into fewer areas, such as reading and writing, problem solving and critical thinking are better prepared for college courses during their first year in college (Cohen, 2008).

According to The American Diploma Project (2004) consulted with business representatives to help define standards in Math and English (Cohen, 2008). The overall analysis of the project, indicated that high students need to be able to identify big ideas, key concepts and organize principles that form the structure of each academic area (Cohen, 2008). As a high school graduate students must be able to synthesize information from multiple resources and draw conclusions based on the evidence from the findings (Cohen, 2008). Another expectation is for the student to be able to carry out information from research projects. The key concept from

these findings is critical for the student to be able to evaluate and to provide a written analysis that marshals the evidence in support of the information (Cohen, 2008).

Another skill that is essential for a student to success in college is to have self-management skills. Once the student is attending a post-secondary education, there becomes many more deadlines and priorities. During the high school years, teachers need to demonstrate on how to take notes, work in teams, collect and analyze factual information. Once the student is entering college they must be able to study independently either informal or formal study groups, seek academic support and manage their own free time (Conley, 2005). All of these tasks require self-management, a skill that will develop over time.

The fourth dimension that is essential for college readiness is the overall knowledge about post-secondary education. The knowledge includes matching personal interests with college majors and programs, understanding the admission requirements, understanding federal, state and institutional financial aid programs and how and when to complete these forms (Conley, 2005). One of the most important aspects of being prepared for college is to understand how the culture of college is different from that of high school (Conley, 2005). Visiting a college campus and meeting with admission advisors will enhance that knowledge for that specific campus.

Programs for high school students to be college-ready

Students that generally demonstrate the basic skills from the four dimensions will have a smoother transition from high school to college. During a student's high school years, most students will be required to participate in a credit-based transition program to help guide them for the requirements to be successful during college. A credit-based transition programs' main

purpose is to increase the number of students that graduate from high school and go on to college (Fowler & Luna, 2009). The credit-based transition program has many different types; depending on what academic level the student is at during the last one or two years of their high school career. The three broad categories of a credit-based transition program include: comprehensive programs that include mostly academic experiences, singleton programs that are separate college-level courses, and enhanced comprehensive programs that offer college courses to high school students as well as a support system to ensure success in postsecondary education (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

An invigorating credit based program, which is targeted for very driven and talented students, is the comprehensive program. This particular requires students to take many, if not all, of their courses during their senior year under a college curriculum (Fowler & Luna, 2009). Typically these students have started their career path during their first year in high school. One specific program based out of the state of Washington, Running Start, was created in 1990 for qualified juniors and seniors to take college classes for college credit (Fowler & Luna, 2009). This program provides a challenging environment for those who are ready for college and are constrained by their high school's curriculum. A research study on Running Start students who transferred to a four-year institution, 41 percent had graduated in four years as compared to 31 percent graduation rate of its traditional students during 1996-1997 (Running Start, 2011). In addition to the higher graduation rate, the graduating GPA of the Running Start students was 3.42 as compared to the traditional students of 3.14 (Running Start, 2011). The follow-up research study found that this program was very well accepted and is continuing in Washington State for now eleventh and twelfth grad students (Running Start, 2011). Overall, a

comprehensive program benefits the student who is career driven and is ready for college much earlier than the traditional high school student.

An additional credit-based program for high school students is a Singleton program. This type of program is offered to students who are eligible to take college-level classes as electives. The primary objective of this type of program is enrichment of the high curriculum, while the secondary goal is to provide students with the opportunity to earn college credit (Fowler & Luna, 2009). The most common type of a singleton program is known as Advanced Placement (AP) classes. According to the College Board (2008), for the class of 2007, about 25 percent of all students took at least one AP exam for college credit. The College Board noted, “Over the years, schools with diverse populations have become increasingly involved in the Advanced Placement Program. From 1994 to 2004, there was a 222 percent increase in the number of AP Exam grades of three or higher among traditionally underserved minority students” (2005b, para 10).

Once the student has completed the AP course, the student takes an exam to earn college credit. The student must earn at least a score of three or higher to receive college credit. In May 2011, nearly 2 million high school students at over 18,000 schools worldwide took AP Exams ("Ap ," 2012). The majority of U.S. high schools currently participate in the AP Program, and most four-year U.S. colleges and universities grant credit for qualifying AP Exam scores ("Ap ," 2012). The AP exam can make a huge impact for the student when applying for admission to college. The student has a higher potential of receiving academic scholarships, allowing their admission application to “stand out” from others, saves time and money once they get to college, providing them with more study options and allowing them to move directly into upper-level courses in their field of interest ("Ap ," 2012).

The third type of a credit-based transition program is the extensive support system. This specific type of program includes; counseling, application assistance and mentoring (Fowler & Luna, 2009). There are many well known types of these programs in the United States that have been proven to be very effective for high school students who are interested in a higher education. One specific program that is offered in 24 states is the Early College High School Initiative Program (Fowler & Luna, 2009). The core principles of this program are: serving underrepresented student in higher education, engage in local education agencies and the community for student success, develop an integrated academic program, engage all students in a comprehensive support system program to help develop social and behavioral skills that are necessary for college and create and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement ("Early college high," 2008). The core principles for this program are essential for the increase in high school graduation and a successful postsecondary education for all youth.

One specific program available in Wisconsin, is the College Possible (founded as Admission Possible) program. College Possible began in the Milwaukee area in 2008 to help promise; low-income high school students earn admission to college. The mission of College Possible is making college admission and success possible for low-income students through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support ("Who we are," 2012). The three fundamental beliefs of College Possible are: many low-income high school students lack the resources to compete effectively for admission to a higher education, colleges and universities are very interested in admitted students from low-income backgrounds, but have difficulty identifying and attracting them and to increase diverse and global economy, the economic stability and competitiveness of the U.S. requires a highly educated workforce ("Who we are," 2012). The

basic services that the College Possible Advisors provide are: academic support through ACT and SAT preparation, college application assistance, financial aid counseling, guidance in the overall college transition and support toward college degree completion.

College Possible is a two-year program entailing a junior year and senior year Curriculum. The junior year curriculum is heavily focuses on ACT/SAT preparation, orientation on college admission requirements, college visits and summer enrichment opportunities. Research has been provided that students who participated in the College Possible increased their ACT average by 23 percent since 2000 (Admission Possible Program, 2011). The senior curriculum is heavily focused on college essay and application assistance, financial aid/scholarship application support and the college selection and transition advising (Admission Possible Program, 2011). Of the 720 students in the College Possible Class of 2010, 98 percent earned college admission to college (Admission Possible Program, 2011).

In an interview with a Senior Coach of the College Possible program, Tiffany Leflore, explained in more detail of the program and the specific duties of a coach. Tiffany was a coach, mentor and advocate for 31 students for two years. During the two year process, Tiffany worked with the students twice a week for two hours after school. The first year, the focus was on the preparation of the ACT. During this process, the students engaged in reading, English, math and science work problems (LeFlore, 2012). Also during that year, the students work diligently on their writing skills and test taking skills. During the second year of the program, which is the senior year for the students, the main focus was visiting college campuses and applying for admission (LeFlore, 2012). Completing scholarship applications, admission requirements' and completing the Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA) were the main focuses. The

31 students Tiffany coached, all applied for college admission and are currently receiving a college education, working on either an Associates or Bachelor's degree (LeFlore, 2012).

Overall, credit-based transition programs help high school students make successful transitions to college. These programs help bridge the gap between high school and college by ensuring that students do not repeat high school coursework during their first years of college (Fowler & Luna, 2009). Credit-based transition programs continue to provide challenging educational opportunities, improve college preparation, promote a trained competitive workforce, expedite educational progress with cost-savings and foster collaboration among high schools and postsecondary institutions (Bailey & Karp, 2003). Secondary education leaders can take an active role in the school improvement process by encouraging cultural change for the college campuses through two initiatives (Fowler & Luna, 2009). One initiative is for higher educators to promote a rigorous curriculum by encouraging more students to take Advanced Placement classes and to encourage a collaboration between the high school and higher education institution for students to enter into a credit-based program (Fowler & Luna, 2009). This type of collaboration will help the students be academically motivated and be prepared to have a successful transition to college.

Programs available on college campuses to accommodate first year students

The first year in college, a student experiences many life transitions. During the transition from the high school environment, students experience personal and emotional problems, global psychological distress, somatic distress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression (Hicks & Heastie, 2008). The student is living away from home for the first time and is dealing with many different types of decisions. A course that is typically offered for first-year students, Introduction

to College Life, supports students in this transitional phase by helping them integrate into the campus environment and by teaching them college-appropriate learning strategies. Most of the First Year Experiences courses follow a similar curriculum that introduces the students to effective study habits, critical thinking skills, and the resources that their institution offers (Smith, Lim & Bone, 2008). Research portrays that when students are involved in learning activities and integrated into the fabric of their college, the student is more likely to remain enrolled and continue their education at the same institution (Barefoot, 2000).

One type of intervention program that higher education institutions have created to facilitate a greater academic and social integration for first year students are the Living and Learning (L/L) programs. L/L programs were developed to strengthen the undergraduate students' learning by helping them to gain knowledge from the academic, co-curricular and residential arenas (Inkelas, et al 2007). The main purpose of an L/L program is to create a sense of community between the student and the institution. These types of programs increase the opportunity for co—originated activities and a socially and academically supportive residential living environment (Inkelas, et al 2007). Due to the needs of the students living on a college campus, there are a wide range of programs available to them. Such L/L activities include discussing academic issues with faculty, studying in groups, forming groups within the residence halls; academically and socially supportive groups.

Inkelas and Weisman (2003) found that students who participated in L/L programs at a university in the Midwest had a smoother transition into college than those that didn't participate in such programs. The study portrayed that college freshman that were involved in structured activities, such as faculty interaction, residence hall programming, social fraternities/sororities were more influential than informal peer groups.

Another program, a Student Mentor Programme, is available to first year students that promotes academic success and improves the retention rate from their freshman to sophomore year (Loots, 2008). The four main objectives of a Student Mentor Programme is to have mentors available for psychological and emotional support, support for setting goals and choosing a career path, academic subject knowledge support to help increase the student's knowledge relevant to their chosen field of study and being a positive role model (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Psychosocial support is referred to the integration of students into university culture, which include student associations, sports programs, social functions and other campus organizations (Loots, 2008). Because mentoring takes place in small groups, friendships are formed and are important for students to succeed during their first year of college. A mentor is encouraged to reach out to new freshman when he/she recognizes and has the ability to address minor problems and when to refer possible psychosocial problems such as; substance abuse, depression and stress.

The second objective, goal setting and career paths, represents the idea that mentoring includes an assessment of the student's strengths, weakness and abilities (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). This goal of the mentor is the most complex and includes more time to help achieve the students' purpose for a higher education. This phase would include a detailed assessment which entails a questionnaire and interview to determine their career path. This type of assessment is encouraged to be completed at the beginning of the student's college career.

The third goal of a mentor is to assist the students with academic subject knowledge support. With the idea of a Student Mentor Programme, the mentor would be able to help the first-year student with expectations, perceptions and experiences during the first semester of college, both

inside and outside of the classroom. (Loots, 2008). The mentor would also provide instructional support; such as enrich on writing skills, note taking skills and study habits (Loots, 2008). With the help of the mentor, there are many services available on college campuses to help the student with their transition. Some of the services include: tutoring/writing centers, academic advising, counseling services and career centers (Loots, 2008). Mentoring is about establishing a teaching-learning relationship that helps the student prosper during their college career.

Finally, the fourth objective, being a role model, centers around the ability of the mentee to learn from the mentor's present and past actions as well as his or her achievement and failures (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The underlying issue is to have a relationship between the mentor and mentee to personalize their experiences for each to build on to. The mentor's main goal during this phase of the program is to guide the student to a new social world and allow the student to mature, build relationships and be a successful college student.

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, this paper is a reflection of the effective strategies to help high school students prepare for college, programs available for high school students to allow them to be college ready and programs available on campus to enhance their first year in college. The basic four concepts that are to be focused on during the student's high school career are: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, self-management skills and knowledge about postsecondary education (Conley, 2005). All of these skills that are taught will help the student be able to adjust to college easier.

The credit-based programs that are offered in high school are determined on which level the student is at academically. The three basic programs that have been addressed are comprehensive programs, Singleton program and an extensive support program. Studies have shown that for each program the student's transition from high school to college has been very positive. Once the student is on campus, there are programs and services available to all college students. Some of the effective programs and services include: tutoring/writing centers, counseling services, academic advising and career planning.

In general, there are basic recommendations for high schools and for higher institutions to follow that will make the transition to college successful. In high school, I believe that each student should develop an effective individual career plan. One in particular is a career plan that is consistent with the student's goals, align high school courses with the student's goals, and inform and educate students and parents about post-secondary options. Providing this information at the beginning of the student's high school career and continuing through graduation will enhance a smoother transition to college. One recommendation for the students during this generation is providing a partnership between high schools and a higher education institution. One example of a collaboration that UW-Platteville has initiated is a school district in Houston, Texas. The admissions office and the School of Education has collaborated with the Aldine School District to guide the students who are interested in attending UW-Platteville and need help to be a successful college admit. Recruiters and advisors attend week long visits to work in partnerships with the students and their families to make UW-Platteville not just a dream, but a reality. UW-Platteville has currently two students working on a degree from the Aldine School District. After researching issues on the transition to college the biggest issue is

that student's are not prepared for college and aren't aware of the expectations a college course involves.

Every higher education institution should have a mentoring program for first year students. Students entering college are at very different stages in their life and come from different backgrounds. The needs of each student will depend on how they have prepared for college. With a mentoring program set in place, this will collaborate all of these students into group and they will all learn from each other. Studies have been proven for students that are involved in mentoring programs, completed an Introduction to College Life course and involved in campus activities have a higher success rate during their higher education career.

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