

THE JOURNAL OF

COLLEGE ADMISSION

RURAL STUDENTS

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THE JOURNAL OF COLLEGE ADMISSION

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As The Journal of College Admission went to press, the country was confronting the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented moment in the nation's history. Articles included in this issue were written weeks before the outbreak and do not reflect changes pertaining to school closures, travel limitations, and other restrictions that affect the college admission process. We believe the content of the articles remains relevant to your work as college admission professionals and will be useful when we all return to normal recruitment activities in the coming months.



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NOTE FROM THE CEO



OUR WORK CONTINUES: A NOTE FROM NACAC'S CEO

As each of us is adjusting to the new realities related to the COVID-19 emergency, our work continues, although in ways we might not have imagined before. NACAC staff continue to work on your behalf even as you have our sincere appreciation for your continued, dedicated work on behalf of students.

Like so many of you, this outbreak has created a whole new meaning to working as a team while working apart. The rhythm of the day has changed and each seems longer and more stressful, as we juggle normal work requirements and rethink programming during this crisis.

Through it all, I have come to appreciate that everyone in a crisis becomes essential.

RELATIONSHIPS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

I am pleased to share that one element of this crisis that has proven invaluable are relationships and networks cultivated over time. As CEO, I am in touch with my counterparts from other associations to determine how they are managing critical decisions with their boards and members. NACAC staff has fostered relationships with other associations that are proving more important now than ever. Our communications team, for example, is in touch with colleagues from AACRAO, ACT, ASCA, IECA, HECA, College Board, ACT, NASFAA, and Common App to exchange news about critical changes that affect our shared members.

The National College Fairs and national conference teams are gathering information from other education associations regarding canceled events, insurance policies, and "go or no-go" decisions that help inform decisions by NACAC leadership.

With the NACAC affiliates, we have strived to be supportive by being in touch with leaders as they grappled with decisions to cancel spring conferences and develop legal strategies for conducting important business, changing bylaws, and modifying contractual agreements.

GENEROUS SERVICE OF VOLUNTEERS AND LEADERS


I have been most impressed, as I hope you will be, that many NACAC volunteers and leaders persist in their roles as committee members,

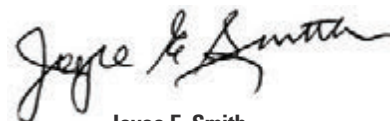
national board and affiliate leaders, and more. The Affiliate Presidents Council has been working on ways to engage affiliate members, postpone their spring and summer conferences, and consider legal ways to conduct business online if face-to-face meetings are not possible.

NACAC committees, Special Interest Groups, and other ad-hoc member groups are meeting daily to continue work on association priorities, including: working on bylaw changes in preparation for the Annual Membership Meeting; providing comments on NACAC's two new tools, the College Admission Status Update and the Secondary Schools Status Update; raising issues about the pandemic's impact on international students in the US who need to return home as well as questions about the admission process for prospective and admitted students, and so on.

The NACAC Board of Directors continues to monitor the educational marketplace, providing insights about their campus and school operations and student decisions and also deliberating on critical association business.

These are but a few examples of how NACAC continues to function behind the scenes on behalf of admission and enrollment professionals, counselors in public and private schools, professionals in counseling roles at community-based organizations, and independent educational consultants.

We thank you for your support and patience in this difficult time. We are grateful for your vital service to students, parents, and the college admission profession, now more than ever. 



Joyce E. Smith
CEO, NACAC

"THE MORE OUR
PROFESSION RUNS
LIKE A BUSINESS,
THE MORE THE
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL
WELLNESS OF OUR
STUDENTS TAKES
A BACK SEAT."

—NACAC Member
Lauren Cook,
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THE JOURNAL OF COLLEGE ADMISSION

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and see change in our
work by bringing others
along and working
together.



BATTLING BIAS, EMBRACING CHANGE

SOMETIMES IT IS HARD TO RECOGNIZE OUR PRIVILEGE.

As an African American male in a predominately white profession and campus community, it can be easy to always speak from an underrepresented or underprivileged place. However, I have to be mindful that I come from an educated family, I'm physically able-bodied, I'm a male, a Christian, my first language is English, and I was born in this country.


Let's check our biases at the door, or at least be aware of them.

Ever participated in an implicit association activity or test? They tend to show that we make connections much more quickly between pairs of ideas that are already related in our minds than we do between pairs of ideas that are unfamiliar to us. However, just because something may be unfamiliar doesn't mean that the association doesn't exist. Let's not assume a family doesn't have means to make an education at your institution feasible. Let's not assume because someone has served on a committee (or hasn't) that it means they are more or less capable. Let's not approach the situation as though everyone has equitable opportunity for positions or experiences. Let's not assume that our *Code of Ethics and Professional Practices* is the only ethical framework that keeps us focused on the students we aim to serve.

Let's also be mindful of our perspectives. As a person who is very passionate about leadership, I can easily narrow my lens on who I think is a leader or who is demonstrating leadership qualities. We are all unique individuals, thus we seek different qualities and offer different perspectives. The truth is, there isn't one model of leadership, there are alternatives and variations. We have to approach challenges or situations with an

open mind and be willing to listen to other perspectives. Regardless of how long one has been in the profession or served in a position, we never stop being a sponge. There is so much information and education to soak up.

In *How to Be an Inclusive Leader*, diversity and inclusion expert Jennifer Brown confirms that "pushing to address root causes and biased practices does not come without risk. And risk goes up when you become more public, moving from awareness, to action, to advocacy." As we continue to navigate uncharted territory, let's continue to challenge ourselves to move from awareness to actionable ways to find solutions and to advocate for appropriate change. Let's think critically about how we approach and communicate with one another. Let's pause and take time to respond to each other with respect and sincere care to understand the perspectives of others while still holding people accountable.

Whether we are trying to assist prospective students, supporting colleagues in their professional growth, or seeking systemic change, we have to be able to sit side-by-side to navigate the new future together. We can only improve and see change in our work by bringing others along and working together. We can only come together if we are willing to sit down at the same table. And we can only come to that table and navigate challenges if we are willing to be vulnerable, to listen, and be aware of our own privilege and bias. 

NACAC Board Director **Delorean Meniffee** is director of admission at Butler University (IN).

Join us at Guiding the Way to Inclusion



NACAC's premier diversity conference empowers college admission professionals to provide support for ALL students.

We greatly appreciate your patience and understanding as we monitor the COVID-19 outbreak and consider future plans. Please view our message about upcoming conferences: www.nacacnet.org/ConferenceUpdate.

nacacnet.org/gwi



MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

AROUND THE TABLE



ALEXANDRA CARROZZA

Associate Director of College Counseling
The Lawrenceville School (NJ)
NACAC member since 2011

Founded in 1810, The Lawrenceville School offers a comprehensive, coeducational program for more than 800 students, grades nine through post-graduate, who come from 33 states and 33 countries.

WHAT HAS SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT WORKING AT A BOARDING SCHOOL?

There are lots of parallels between my undergraduate experience at a liberal arts college and life at a boarding school. It's one of the reasons that drew me to the role of college counseling in a residential high school. Most special of all is getting to know students in a variety of contexts, as the relationships you

cultivate with students can only grow stronger when they stretch beyond just a singular focus of college counseling. I have worked with students through their college process who were formerly my academic advisees as ninth graders or those I coached on an intramural team, and seeing those students grow from their first year on campus to the last is incredibly rewarding.

WHAT WAYS DO YOU LIKE TO RECHARGE DURING THE DAY?

I have been conscious about creating time in my schedule to take care of our dog, Penny, who requires lots of long walks. While I may miss out on some human interaction at lunchtime, it's a great release from the day to be able to take her outside and collect my thoughts as I move into the afternoon. I realize this is only possible due in large part to working at a boarding school, where I live right off campus!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS LOOKING TO CHANGE ROLES OR INSTITUTIONS?

Each time I've entered the search for a new role, I have informed my supervisors ahead of time. Some young people are hesitant to keep their managers in the loop, but they are ultimately going to be the ones who will endorse you. After

Continued on page 8



KRISTEN ENGLISH

Vice President for Enrollment Management
Monmouth College (IL)
NACAC member since 2014

Monmouth College is a private liberal arts, college offering majors in the natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities.

HOW INTENSE IS THE PRESSURE AS AN ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT VP FOR A TUITION-DEPENDENT COLLEGE, AND HOW DO YOU HANDLE IT?

Immense; and usually with wine, yoga, a sense of humor, and my best attempt at humility. Recruitment is incredibly challenging in today's market, and you're tasked with articulating the challenges to your trustees and campus community, but then figuring out how to overcome them and do well anyway. Marketing does not create demand, as much as I wish it did. I try to be radically candid with my president, my staff, and others across campus so we can make informed

decisions rooted in optimistic, but ultimately realistic, expectations.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN THE MIDST OF DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT TO STAY IN AN ADMISSION CAREER?

Every woman gets to make her own decisions about what's best for her. But watching so many admission offices hemorrhage talented women has made me cringe since the beginning of my career! I really hope more women consider sticking with admission. And as managers, I believe it's on us to give them reasons to stay.

We must find ways to evolve as a profession and at the individual office level so that women see opportunities for themselves beyond their mid-20s and after they have children, if that's what they choose to do.

YOU HAVE WORKED FOR MANY TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A PROFESSIONAL IN ADMISSION WHO BELIEVES THEY COULD ONLY RECRUIT FOR THE SCHOOL THEY THEMSELVES ATTENDED?

Once you truly believe that the college search is about each student finding their own best fit, it's easier to see how your alma mater may or may not be that for any one person.

WHAT DO YOU MOST VALUE ABOUT YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK? HOW DO YOU USE YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK?

What I value most is the understanding—no one can celebrate or commiserate with

Continued on page 8

Alexandra, continued from page 7

two years working in my first admission role, I went with my gut and told the dean of my plans to seek new opportunities and he couldn't have been more supportive. There is no reason not to share your ideas and aspirations with your supervisor. You can only benefit from tapping into their expertise about what an admission office might be looking for in its next hire. Looking back on it now, it doesn't feel like I even took that big of a risk in doing so.


HOW HAVE MENTORS PLAYED A ROLE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORY?

One of the best things about this field is how many people have been willing to offer guidance along the way, and I am grateful for a network of hard-working, caring people who I can turn to for advice. The first mentor I sought out was Jim Richardson, who at the time was the director of admissions at Holy Cross (MA). As a tour guide, work-study student worker, and senior interviewer in the admission office, we crossed paths often. I sought his advice when I pursued a job in higher education as a graduating senior, and he coached me from the initial stages of searching for jobs to the interviews themselves. Jim has since also moved to "the other side of the desk" and we are still in touch more than 10 years later.

IF YOU COULD MAKE ONE CHANGE TO THE COLLEGE ADMISSION PROCESS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

One of the most confusing aspects of the process for students and families is managing the wide variety of application timelines, requirements, and deadlines across different institutions. The difference between early action and early decision versus "single choice" and "restrictive" early action is complicated. I would love to see colleges collectively decide on offering one kind of early action plan and then stick to the same timeline of application due dates and decision release dates.

WHAT IS ONE THING THAT A STUDENT HAS RECENTLY TAUGHT YOU?

If you ask for it, students will be the first to help keep you in line with what's relevant. For example, the use of "YOLO" is no longer cool according to a senior I work with. 


Kristen, continued from page 7

you like someone who's been through it. I reach out to my network constantly—when I want to brainstorm, when I'm stumped by a particular challenge, when I need a pep talk, when I have a funny story to share. I find the admission and college counseling communities to be incredibly supportive, and especially in a high-pressure job, it's such a gift to have a network of people who have your back.

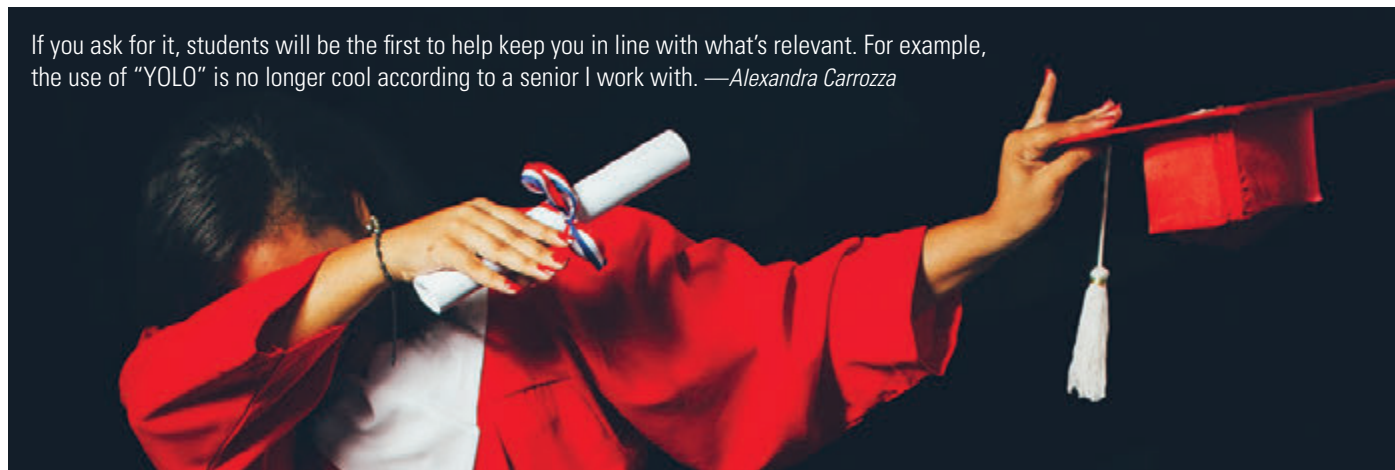
WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE QUALITIES THAT WILL MAKE SOMEONE SUCCESSFUL IN ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT?


A keen interest in data and reporting, strong written and verbal communication skills, mental toughness, a developmental approach to management, a firm grasp on budgets and finance, a sharp command of politics and persuasion, and a commitment to their institutional mission. That said, in my experience, many of these things, along with patience, humility and emotional resilience, are learned on the job. I also recommend a strong partner at home, if you are interested and can find one. My partner is a mental health counselor, so that's a bonus if, like me, you have zero chill by nature.

EVEN WITH ALL YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES, YOU STILL MANAGE TO TRAVEL FREQUENTLY, BOTH INTERNATIONALLY AND TO VISIT FRIENDS AND FAMILY IN THE US. HOW DO YOU GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO MAINTAIN YOUR PASSIONS AND HOBBIES? ANY TIPS FOR HOW TO AVOID FEELING "GUILTY" FOR BEING OUT OF THE OFFICE?

I struggled with this earlier in my career, but eventually I realized that I'll never be as productive or creative if I'm mentally and emotionally sapped all the time. Plus, my work is important to me, but so are my friends, my relationship, and travel. Having a rich and interesting life outside of work makes me a more productive VP, and a better and kinder boss. It also sets an example for my team, and being away empowers them to handle things in my absence. And if you're still unsure, just Google an image of Valencia, Spain, and then think about if you would rather be there or reading applications. 

If you ask for it, students will be the first to help keep you in line with what's relevant. For example, the use of "YOLO" is no longer cool according to a senior I work with. —Alexandra Carrozza





10th grade students take part in a human rights course offered through Partnership for Success!

ENCOURAGING COLLEGE ACCESS

Partnership Paves the Way for Underserved Students in Pasadena

Can independent and public schools work together to better serve students? This is the question Partnership for Success! in Pasadena, California, seeks to answer.

"We kind of started as a little mom-and-pop operation here at Polytechnic School in Pasadena. The idea came from our former head, Mike Babcock, who wanted to develop a partnership with Pasadena Unified Schools and wanted to develop a collaboration that wasn't going to be a program that poached students from public schools but one that shared resources," said José Melgoza, executive director of Partnership for Success! and a teacher at Polytechnic, an independent, coeducational school serving students in grades K through 12.

"From that idea, we started off as a middle school program. But we realized that if we wanted to help students to ultimately pursue a college education, we obviously needed to

expand to the high school years," Melgoza added. As we did that, we realized that we really had to start working with them at a younger age. So we've settled into a program where we work with them from the fifth grade to what we call the 13th year—the summer before college."

A collaboration between private and public schools, Partnership for Success! provides a fully funded summer program for students that "show academic promise, have good attendance, some evidence of parent involvement, and are on free/reduced lunch."

About 60 fifth grade students are selected by their principals in the Pasadena school district to join the program each year. That cohort of students stays together for the next nine consecutive summers. Melgoza said they have about a 93 percent return rate each year, losing some students who move out of the district.

For the younger students, Partnership for Success! is a full-day summer program that features academic offerings, as well as art, music, and physical education. When participants hit high school, there is an adjusted, shorter summer schedule to help accommodate students who work. They take math and writing classes, as well as a "wild card" class such as a Chinese language course or a class focused on human rights.

Participants in the "13th year" program can earn a college credit from the University of California system. That program serves as a college orientation program, with the goal of preventing summer melt, Melgoza said.

Partnership for Success! will celebrate its 30th summer program this year, expanding from "just an idea" in one counseling office to a program serving 400 students each year.

As the program grew, organizers at Polytechnic started reaching out to other independent schools in the area to help with

space and resources. Now Westridge School hosts girls in fifth and sixth grade, while Chandler School hosts boys of the same ages. Mayfield Junior School hosts seventh and eighth graders, and Polytechnic hosts students in ninth grade through their pre-college summer.

The program also works to expand mentoring beyond the summer months. They offer tutoring throughout the school year and host community events to make sure their students keep returning every summer.

"It's a commitment from all parts," he said.

Partnership for Success! is truly a partnership, not a one-sided relationship, he added. He believes Polytechnic and the other participating independent schools get just as much out of it as the public schools and their students.

"I think one of the benefits to the independent schools is that it helps in recruiting teachers

who are thinking about teaching in independent schools but are worried that they are just going to be teaching to elite students, who, quite frankly, don't always need quality teachers. They are going to be okay regardless," Melgoza said.


"I was a person who taught at public schools and I was on the fence about teaching at an independent. When I found out about Poly and the fact that it had this program and that I could work in the program, I was sold. That's kind of what brought me here and I know a lot of my faculty, especially the younger faculty that are socially conscious, it's a big attraction for them to be able to come and work in a program like this."

Partnership for Success! boasts a 100 percent high school graduation rate and a nearly 100 percent college enrollment rate.

As they move into their 30th summer and beyond, they are now looking to track their

students throughout their college experience. They want to make sure program participants graduate with a college degree.

"One of my biggest hopes is that they start understanding pretty early on that college is a reality and, regardless of where they are at, if they push themselves, they can go beyond what they thought was possible. We know that whatever their dreams are, it's most likely going to require a college education and unfortunately, a lot of students start to think about college a little bit too late," Melgoza said.

"Our hope is that they do the legwork to prepare themselves so they're able to go there and then thrive." 

Ashley Dobson formerly served as NACAC's senior manager of communications, content and social media.



High school students involved in Partnership for Success! gather on the first day of summer programming.

Visit NACAC's CBO database at casp.nacacnet.org.

ENGAGING WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES

By Ashley Dobson



NACAC's SIGs Continue to Grow

NACAC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) nurture the growing diversity in our association by providing "micro" communities within which members can network and add value to their NACAC membership experience.

SIGs can be created around a variety of different interests, ranging from identity to institution types or students served.

Jill Corbin, director of college and transition counseling at Denver Academy (CO), said the idea for the Learning Differences SIG came up while she was in Boston for the 2017 NACAC National Conference.

"I was reflecting on the events leading up to the start of the conference, specifically, bus tours to Curry College, Dean College, Landmark College, and Regis College, with my Denver Academy colleague and eventual SIG co-creator, Carey Eskesen," she said. "We couldn't seem to shake the sense of genuine community experienced among the fellow high school

counselors on the tours. We agreed that it had been incredibly energizing to connect with secondary and postsecondary professionals who counseled diverse learners from all over the world. The number of high schools in the US dedicated to serving students with diverse learning needs is quite small, so it felt like we were finally meeting our peer group."

Andrew Moe, director of admissions at Swarthmore College (PA), and Peggy Jenkins, executive director of Palouse Pathways (ID), started discussing the creation of a SIG about rural college access because they were surprised one didn't exist already.

"Rural students graduate high school at the highest rates among urban, suburban, and rural students, yet they attend college at the lowest rates, and we needed to change this. Because of this urgent challenge, we wanted to gather folks in rural high schools, college admission offices, community-based

organizations serving rural students physically and virtually, and others with an interest in rural college access to ensure professionals were able to connect with one another to devise strategies to increase college-going rates among rural and small-town students," Moe said.

For David Kamimoto, associate director of admissions at University of California-Santa Cruz, creating the Asian American/Pacific Islander SIG was about necessary representation within NACAC.

"After attending a NACAC conference years ago and noticing several Special Interest Groups that were listed in the program, I began to wonder why there was not an Asian American and Pacific Islander SIG. I was disappointed that this group was not represented, and I brought the question to some NACAC staff members I knew," he said. "They greeted me enthusiastically! They shared that they wanted to grow the SIGs and needed people to step up and help launch them."



CREATING A SIG

CREATING A NEW SIG

The creation of a new SIG requires a proposal to be submitted to NACAC for review and approval.

The proposal must include:

1. A SIG mission statement articulating how the group furthers and promotes NACAC's mission.
2. Identification of two committed co-leaders. Both must be members of NACAC.
3. Signatures of at least 15 NACAC members. Emails from NACAC members indicating support of the proposed SIG and its mission can serve as "signatures."

"The process of creating a NACAC SIG was not overwhelming but did require some initial legwork. After receiving initial approval and support from NACAC leaders and the promise of a meeting room at the next conference, my colleague Alice Tanaka and I began letting members know of our initial meeting," Kamimoto said.

"In those early days, we made flyers and handed them out to people we knew and saw. A lot of the networking happened by word of mouth. During that first meeting, we all shared reasons why we wanted to form a special interest group and began discussions on our first mission statement."

Corbin said the process of creating a SIG was easy and straightforward.

"Carey Eskesen, fellow LD SIG co-founder, and I drew up the proposed mission statement while brainstorming at one of the conference hotels in Boston. The next day I was part of a speaker panel focusing on finding success for the LD student," she said. "At the conclusion of the session, I quickly polled attendees on their interest level regarding the creation of a SIG specific to students with learning differences. The response was overwhelmingly in favor and that day we collected far more than the 15 necessary signatures to form a SIG."

Moe didn't want to wait for the national conference to create the Rural and Small Town SIG. He was able to find the necessary signatures in "an hour and a half after posting our SIG idea on social media."

Once the group was created, SIG leaders worked to spread the word and keep members connected.

Growing a new group requires work, but Moe said it is definitely worth it.

"We have made a concerted effort to ensure everyone who cares about rural college access and serves rural and small-town students knows about our SIG," he said.

"We post daily to social media, connect with rural education networks and organizations, and conduct outreach to college admission offices. Additionally, we have emailed thousands of federally designated rural and small-town high school counselors, rural private schools, CBOs, and independent

education consultants," Moe said. "Soon, we are launching our 50-state strategy with members serving as state and local SIG captains, encouraging others in their backyard to join the SIG and spread the word among their networks. Finally, we have developed buttons, logos, and flyers and hand these out at college admissions conferences, such as the annual conference, ACAC conferences, GWI, and the Rural College Access & Success Summit. Since starting in November 2018, we have gained more than 1,500 members from all 50 states, US territories, and a dozen countries around the world."

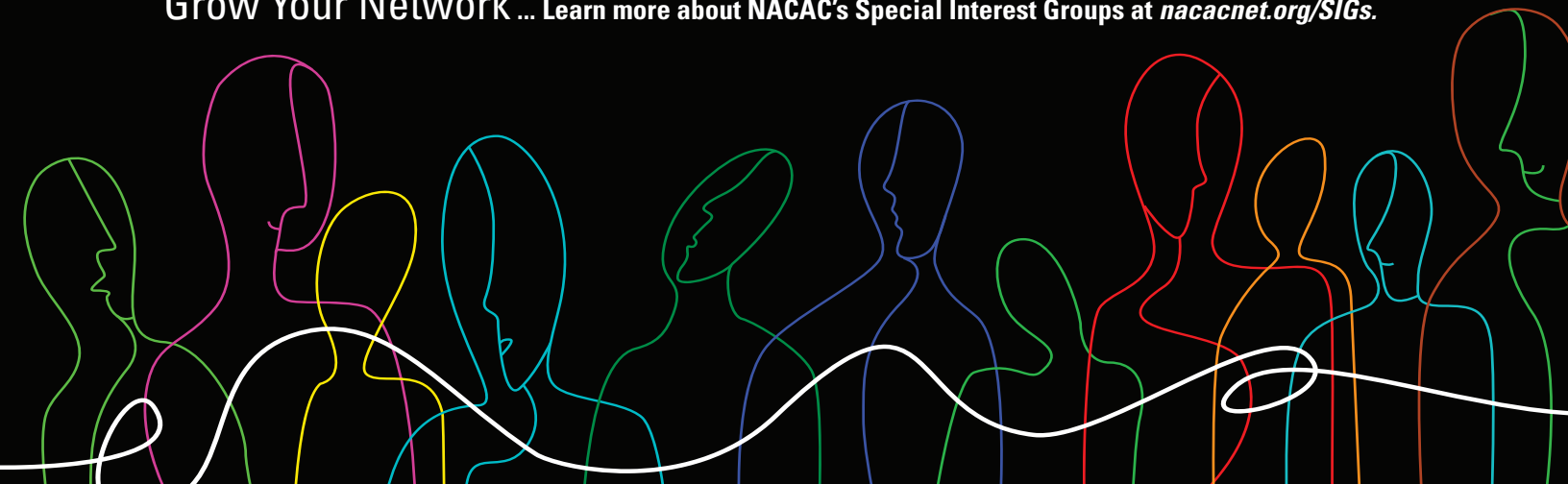
And while leaders of all SIGs must be NACAC members, nonmembers can join a SIG for free. Moe said this is crucial.

"Most of our counselor members are not NACAC members, and when we asked our members why they had not joined the association, they reported that they lacked professional development funds to do so," he said.

"We believe SIGs serve important constituencies—those who might lack membership funds for various reasons — and that it's vital to offer our services and resources for free."

Ashley Dobson formerly served as NACAC's senior manager of communications, content and social media.

Grow Your Network ... Learn more about NACAC's Special Interest Groups at nacacnet.org/SIGs.





PROFESSIONAL TRENDS

— AROUND THE TABLE —





"Almost no one flinches if a college graduate opts not to directly enter graduate or professional school. A high school graduate contemplating a gap year is likewise exercising the freedom to choose, just earlier."

—NACAC member Bryan Rutledge, writing for *Admitted* about the reasons students may choose to pursue a gap year. Rutledge is director of college counseling at Woodward Academy (GA).

"To those outside of the school counseling profession, it may be surprising to know that a majority of school counseling programs do not require, or even offer, a course related to college counseling."

—NACAC member Beth Gilfillan, writing for *Admitted* about the reasons college counseling training should be a priority. Gilfillan is an assistant professor of counseling at Bowling Green State University (OH) who previously worked for 10 years as a school counselor in Illinois.

"Everyone needs a cheerleader, and everyone also needs someone to set them straight. As a counselor, I often find myself playing both roles simultaneously."

—NACAC member Edward "Eddie" Pickett III, writing for *Admitted* about his work with students. Pickett is a college counselor and 11/12 dean at Polytechnic School (CA).

"The saying 'if not me, then who?' rang even more clearly when working for my sister. Her complicated situation made me think about those students who are caught in a grey area as they transition to higher ed."

—NACAC member Danny Tejada, writing for *Admitted* about the challenges his sister faced on her journey to college. Tejada is the director of college counseling at Villa Duchesne and Oak Hill School (MO).

"The more our profession runs like a business, the more the social/emotional wellness of our students takes a back seat."

—NACAC member Lauren Cook, writing for *Admitted* about the practices colleges follow when notifying students of their admission decisions. Cook is dean of college and gap year advising at the Jewish Community High School of the Bay (CA).

VIEW THE *ADMITTED* BLOG AT ADMITTED.NACACNET.ORG AND SIGN UP TO HAVE POSTS DELIVERED DIRECTLY TO YOUR INBOX. THE SUBSCRIBE FUNCTION CAN BE FOUND NEAR THE TOP OF THE BLOG'S LEFT-HAND COLUMN.





WOMEN OF COLOR IN ADMISSION

Tips and Advice from Four of the Profession's Leaders



After last year's Guiding the Way to Inclusion (GWI) conference, four admission leaders got together to talk about what it means to be a woman of color (WOC) in the field.

Stephanie Gonzalez, associate director for diversity recruitment at Williams College (MA); Suzi Nam, executive director of Lenfest Scholars Foundation (PA); Ashley Pallie, director of recruitment at Pomona College (CA); and Beverly Henry Wheeler, regional director of admission at Hendrix College (AR), discussed how they've been supported by the profession and the ways in which the field of college admission counseling can better support women of color.

HERE'S A GLIMPSE INTO THEIR CONVERSATION:

Gonzalez: One of the topics we touched on at GWI was the intersectionality of being a woman and a person of color. It can often be the case that you are the only WOC in an office. I'm lucky to be in a place now where I'm one of five WOC in the admission office, including our director. Williams has also built in some structural support to connect faculty and staff who identify as WOC through a network. The Williams' Women of Color Network (WOCN) receives funding for a few events each semester where we do things as simple as taking over the local coffee

shop and as complex as offering a workshop about finances. It's been a great way to meet people outside of our office that I would not have otherwise found on campus, especially considering the faculty/staff divide that often exists on college campuses. The WOCN has been a nice support, especially when I was new to Williams. I think there are ways that institutions can take steps like these to better to support WOC, especially as they transition to a new place.

Henry Wheeler: Oftentimes as women of color we quickly take on everyone's burdens and actually try to be Wonder Woman instead of taking care of ourselves. It's okay to give



WOMEN OF COLOR IN ADMISSION

ourselves permission to move, to not feel guilty. I had to begin to train myself, if that makes sense, to see what I needed and be ok with making a change, because nobody else will do this for me.

Nam: What I wish I'd known when I first started my career is that just because you share certain commonalities with other people doesn't mean that they think or feel the same way as you or will support you. I didn't understand the nuance and complexities behind all our different identities coming into play, especially as we become leaders within the profession. I also want to echo what Beverly talked about; it's not selfish to take time to give yourself a day off, even during a busy time of the year or say no to a project that you really don't have bandwidth for. It's a professional skill and it's not selfish, it's strategic.

Pallie: At Pomona, I am the only woman and person of color on the admission leadership team. Going to a women's college for undergrad was fulfilling in ways I didn't realize I needed. I learned who I am and what I need, and that strongly solidified my identity. The requirements I have for colleagues have shifted and now I have a clear vision of what I need and will ask for it.

I also think about being the supervisor of color. I think about the junior staff of color and how they are experiencing our office, our work, or the world. We're humans who bring our whole selves to work and, sometimes, we need a minute to breathe. We have conversations on our senior team and I bring these things up. My incredible colleagues are very responsive to this.

Nam: In the beginning, I didn't know how to identify allies and accomplices who weren't people of color (POC), but that is truly an important skill because the reality is many of us will not be able to work in offices that have a lot of POC or are led by a POC or a WOC. People don't necessarily have to share your background to be really understanding, supportive, and educated. So I would challenge all of us to find not only other POC who can be professional supports, but also others who may not look like you or have shared experiences, who will go to bat for you.



Stephanie Gonzalez



Suzi Nam



Ashley Pallie



Beverly Henry Wheeler

Henry Wheeler: I agree with Suzi because I think that's the dilemma. I think some individuals don't feel that they need that connection or feel they've been raised in a different environment. But I do believe that having the knowledge, even if you don't use it yet, is very important in this process because I think when you end up in one of those situations, it's almost too late to go and seek help. I finally realized I had to find other WOC and mentors—I had to seek them out. And I remember someone told me that not every person of color is for you and not every Anglo is against you, but you have to have the wisdom to know the difference. And it was the wisdom that I needed, the discernment—how do I discern who is for me and who's against me? How do I acquire the tools, not only to assist myself but to assist others? And how do I know when those individuals want to be assisted? Does that make sense?

Pallie: GWI is one of the most powerful conferences for people of color to be in a space where your truth and your voice are at the forefront. I also have some ride-or-dies. That is really important. I think about my trajectory and how I make decisions about the things that I do. It's a lot of POC who come around me and hold me up.

Gonzalez: Yes! People not on your campus can be a great resource. This conversation wouldn't even be happening if it hadn't been for GWI. I realize that not everyone can attend GWI, but there are also great online resources. You can find ways virtually to expand your network.

Henry Wheeler: So, we even have to check ourselves and understand we are powerful women. I started saying, "Okay, who else is out there? Who represents me? And do I have

to see that person in order to be a woman of power and authority?" But it's coming to a point that we don't have to see it to be it, because right now you may not. I'm 33 years into my career and I'm tired of looking for that hero. I want to be my own hero. I do.

So, I want this message of empowerment to really be for real. We're going to have to fight. I don't know if it's going to ever go away, but we can fight and we can win, I guess that's what I want for this group.

Pallie: When I think of my career, my greatest advances have been because of WOC who have mentored me. Recently, I saw Youlonda Copeland-Morgan from UCLA. She sat me down and was like, "What is happening in your career? What's in your future? Where will you be and what will you be doing by 40?" And I was like, "I was just coming to say hi." But she projected this list of things I hadn't contemplated. There are really incredible WOC out there and they really have your back in beautiful ways.

Nam: So I think one piece of very pragmatic advice I wish I had heard earlier is that having the freedom—financially—to do what you want is paramount. Save as much money as you possibly can! Being from a first-gen/low-income background, I didn't think I would have the opportunity to do that, especially on an admission salary. It was very difficult to do in the beginning, but I definitely encourage women to make sure that they have enough saved to make moves and changes when it's right for them—that's power.

Gonzalez: Know your worth.

Pallie: And negotiate well. 



SUPPORTING TRANS, GENDER-NONCONFORMING, AND GENDER EXPANSIVE STUDENTS

By María Mónica Andía and Lenni Yesner



As educators situated on the bridge from high school to college, it is our job to ensure that our students transition into the adulthood that is most supportive of their joy and wellness.

That process often includes the college search, and for transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) young people, the application experience can be very activating. TGNC youth experience a particular urgency as they apply to colleges.

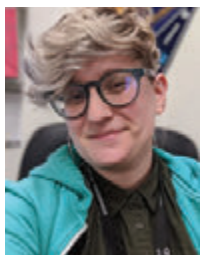
That urgency lies in a desire to live free of the limitations imposed by the gender binary (the idea that there are only two genders) and cisnormativity (the assumption that everyone is cisgender, or identifies with the sex assigned at birth).

Therefore, when supporting our TGNC students in postsecondary planning, we have a choice—we can either uphold the cis- and heteronormative ideals prevalent in our society, or we can embrace gender liberation and provide the nuanced care and support TGNC youth require during this critical transition.

As two counselors who have helped students through the process, here's what we've learned along the way.



OPENING THE DOOR



LENNI YESNER— CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

My own experience supporting TGNC youth really pivoted when I came out as trans and nonbinary

in my late 20s. I had been a college access counselor for almost seven years at that point. And even though I worked at one of the most progressive high schools in New York City, it was only after the city passed an ordinance prohibiting workplace harassment and deliberate misgendering that I did it. I thought to myself, “What would I want the young people I work with to be able to do?” and the answer became clear; I put on my big kid pants and shared with the whole community.

Opening that door changed me. Soon, the little queerlings, as I like to call them, knocked on my door. “How did you KNOW? And when?” they’d ask. As I answered and listened I learned all the ways that TGNC young people learned to hide themselves.

One student came in as a junior. Listless and disheveled most days, she could barely hold eye contact. Then one day her mom shared after a College Fair Night that her child was trans. I understood why this young person’s light was dimmed. Over the next few months, she transitioned. She changed her name, began hormone therapy, began to dress as she wished, dyed her hair fire engine red, and wore eyeliner to school for the first time.

She was truly alive and it was a sight to behold. Now she had a supportive family, a supportive school, and a supportive counselor. Can you imagine what would have happened if even one of those had been more hostile to her?

When I met the principal of my new school this year, we talked about her students—predominantly black and brown young people,

mostly boys. Our meeting, coincidentally, was on Trans Day of Remembrance. The event honors the many trans people who are slain each year—mostly black and Latina trans women who were, not unlike my new school’s students, also told they were “boys.” We talked about how even with no “out” trans students, we owed it to our students’ future selves to make the school as affirming as possible. I asked her what it would be like to have an openly genderqueer counselor, and she said: “We’ll all just have to learn.”

We all just have to learn.

We have to.

We owe it to the young people we serve, to our colleagues, and to ourselves to learn and to demand environments that not only openly support trans youth, but help them turn their brights on.



MARÍA MÓNICA ANDÍA—PUSH FOR CHANGE AT YOUR SCHOOL

As counselors who are committed to supporting our students in finding the best and most welcoming

universities for their continued education, we must also ensure that our high schools are equally welcoming.

Efforts to dismantle heteronormativity and cisnormativity must be intentional and explicitly supportive of trans and gender-expansive experiences. The following steps can help support that work.

1. Educate your professional community!

Take a look at your dress codes, bathrooms, school materials, and school climate. Is your school still upholding the gender binary (boy/girl)? Suggest an all-gender bathroom and talk about the dangers of continuing to see gender and expression through sex assumed at birth. Bring it up in staff meetings. Be

the agitator so that students don’t have to be. Don’t wait until you have an out trans student needing support to make the changes.

2. **Respect name preferences.** Ask students how they want to be referred to (by their legal name, their preferred name, etc.) and to whom. Due to safety and privacy reasons, students may ask to be called different names in different scenarios. In some cases, they may still use their birth name or “dead name.” As a counselor, it is important that your relationship with your student be a space where they can experience being called by the name(s) of their choice.
3. **Don’t assume.** Young people are constantly figuring themselves out. If a student tells you they are trans you should feel lucky—it’s a sign they trust you! But don’t assume this is a phase and don’t assume it’s forever, either. Young people have the right to try on identities and see which ones fit. Young people have the right to change.
4. **Update your paperwork.** Change your counseling intake forms to make space for nonbinary students. Many colleges have already done this.
5. **Practice pronouns.** Practice asking for pronouns at the beginning of all meetings and events. Practice correcting yourself or others if someone messes up another person’s pronouns. Ask admission counselors to share their pronouns in introductions.
6. **Seek out diverse job candidates.** Hire queer and trans people, including queer and trans people of color. Young people need to see themselves reflected in your staff. Once you hire them, do more than tokenize them. Listen to their insights and make changes when they suggest them.

María Mónica Andía is director of college success at the Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy (NY). **Lenni Yesner** is a school counselor and director of college, career & future planning at City Polytechnic High School of Engineering, Architecture and Technology (NY).

Over the next few months, she transitioned. She changed her name, began to dress as she wished, dyed her hair fire engine red, and wore eyeliner to school for the first time.



NACAC WORKING FOR YOU

— AROUND THE TABLE —

Jason

James H. Hester
President
American Association
of Community Colleges
AACC

Karen

Karen Benitez
Vanguard University of
Southern California
COSTA MESA, CA

Get social with #NACAC18



LARGE OR SMALL COLLEGE?

Close your eyes. When you think about college, do you picture a compact campus where you run into friends between classes? Or do you envision big Saturday afternoon football games, with thousands of fans cheering on your college's team? Are you participating in small-group discussions or listening carefully to your professor lecture in a large room?



There are no right answers to these questions, only what feels right to you. A college's size affects many aspects of the college experience, from your classes and extracurricular activities to your social life.

CLASS SIZE

A college's size often affects the size of its classes. In general, larger schools tend to have larger classes, especially at the freshman level. You may find yourself taking notes along with a hundred other students in your introduction to psychology class. If you prefer being somewhat anonymous in class, large lecture courses are the way to go.

At smaller colleges, you may find fewer lecture courses and more courses that emphasize class participation. These types of classes facilitate closer contact with faculty

and other students, which is attractive to some students, but not all.

Of course, smaller colleges may still have some large classes, and large universities may offer a variety of small classes (especially in upper-level courses). But if you have a definite preference for a particular style of learning, look more closely at the colleges that offer more classes in that style.

INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY

Who teaches your classes can also depend on the college's size. Large universities often have many professors who are considered senior-level in their field of research. Undergraduates may not have much contact with these professors; instead, teaching assistants (graduate students) may do the bulk of the teaching and grading, while the professors only lecture.

At smaller colleges, particularly those with no graduate programs, you may not run into as many big-name research professors, but you will likely have far more interaction with the faculty. Many small colleges pride themselves on fostering mentoring-type relationships between professors and students.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Size can have a big impact on extracurricular activities. In general, the larger the college, the wider variety of activities offered. If you're interested in a relatively obscure activity, you're more likely to find it offered at larger colleges. On the other hand, it can be more difficult to break into popular activities on a larger campus. After all, the more students there are, the greater your competition.

At smaller colleges, students may find it easier to get involved and stand out in extracurricular activities. But small colleges usually can't offer the variety of activities that a large college can.

SOCIAL LIFE

Larger schools have a greater variety of social options, and small colleges may have fewer options but wider student participation in any one event.

You may find that smaller colleges seem friendlier, if only because you're likely to run into the same people more often. On the other hand, once you make a few friends, even the largest campus begins to feel like home.

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

The best way to figure out what size of college appeals to you is to visit a variety of colleges.

College is what you make of it no matter what campus you choose. Keep in mind that your personality, interests, and choices will make your college experience different from anyone else's. This is your journey, you decide the way.

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MICRO-BARRIERS IN COLLEGE ADMISSION

Conference Corner articles highlight research and insights previously shared by presenters at a NACAC conference. Andrew Moe, Swarthmore College (PA), was part of a panel that explored micro-barriers at NACAC's 2019 National Conference. Other panelists included Claire Kirby, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Kelly Talbert, Boise State University (ID); Dustin Lynn, Battle Ground Academy (TN); and Brandi Smith, Marietta High School (GA).



How Application Fees and Enrollment Deposits Can Thwart College Access

Back when Dustin Lynn was thinking about college, he wasn't sure where or how to apply. Lynn grew up in Waynesboro, Tennessee, a remote outpost of 2,500 people about 100 miles southwest of Nashville. Rural parts of the US rarely see admission officers visiting high schools or attending college fairs, and it was no different for Lynn and his classmates. But he was a bit different. He excelled in school and earned one of the highest standardized test scores the county had ever seen. Despite the

lack of exposure to four-year colleges, Lynn took a leap and applied early decision to a highly selective college.

Lynn's family was situated on the lowest economic rung in one of the poorest counties in Tennessee. He lived in a mobile home on rural country land where his dad mowed lawns and took up odd jobs for a living. His mom worked in a sewing factory. So when Lynn received his acceptance letter—as well as his financial aid award, lined with a

Pell Grant, subsidized loans, and tremendous institutional aid, he was thrilled. Until he read what was required next: a \$400 matriculation deposit, due in short order.

The enrollment deposit that Lynn and his family had to pay is an example of a micro-barrier. Micro-barriers, or logistical roadblocks students face in the college admission process, cause undue harm and disproportionately affect low-income and first-generation college students. Unlike macro-barriers—systemic and structural obstacles to achievement, access, and affordability (think neighborhood segregation and concentrated poverty)—micro-barriers can more



We found that more than 360 colleges failed to highlight how to obtain an application fee waiver, so we reached out to them. Many didn't charge a fee at all, something that was left out of their website language.

easily be dismantled by admission and financial aid offices, high school counseling centers, and nonprofit organizations.

The enrollment deposit is only one example of a micro-barrier. Add to the list: application fees, housing deposits, standardized testing registration, SAT and ACT score sends, the cost of test preparation or transportation to the testing center, availability of admission representatives in one's community, visits to campuses, and the vast social capital required to apply to college. While we might not be able to solve school funding formulas or institutionalized racism overnight, we as a community can do more to equitably support those without financial resources and extensive connections to ensure that they, too, can make it to and through college.

Take the application fee. In 2019, working with a colleague, I reviewed more than 1,500 college admission websites. We found that more than 360 colleges failed to highlight how to obtain an application fee waiver, so we reached out to them. Many didn't charge a fee at all, something that was left out of their website language. Others wrote back to us, only they thought they were writing to a low-income student requesting information about an application fee waiver and financial aid. We played "secret shopper" to better understand true responses from admission offices.

The results were astounding. More than 70 percent of responding colleges failed to include any information about financial aid, and several told "the student" to submit a fee waiver—like the NACAC fee waiver—without providing a link to the form or an explanation about NACAC. While many responded and offered fee waivers and codes

to submit a free application, a few notable replies included:

- *We only provide fee waivers to alumni children.*
- *We need to vote on your fee waiver as a committee.*
- *We only offer fee waivers to those who visit—and, in this case, the college was located thousands of miles away from our low-income secret shopper.*

Those responses are unacceptable. In addition, too many colleges require documentation of federal free lunch status or other barriers for the application fee to be waived, and this is one reason why students give up applying. At the 2019 NACAC National Conference, my colleagues and I presented to a sparsely populated room about micro-barriers in the admission process. Namely, we covered how a lack of high school visits by colleges, along with application fees and enrollment deposits, created barriers for underserved students.

In our research project about waivers, we found some excellent examples of how public colleges are changing course. Boise State University (ID) and University of North Carolina-Charlotte represented exceptional instances of how colleges should outline their fee waiver policies. Both institutions included clear and concise language on their admission websites about eligibility for fee waivers and how to obtain one. Boise State went so far as to offer an enrollment deposit waiver through a web-based form. The admission directors at both institutions disclosed that their budgets hinged on application fee revenue, yet

because of their institutional missions and personal commitment to lowering barriers, they offer fee waivers to those most in need. Still, more must be done to eliminate barriers and mitigate their harmful effects on underserved students.

Dustin Lynn's story didn't end with his admission letter. Lynn was determined to make it work. He knew the opportunity he had in front of him could change the trajectory of his life. He told his parents about the \$400 enrollment deposit and hoped for the best. "Dad told me, 'Well, I'll just have to mow more lawns. We'll come up with it, somehow,'" Lynn told me. And they did. Lynn enrolled in college as a rural, first-generation, Pell Grant recipient and graduated with a bachelor's and master's in education from the same institution. Today, he's director of college counseling at Battle Ground Academy (TN), co-leader of the NACAC Rural and Small Town Special Interest Group, and a fierce advocate for low-income students in the college admission process. In fact, he's the colleague who helped me review those 1,500-some college websites, looking for answers about application fee waivers.

We shouldn't have to highlight examples of how our own colleagues have overcome micro-barriers in the admission process, but I hope it serves as a stark reminder that our community includes first-generation, low-income folks who made it to college, despite the persistent barriers that we fail to dismantle. [↗](#)

NACAC member **Andrew Moe** is director of admissions at Swarthmore College (PA), co-leader of NACAC's Rural and Small Town SIG, and a member of the association's Inclusion, Access, and Success Committee.

MINNEAPOLIS MINUTE: THE SPACE

The 2020 NACAC National Conference is scheduled for Sept. 24–26 in Minneapolis. The Minneapolis Minute highlights new features and other conference updates planned for the meeting.

We greatly appreciate your patience and understanding as we monitor the COVID-19 outbreak and consider future plans. Please view our message about upcoming conferences: www.nacacnet.org/ConferenceUpdate.

WHERE WILL THE 2020 NATIONAL CONFERENCE TAKE PLACE?

The Minneapolis Convention Center (MCC) features five exhibit halls, 87 meeting rooms, two ballrooms, and a 3,400 fixed-seat auditorium with three revolving rooms. It is LEED-certified and has expanded to 1.6 million square feet.

WHERE WILL NACAC EVENTS BE HELD?

NACAC events will be in different locations spaced throughout the center.

- First Floor—Education Sessions
- Second Floor—Education Sessions, Preconference Workshops, Speakerville, Recovery Room, Pop-Up Meeting Spaces, Financial Aid Stage, and the brand-new Guiding the Way to Inclusion (GWI) Stage
- Lounge A—Zen Den
- Seasons Room—Global Hub
- Mezzanine Floor—Education Sessions, Career Hub
- Exhibit Hall—Exhibitors, CCF, ACF, Welcome Reception, Opening and Closing General Sessions, and more!

IS IT HARD TO GET AROUND THE SPACE?

The convention center is large, but the floors are stacked right on top of each other, so it is easy to get to your next education session, workshop, or event! The Minneapolis Convention Center also features a Visitor Information Center in the main lobby, with staff available to give directions and offer additional information about the facility and how to make the most of your time at the conference and in Minneapolis.

WHAT ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS DO YOU OFFER?

NACAC's conference team always does its best to make sure everyone's needs are taken into consideration. We ask for details about any dietary restrictions, special needs, and mobility issues during registration so we can follow up with you directly to make sure your conference experience is not limited in any way.

The MCC has many elevators and escalators, multiple unisex accessible restrooms, entrances

with power-assisted doors, and outlets for scooter rental.

WHERE CAN I GET COFFEE?

Attendees can always find free coffee in the Exhibit Hall! They can also enjoy a made-to-order coffee at the on-site Dunn Brothers Coffee shop. Kelber Catering and Craft Bar & Lounge are also located in the convention center for a drink or bite to eat. [↗](#)



ADVOCACY IN ACTION

In March, I was joined by nearly 160 of our colleagues for NACAC's Annual Advocacy Meeting. I left excited and exhilarated about our work and our future.

The Advocacy Meeting is a two-day event, but in my capacity as a member of NACAC's Government Relations Committee, I arrived in Washington, DC, a day early to discuss some pending policy positions we had been debating. I found the weekend particularly rewarding because of the conversations had, the opportunity to see friends and meet new people, and to use my voice to affect policy in the halls of Congress.

My colleagues and I met with congressional staff from all nine states that comprise the Southern Association for College Admission Counseling (SACAC) and while not every congressional office agreed with our policy

recommendations, I believe they came away with a better understanding of what we do on a daily basis and why our work is so critical to the future of our students and our country.

While coming to Washington is a thrill, our colleagues are doing equally important work in state capitals around the country. Within SACAC, advocacy meetings have been held in Georgia, Tennessee, and South Carolina, among others.

There may be an advocacy day in your state. Reach out to your Government Relations Committee chair to find out more—no experience is necessary. We have people who have been in the field for decades as well as attendees that

are still within their first decade on the job. The common theme is that they love their work and want to advocate for the profession and the students they serve.

I joined NACAC to become more empowered, and one of the ways this empowerment manifests itself is by meeting with state and federal lawmakers about my job, its challenges, and its many rewards. I encourage you to add your voice to the conversation. [L](#)

Christy Sevier is the director of admissions at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University (LA) and a member of NACAC's Government Relations Committee.



Johnnie Johnson attends an information session to prepare for Hill Day visits.



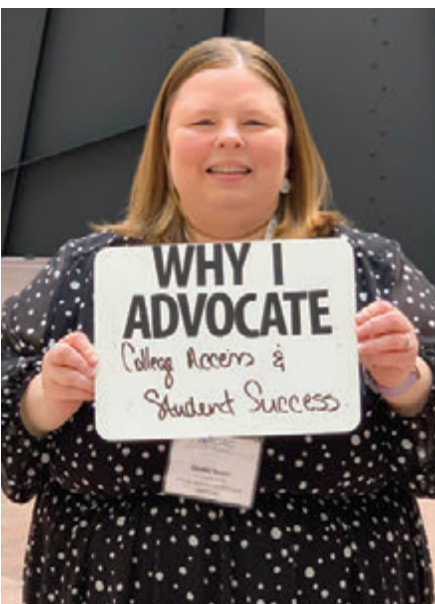
Ja'Niah Downing attends an information session to prepare for Hill Day visits.



Above: Members from the Hawaii ACAC, from left: Rochelle Sakurai, Dayna Kaneshiro, and Todd Fleming.



Above: Attendees learn more about NACAC's policy priorities.



Left: Christy Sevier, a member of NACAC's Government Relations Committee, shares why she came to DC for the Advocacy Meeting.

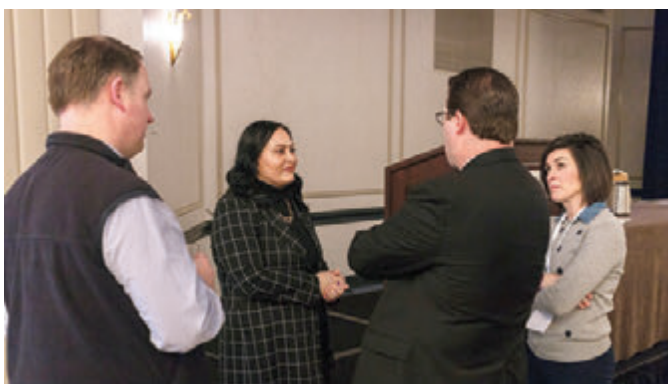


Right: Phillip Moreno shares why he participated in NACAC's Advocacy Meeting.



Above: Texas ACAC members pose for a picture outside the US Capitol.

Below: Attendees ask questions of Jinann Bitar, senior policy analyst with The Bipartisan Center (DC), following her presentation.



Above: Attendee Andrea Leonard asks a question in preparation for Advocacy Day.

Below: Members from the Rocky Mountain ACAC pose for a picture at the US Capitol.





Ohio ACAC members, from left: Collin Palmer, Nancy Gibson, and Courtney Johnson-Benson, pose outside the office of US Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH).



Members of the Pennsylvania ACAC pose for a picture at the US Capitol.

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RURAL STUDENTS

Breaking Down Barriers for
Small-Town Students

By Jim Paterson





Darah Tabrum can quickly list all the good qualities of her students at Navajo Preparatory School, located in the remote, dry and rocky region just east of where the northwest corner of New Mexico meets three other states.

They are independent, she says, and resilient, with an excellent work ethic and willingness to take on new challenges. Moreover, they develop close ties to their peers and involve themselves in the community.

These are desirable characteristics that she hopes colleges will see in the students, nearly all of whom are Native American. But Tabrum, a former high school college and career coordinator who now serves as the community engagement coordinator at Navajo Prep, also knows getting that message across can be a challenge. Too often, she says, there are sticky assumptions about students from minority groups and, more broadly, students from rural areas.

"There are often negative ideas about what our students are capable of. Some people don't fully understand what they can bring to the table," Tabrum said. "Some colleges assume that they aren't ready for a

college-level curriculum without fully understanding rural students and their potential and achievements within the context of their region."

Tabrum is among a growing group of admission officials, high school counselors, and college access professionals who say rural students don't always have the same access to college as their counterparts in more urban areas.

Darris R. Means, an associate professor at the University of Georgia who has researched the problems rural students face as they explore and enroll in college, worries about the subtle, implicit bias Tabrum describes.

"We shouldn't assume anything about these students. They are a diverse group and have many strengths," he says, noting that admission officers, counselors, parents, and others may underestimate or pigeonhole rural students, contributing to "significant constraints for college access and enrollment."

For instance, he is concerned that an overindulgence in "college isn't for everyone" thinking might be more common in some rural areas and may limit how students think about higher education. Meanwhile, some admission offices may wrongly believe small town students are less likely to be successful or won't fit in on campus, making retention a challenge.

Given the barriers, he and others who advocate for rural students have developed a variety of ways they can be supported ranging from extra guidance from peers or others in their close-knit school and community, to early preparations to help them enthusiastically create a path to college and thrive when they attend. Changing both college recruitment strategies and the focus of high school counselors also might help. And addressing the cost of higher education at the local, state, and federal levels would potentially offer the biggest boost, Means says.

THE NUMBERS

Andrew Moe, one of the founders of NACAC's Rural and Small Town Special Interest Group, notes that "despite being underrepresented on college campuses and seeing few admission officers in their communities, students in rural areas are going to college, albeit at lower rates than their suburban and urban peers."

The 61 percent college enrollment rate of students in rural public schools is at least 6 percent below the rate for students in suburban and urban schools, according to national data. Rural students are also considerably less likely to attend a selective college or university, more likely to delay attendance, and, according to some researchers, more likely to withdraw from college.

Undermatching can also be a concern. According to Sindy Lopez, an analyst with Ithaka S+R who also has researched the issue, federal data show that only 16 percent of rural students enroll in highly selective colleges, compared to 30 percent of students from urban areas and 53 percent from the suburbs. In addition, she notes that using consistent academic and social criteria, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* found rural students were 2.5 times less likely to enroll in the top 50 universities and liberal arts colleges, as defined by *US News & World* rankings.

That deficit occurs despite the fact that rural and small-town students generally score better than average on National Assessment of Educational Progress tests and finish school at nearly the same rate as suburban students.

"It is clear that there is a lot of talent in rural communities," Lopez writes. "If America's high-graduation-rate colleges and universities provide greater access and opportunity for talented low-income rural students, they have the potential not only to propel these students' social mobility, but to provide benefits to their communities as well."

WHAT'S IN THE WAY?

Means and other advocates have found that several factors make it more difficult for students from small towns and less populated regions to attend and succeed in college, resulting in what he calls the "invisibility of rural schools, districts, and students and their families."

Rural students often cannot travel easily to visit college campuses. College representatives, likewise, face challenges when planning to visits to remote areas.

"Rural students do not always have the resources to make college visits and admissions officers do not frequently visit rural schools," says Linda Binion, counseling director at King George High School in a rural part of Virginia, about 70 miles down the Potomac River from Washington, DC. "As a result, rural students tend to look at a limited number of colleges in a close geographic area."

While NACAC promotes consideration of rural students among admission officers, David Hawkins, the association's executive director for educational content and policy, has noted that more selective institutions are often less likely to participate in small regional recruiting fairs that draw rural students.

Another problem stems from the well-documented decrease in income levels for families living in rural areas, particularly in regions struggling with unemployment or underemployment.

According to one national study, colleges are more likely to recruit from areas with families whose incomes are above \$100,000 and forgo visits to areas where the average family income is \$70,000 or lower, putting rural students at a disadvantage. The study, by EMRA Research, also found that colleges concentrate disproportionately on private schools, which are more commonly found in large urban or suburban areas.

Other research found low-income students were less likely to want to leave their communities and may face pressures from home.

"I worked with a student who supported her family financially and ran the day-to-day activities of the household," says Binion. "When she applied to college, she left the computer screen open and her mother sabotaged her college application. In some families this change creates conflict."

There can also be student anxiety about navigating a large or urban campus, and even worry from parents about how it will change their relationship, Binion said.

"Parents, for instance, wonder if they can relate to their college-educated child or if their child will move away and not want to spend time with them after being exposed to a different lifestyle," she says.

SCHOOL RESOURCES

Donald Crow, a former veteran counselor in rural Colorado who now works on a state program designed to get more trained counselors in schools,

"There are often negative ideas about what our students are capable of. Some people don't fully understand what they can bring to the table."

—*Darah Tabrum, community engagement coordinator,
Navajo Preparatory School (NM)*

NACAC'S RURAL AND SMALL TOWN SIG

A group of more than 1,000 professionals from admission offices, high schools, and other organizations have come together through NACAC to form a special interest group (SIG) devoted to improving college access for rural students.

The Rural and Small Town SIG brings together professionals who support rural education and share knowledge of rural assets, challenges, and issues with one another. Anyone can join. A variety of resources are available to members, including monthly virtual meetings and lists of rural high schools.

"We wanted to bring all folks to the table to prioritize rural college access; offer free resources and a network to advisers and school counselors—many of whom have little to no professional development funds but incredible ideas; and to tap experts to share knowledge and best practices," said group co-leader Andrew Moe, director of admissions at Swarthmore College (PA).

—*Jim Paterson*

says the availability of counselors has a significant effect on college attendance by rural students.

"Because of tight budgets, many of the people in those (college counseling) roles are teachers or other school personnel...Many of them also have full-time class loads, and they don't have time to attend workshops, or get training, or spend the time with students that is needed. In most urban areas they have specific career and college counselors."

Limited resources can also mean that schools in these regions provide fewer options when it comes to accelerated academics, unique extracurricular activities, and travel opportunities—factors that many colleges weigh when making admission decisions, says Chris Gage, vice president for strategy and enrollment at Hanover College, located in rural southeastern Indiana. Although dual enrollment has grown in rural areas, with 23 percent of rural students enrolled in at least one dual enrollment class, not all colleges grant transfer credit for those courses. And researchers have also found the rigor of such courses varies widely.

10 WAYS TO SUPPORT RURAL STUDENTS

Here are 10 things admission officers, counselors, and others can do to support rural students.

IN SCHOOLS

Promote higher education early and often. K-12 counselors and others should encourage students at a young age to explore all colleges and careers, initially without regard to cost, size, or distance. With colleagues they can implement coordinated college planning messages for families as students progress through the grades. Summer sessions for high school students have also paid off.

Encourage students to plan ahead. Tell them about factors that sometimes complicate college attendance for students from rural areas. Ask them to consider what their challenges will be—from financial or family pressures to worries about adapting to a big campus or urban area—and how they will overcome them.

Develop an “all hands” strategy. Schools play an important, central role in rural areas. Counselors should creatively and energetically involve the school and local community in efforts to help students appreciate the value of college, explore their options, and apply. Support from alumni and other adults can be especially powerful, as can financial assistance.

Exert peer pressure. Ask recent graduates or, for younger students, high school juniors and seniors, to provide information about the college admission process. Building excitement about attending college can help increase enrollment.

Create college connections. Help connect students with admission officials who may be less likely to visit. Consider online chats or collaborate with other schools on visits and college fairs. Build relationships with admission representatives to help assure them they’ll be connected with interested students and get support in their recruitment efforts.

IN THE ADMISSION OFFICE

Bury bias. Don’t make assumptions. Data shows rural students perform well. They test better and graduate at a higher rate than students generally. And beyond that, they often have other unique characteristics that make them worth pursuing.

Get creative. Consolidate efforts by hosting a “visit day” for rural students at your school. Consider providing transportation for participants or schedule an online session for rural applicants. For students from especially remote areas, stay in touch online and consider making up for a lack of face-to-face contact by committing to a greater frequency of online conversations.

Offer focused support. The University of Chicago’s Emerging Rural Leaders Program has boosted enrollment by offering on-campus summer programs and assistance with the application process for top students from rural and small-town high schools. The university is also developing a network of these schools and top colleges to bolster connections.

Promote peer support. See if enrolled students from a rural region can help with rural recruitment or provide informational programing. Several colleges are working with a national program called Matriculate that rigorously trains undergraduate college students to be virtual college advisers.

Keep your commitment. Too often students from rural areas leave college due to financial, social, or academic pressures. Recognize they may face different and more challenging stressors, but also may be less likely to seek support. Some colleges have connected incoming rural students with upperclassmen from similar circumstances or the same region. The University of Georgia has a very active and successful rural students’ group that provides camaraderie and support.

—Jim Paterson



PHOTO © ZACK SMITH.



"When a student is attending a school with fewer resources and little or no AP, they are attracted by the prospects of gaining credit—or even an associate degree—through dual enrollment, but that can be misleading," Gage says. "They may have what they believe is a semester worth of credit, but they may not be prepared for the college work that follows."

BATTLING ASSUMPTIONS

Implicit biases are prevalent when it comes to rural students and can lead colleges and the adults supporting these students to limit their goals. And often, parents and students have the idea that simply getting into college is enough, Crow added.

"Many parents in rural areas think four years of college are the student's ticket to (a) better life," he says. "Then, unfortunately, the student goes for one or two years, amasses debt, and quits because they were not properly prepared and advised."


Gage notes, however, that rural students and those advising them also shouldn't automatically rule out a big school or a campus in an urban environment. He recalls one student who believed she was limited to attending

a small college because she was from a very small town and small high school. Ultimately, she wasn't happy at the small college. "She transferred to a much bigger institution and loved it and did very well," he says.

Like Tabrum at Navajo Tech, Gage can tick off a long list of qualities that rural students possess to help them thrive at Hanover and other colleges.

"We have found they tend to be humble, and have a certain grittiness and strong work ethic, and an ability to get things done on their own," he says. "In fact, they have to often be encouraged to use support services that are available to ensure their success."

But ultimately, like all applicants, rural students should simply be judged on their merit, Gage says.

"It is important not make any assumptions about any student, including based on where they come from. Sit down with them and seek to understand their lived experiences. Find out why they are interested in your college and what they will bring to it." 

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

"It is clear that there is a lot of talent in rural communities. If America's high-graduation-rate colleges and universities provide greater access and opportunity for talented low-income rural students, they have the potential not only to propel these students' social mobility, but to provide benefits to their communities as well."

—Sindy Lopez, analyst with Ithaka S+R

Resources for Small-Town Counselors and Students



Plus tips to help colleges improve their outreach to rural students



Adam Sapp, assistant vice president of admissions at Pomona College (CA), grew up in a town with a population of 950 residents. He graduated with 47 other seniors and was one of only five in his class headed directly to a four-year college.

Sapp's experience mirrors that of thousands of other students nationwide, clearly demonstrating that we need to proactively pave the way for students from rural areas or small towns to access a college education.

"There were so many moments when being rural and a first-generation (student) created new hurdles to navigate," Sapp said, remembering the challenges he faced as a 17-year-old. "There was a secret language you had to speak in order to negotiate academic spaces."

In our role as counseling and admission professionals, we have a responsibility to develop and promote resources that help translate this language. One of the primary ways NACAC and its members support students from rural and small towns is through the Rural and Small Town Special Interest Group (SIG). SIGs are communities within NACAC composed of members with shared interest and knowledge.

In addition to the resources developed by NACAC and the Rural and Small Town SIG, here are some ideas that can serve as a springboard for counselors or students in rural communities.

RESOURCES FOR COUNSELORS

Counselor Fly-In Programs: Fly-in programs provide rural and small-town counselors the opportunity to visit colleges or universities at low- or no-cost. Though not all programs specifically identify as "rural-friendly," a number of deans and directors who were contacted by the *Journal* indicated that counselors who reach out to the sponsoring institution to explain their interest in providing access to rural students would be given additional consideration. (Read more about fly-ins on pages 38–42.)

Webinar or Skype Virtual Visits: Every dean, director, or vice-president we spoke to for this article indicated that, if given an invitation, they would support one of their professional staff members hosting an online information session for students in rural areas. This unanimous and resounding support reflected the dilemma many enrollment leaders in colleges are facing: with limited resources, it is difficult to invest in travel to rural high schools. Yet there is a strong commitment to increasing access for rural students. Colleges are eager to address this challenge through virtual visits or information sessions.

Inquiring as a Student: Since many colleges still don't have online information request forms for school counselors, one of the easiest ways to ensure you receive the most up-to-date materials and information is to inquire as a student through the college's website.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Travel Grants: Many institutions offer travel grants to admitted students to encourage them to visit campus. Though these grants often have parameters, we encourage students to ask about these kinds of programs. By reminding admission counselors of their personal circumstances, they may be awarded one even if they don't meet the established requirement.

Research Rural-Friendly Colleges: More and more colleges are identifying resources for students from rural areas and small towns. Through scholarships, resource pages on their websites, summer opportunities, and more, students can seek out institutions that have the expertise to support their transition. Colleges engaging in this work include Lycoming College (PA), Swarthmore College (PA), University of Georgia, Carleton College (MN), and others, but it is important for students to ask any college they are considering how the institution supports students from small towns or rural communities.


Virtual Interviews: If you are unable to travel to colleges you've applied to for an in-person interview, request a virtual interview. These interviews are typically added to your application record and give you an opportunity to share your story.

ADVICE FOR COLLEGE ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Even as we consider the resources students from rural areas need, we must also consider the strengths these students bring to our campuses. Sapp shared how his small school prepared him to persevere in college, stating that even though his high school "lacked the ability to deliver rigor, it made up for it by surrounding me with buckets of love and instilling within me in a high level of self-confidence and ability to persist."

Such stories remind us that, regardless of geography, all students are worthy of our best efforts to create access and opportunity.

And Sapp's personal and professional experiences give him significant insight into small changes colleges and universities can make to impact students from rural communities and small towns. Here's just one:

"Ask your communications office to tell the stories of those rural students you already have on your campus. Sure, I get why we all talk about who wins research grants and Fulbright scholarships and athletic championships, but let's not forget that our students also have stories. Making this invisible community visible through the power of videos, students blogs, viewbook and publications features, alumni magazine features, and more can promote inclusivity while at the same time signaling to rural high school students and counselors that your institution is a place that assigns value to that experience." 

Janelle Holmboe is vice president for enrollment at McDaniel College (MD) and a member of NACAC's Communications Committee.

Even as we consider the resources students from rural areas need, we must also consider the strengths these students bring to our campuses.



NACAC

National Association for
College Admission Counseling

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Whether you're looking for a new job or ready to take the next step in your career, we'll help you find the opportunity that's right for you.

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A photograph of an airplane wing against a sunset sky. The wing is on the left, extending towards the center. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright orange and yellow near the horizon, where the sun is setting. The overall mood is hopeful and aspirational.

USING FLY-INS TO EXPAND ACCESS

The programs help underserved students
increase their college options.

By Elena Loveland





Providing access to the underserved has long been a priority in college admission. A newer trend to increase access to underserved students are fly-in programs that enable students to visit campuses overnight, get deeper insight into a college, and consider schools that they might not have otherwise.

"The idea for fly-ins is to increase the number of underrepresented students on campus—it's important for colleges to include a number of student categories under this underrepresented umbrella—including first-generation, lower-income, students of color, and students from rural communities," explains Jonathan April, general manager of College Greenlight, an online platform providing important resources to first-gen and other underrepresented students.

Swarthmore College, in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, is one institution that has launched a fly-in program. Discover Swarthmore is open to any high school senior, but is geared toward students of color, low-income students, rural students, first-generation-to-college students, and other traditionally marginalized students, including DACA/undocumented students.

To make visiting a campus truly accessible to all populations, college fly-in programs are often free for students. Discover Swarthmore covers the costs of transportation, including flights (and even luggage fees), train fare, and reimbursement for driving. Current Swarthmore undergrads host visiting students and dine with them in the campus dining hall.

"Fly-ins are all about expanding access to students traditionally on the margins of the college application process," said Windsor L. Jordan Jr., Swarthmore's senior assistant dean of admissions and director of multicultural recruitment. "So for students who can't afford to travel for a campus visit, or live in a rural environment where travel is limited, a fly-in program is invaluable to giving them insight into a college."

The program has grown over the past few years. It is now offered twice each fall and a spring fly-in program has started for admitted students.

Counselors and others nominate students for the fall program. Advisers at community-based organizations, teachers, and high school counselors can suggest students beginning in February.

"This allows us to begin communicating with counselors who are working with these populations sooner and give them a long runway to work with as they think about who to nominate," Jordan said.

Each campus develops a fly-in program differently, depending on their institutional priorities. Diversity and student engagement with campus resources are central to Swarthmore's fly-in program.

"One of the really special things about Discover Swarthmore is that our admissions office has a chance to partner with diversity and inclusion leaders on our campus and student groups in our cultural centers to create programming that raises up the voices and experiences of underrepresented students on our campus," Jordan explained. "This means when students arrive on campus for our fly-in they get a chance to interact with folks who share their experience and (they) can learn directly from them about what it's like to be a student of color or a first-generation-to-college student on our campus."

It's not just private small liberal arts colleges, like Swarthmore, that host fly-in programs—many public universities offer them as well.

The Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, started its All-Access Weekend two years ago. The event is

aimed at students interested in studying business and offers participants the opportunity to engage in different business-based learning experiences.

Like Swarthmore, the school also offers a second fly-in program aimed at admitted students. So far, Ross Preview Weekend has been a success: in its first year, 75 percent of participants chose to enroll after attending, and the number of students from limited-income families (\$75,000 annual income or below) rose 5 percent, according to C.J. Mathis, the school's assistant director of undergraduate admissions.

He noted that the Ross events are somewhat unique because they bring parents or guardians to campus along with their students.

"For many underrepresented students, college choice is a family decision," he said. "... It is equally as important to involve the family so (they) have a sense of comfort knowing if their student chooses our institution, that they will have the resources necessary to be successful and feel supported holistically."

THE IMPACT OF FLY-IN PROGRAMS

Fly-in programs have positive benefits for students, said Ellen Ridyard, director of Sponsor-a-Scholar at Philadelphia Futures, a nonprofit that provides resources for low-income, first-generation college students to ease access to college.

"We've definitely seen the impact of fly-ins in the way they cemented students' connection to campus and decision to apply early decision..." said Ridyard. "Students are able to capture significant fit details and heightened storytelling in their supplementary essays based on their time on campus—information you can't find by browsing the college website alone."

Philadelphia Futures has strategic partnerships with several colleges in Pennsylvania, including: Albright College, Arcadia University, Dickinson College, Drexel University, Gettysburg College, Franklin & Marshall College, Haverford College, Lafayette College, Lehigh University, Penn State University, Temple University, and Villanova University. Students visit each partner college annually during a day trip. And program staff encourage seniors to attend fly-in programs at any college they are seriously considering, although Ridyard notes that space constraints limit the number of students who can participate in any given program.

Fly-in programs not only allow students to learn more about a college and deepen their interest in applying. They can also help prevent students from making the wrong college choice, Ridyard noted.

"For example, last fall a student visited a selective liberal arts college with a strong math program and quickly realized that the learning environment was too small," Ridyard said. "From there, the student pivoted and focused their application efforts on larger, selective research institutions."

EDUCATING COUNSELORS, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS ABOUT FLY-IN PROGRAMS

Sometimes students and parents have misconceptions about what a fly-in program is.

Mathis recommends that counselors and admission officers encourage students to explore their options, while also being clear about the purposes of the program.

"For example, invitation to a fly-in program does not guarantee admission in many programs, so it's important that students understand this early in order to best manage expectations for all involved," says Mathis.



If a student really enjoys their experience at a fly-in program and decides that it's a top choice, it can be disappointing if they are not ultimately accepted to that institution. Likewise, students can face disappointment if they aren't selected to attend a fly-in program at one of their top choice schools.

"Even though students understand that fly-in programs are competitive, they still feel the sting of rejection if not selected to participate, and further coaching can be needed to keep a student hopeful about admission when a fly-in application doesn't pan out," advises Ridyard.

STARTING A FLY-IN PROGRAM ON YOUR CAMPUS

For a higher education institution that wants to increase access and attract a more diverse pool of applicants, starting a fly-in program can be one method used to accomplish that goal.

Jordan encourages any institution considering launching a program to do so, but he acknowledges fly-ins can be a "costly and time-heavy undertaking" for admission staff.

"Whatever shape the fly-in takes, it should align with the goals of the institution and take into consideration students who are traditionally at the margins in this college process," Jordan said. "All institutions don't have the same resources and therefore won't have the same fly-in program."

Some fly-in programs are national and some are regional. It is up to the institution to determine which type of program would best meet their needs.

When developing a fly-in program, Jordan encourages institutions to bring together campus stakeholders early and often. "Fly-in programs are campus-wide endeavors that include dining services, facilities, academic support along with cultural centers faculty, and students—your planning should include all these voices as you build and pull off the program," he advises.

Mathis says admission offices should ensure that there is support for a fly-in program both administratively and financially. "You may have to start small and grow your program, so determine what's important to your institution to create buy-in and be ready and willing to present the results of your program early and often," he noted.

April, with College Greenlight, recommends that colleges "know what they can offer."

"Fly-in programs that cover all costs are what many have come to expect for the communities that institutions are looking to reach, so even if you can only do that for a small number of students, it makes more sense to offer everything to a few students, rather than add costs for a bigger group," he says.

Some institutions require counselors to nominate students; others allow students to apply without a nomination.

"We think a combination of the two is the best option," April said. "Counselor nominations can be incredibly helpful in knowing that students have been specifically selected for a program and likely are a good fit for the opportunity. The purpose of fly-ins is to increase access, so we also like the ability for students to nominate themselves, reducing a potential access barrier."

And remember: Starting a fly-in program does not guarantee instant success.

TIPS TO START A FLY-IN PROGRAM

- Ensure there is support for the program both administratively and financially.
- Start small and grow your program.
- Determine what is important to your institution in creating a fly-in program.
- Get buy-in from all relevant stakeholders.
- Share the results of your program.

"Depending on the overall intended outcomes of their program, it may take time to see desired results," advises Mathis. "So, be committed to the purpose, but also continue assessing the program and adjust, adapting to the needs of the students as they pertain to your intended outcomes."

THE FUTURE OF FLY-IN PROGRAMS


Fly-in programs seem to be gaining in popularity and that trend is likely to continue.

"Institutions are recognizing building relationships with students from diverse backgrounds early in the recruitment process increases application and yield rates," notes Mathis. "Also, the traditionally aged college-going population is beginning to decline, and so institutions are having to rethink and be more innovative with recruiting students."

April predicts that fly-in programs will continue to reach another type of underrepresented student in the future.

"The future of fly-in programs is trending to support rural students," he says. "Students from these communities have strong roots and the counselors that support them encourage relationship-building. If they are going to leave home, which many of them want to, they need to know that it is going to be the right fit for them. Fly-in programs provide that opportunity without financially burdening the family and grow trust between the family and the environment (where) they will be sending their child for four years."

A fly-in program is a chance to not only engage prospective students from diverse backgrounds but also educate others in the college admission process about your institution's goals. From that perspective, it has even greater benefits beyond just attracting prospective students.

"A fly-in program isn't just a chance to talk to prospective students about your institution, but can also be a chance to educate high school counselors, community-based organization advisers, and teachers about how your institution supports underrepresented students," says Jordan. "It is good to think about what materials these influencers need to help their students make informed decisions about the financial aid policy or support systems at your institution." 

Elena Loveland (formerly Elaina Loveland) is a freelance writer and the author of *Creative Colleges: Finding the Best Programs for Aspiring Actors, Artists, Designers, Dancers, Musicians, Writers, and More*.

ENSURING STUDENT SAFETY AND SECURITY

SAFETY AND SECURITY IS A PRIORITY WHEN CAMPUSES PLAN FLY-IN PROGRAMS.

Policies vary by institution. Some programs set curfews and may require an adult to accompany a student on their visit. Other institutions select certain staff members to supervise visiting students.

On campuses where current college students serve as hosts, training is usually involved.

At the University of Michigan, where the Ross School of Business hosts fly-in programs, organizers adhere to strict guidelines and training requirements set by the university's Children on Campus office, said C.J. Mathis, assistant director of undergraduate admissions at Ross.

"In order to host minors on campus, the programming staff must complete the trainings and review the training every year," he explained.

In addition, for students to participate in the school's All-Access Weekend fly-in program, they must bring along "at least one parent, guardian, or an adult that the parent has approved as their guardian proxy (who) stays with the student," Mathias said.

The school is also careful about when it schedules its fly-in programs, avoiding dates that correspond with football games, local festivals, or party-centric holidays like St. Patrick's Day.

At Swarthmore College (PA), similar policies are in place to keep fly-in participants safe. Prior to arriving on campus, students fill out a permission form and share their emergency contacts, allergies, and medication information with program organizers.

Two members of the staff stay overnight at an on-campus inn and respond to participants' needs 24 hours a day. Students can easily access the contact information of the dean on-call—it's printed on the back of each attendees' name tag. And information about visiting students and their on-campus hosts is shared with program leaders as well as Swarthmore's public safety team, residential life team, and the dean of students' office.

"We have a safety plan that we review with staff before the program, so each member of the team knows what to do in an emergency situation, whether it be as simple as a bug bite or has severe as a broken limb," explained Windsor L. Jordan Jr., Swarthmore's senior assistant dean of admission and director of multicultural recruitment.

"The most important thing about safety during the overnight program is to provide families and students with the information they need in order to contact us if they require help, and that our team knows what to do if something should occur," he added.

Coordination before students arrive on campus allows for a quick response and assures families that their student will be well cared for.

"Fly-in programs are an all-campus undertaking," Jordan said.

—Elena Loveland



PARENTAL LEAVE

Policies vary wildly across the profession, but many say the benefit can help attract and retain employees.





By Ashley Dobson



When Quincey Malauulu Otuafi was looking for a new job in college admission, the parental leave and family-friendly culture at Westminster College (UT) was a huge draw.

"Westminster has a really great leave policy, especially when compared to other local institutions here in Utah. They offer 12-week full paid leave and they offer it for both parents...It was definitely a big factor in my decision to work at Westminster...I knew I wanted to start a family and this leave was fantastic," said Otuafi, Westminster's director of undergraduate admissions.

If approved by a supervisor, her school also offers employees the option to bring their child to work for the first month following parental leave, another perk that drew her to Westminster.

"I feel this constant anxiety about both work and motherhood. You feel like both your identity as a working adult and your identity as a mother, they seem like they shouldn't co-exist. Institutions like Westminster are really helping that intersectionality exist and normalizing it," she said.

But many others don't have the same options.

According to Pew Research Center, the share of moms who are working either full- or part-time in the US has increased over the past 50 years from 51 percent to 72 percent, and almost half of all two-

As Lundien and his husband started the adoption process, Lundien kept his eye out for counseling positions with this benefit.

"At first I didn't quite get the importance of it. It was a great policy to have and great for mothers and fathers who need that time to be home with their kids, but it never really clicked in until I had been home (caring for a newborn)—and it's a full-time job," he said.

"...It was so nice to know that school was left at school and I could concentrate on family. That's another part of the 'a-ha!' moment...There is no way I could be writing letters of recommendation, working on the Common App, and all that other stuff that goes on with our job while I'm trying to change a diaper, feed a baby, and tend to their needs."

At Worcester State University (MA), where Tiana Carrasquillo is the associate director of admissions, the current parental leave policy allows new parents to take up to 12 weeks of leave. Two of those weeks are paid and the rest is unpaid, leaving many employees cobbling together a patchwork of accrued vacation and sick time to receive pay for portions of their leave.

"Using accrued vacation and sick time is flawed because if you exhaust all of your vacation and sick time, you are left with nothing when you return. This means you can't take a vacation or be sick—yourself or

"Employers could potentially be missing out on strong, talented, skilled workers by ignoring the specific needs and wants of women with children...It's important for employers to be upfront about parental leave policies and office culture as early as the interview stage to attract and retain women with children."

—Tiana Carrasquillo, associate director of admissions, Worcester State University (MA)

parent families now include two full-time working parents. Yet despite these workforce changes, paid parental leave has not followed suit.

Of the 41 nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union, the US is the only country that does not mandate any paid leave for new parents. Every other nation requires at least two months of paid leave.

Five states—California, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Washington—and the District of Columbia all have state-mandated paid leave plans in place. Starting in 2021, Massachusetts will join these ranks. And as of last December, the US offers the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act, which grants federal employees up to 12 weeks of paid time off for the birth, adoption, or addition of a new foster child.

But paid leave policies in the US are far from the norm. Across the counseling and admission profession, parental leave policies vary wildly.

Rob Lundien, a counselor at Park Hill South High School (MO), was able to take eight weeks of paid adoption leave. His school district offers the same benefit to the primary caregiver of an adopted child as for birth parents.

your child—for the year before or the year after giving birth in order to save your time. Who can work for two years without taking a vacation or being sick? Then there is the question of what to do if you don't have 10 to 12 weeks of vacation and sick time saved? What if you would like to take more than 12 weeks to bond with your child?" Carrasquillo asked.

"I've known one too many mothers that have shared that 12 weeks just wasn't enough time and that going back to work was very stressful. Parents are forced to go back to work because they can't go without a paycheck...Unpaid leave sends a message that taking care of an infant isn't important, valuable work."

Lundien agrees. As he and his husband look toward the next hurdle—childcare—he is realizing just how quickly his eight weeks of parental leave flew by.

"While eight weeks is generous, it's almost like it's not long enough," he said.

Errol Wint, director of undergraduate admissions at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), said he notices that most new parents, particularly new mothers, end up taking a lot more time than is included in their paid leave policy.

"What is the message sent by how the policy presents itself, in regards to what you are supposed to be taking, rather than what is available to you? For some of the members of our team, they went ahead and exhausted their PTO. Others have gone into non-pay status, just to ensure they are there and present for their child," he said.

"It's worth a conversation about what the appropriate length of time is and what that says about American values and what it means to be involved in the development of your child in those early stages."

Wint started working at IUPUI in May 2018 and not quite a year later, he found out his wife was expecting. He was "pleasantly surprised to discover that just in 2017, IUPUI updated their policy to include the fathers, to have six weeks of paid parental leave."

Since Wint hadn't been working at the school for long and his child was due in the heart of recruitment season, he was worried about taking so much consecutive time off. He credits his boss, Boyd Bradshaw, the associate vice chancellor for enrollment management and chief enrollment officer at IUPUI, with making sure he took the time with his family and left work back at work.

"After taking my paternity leave, I was incredibly appreciative. Having the ability to take that amount of time consecutively off as an

great policies out there and then there are also schools that offer nothing. Where there is a will, there is a way. You have to provide something or you're not going to be able to retain quality employees. They are going to go to a school that has a better benefits package holistically, be it parental leave or something else."

Otuafi believes it is a benefit beyond just attracting and retaining employees. She said becoming a mother taught her to manage and prioritize differently and she believes her job performance is stronger now than it was before her parental leave.

"Parental leave is not just about the child. You want to take care of your child but it's about the person, about the parents. I think that as an employer, there is a lot of value to be gained by giving your employees the time they need for self-care," she said.

Otuafi was promoted shortly after she came back to Westminster following her parental leave and she credits some of that decision to the mindset she was in after her time with her family.

"In a weird way being on parental leave, having that time, provided a catalyst for that promotion in my career... It was really stressful before I left on leave so that time off, that time with my child, and being able to re-evaluate my priorities was invaluable," she said.

"Parental leave is not just about the child. You want to take care of your child but it's about the person, about the parents. I think that as an employer, there is a lot of value to be gained by giving your employees the time they need for self-care."

—Quincey Malauulu Otuafi, director of undergraduate admissions, Westminster College (UT)

employee of an organization to be there for my family, I'll never forget that," Wint said. "It was transformational for me and for my family and I'm incredibly grateful."

The option of parental leave—or the lack thereof—has a direct impact on employers.

"Employers could potentially be missing out on strong, talented, skilled workers by ignoring the specific needs and wants of women with children," Carrasquillo said. "...It's important for employers to be upfront about parental leave policies and office culture as early as the interview stage to attract and retain women with children."

Meghan Waddle, assistant upper school head at The Overlake School (WA), has taken this to heart. As an administrator and new mother herself, she hopes she can push her school to offer better benefits, such as comprehensive parental leave.

"I think we lose people all the time because of a lack of benefits in this industry... If you are seeing that schools that are the same size and scope as you are providing some amazing benefits and you're not doing that and you can, let's move the mark on that," she said.

"I know it depends on where you are in the country, and the strength of your school, and the history of your school, but there are plenty of really

"When I came back from leave, I came with a new mindset. Whatever was happening before I left, was happening back then. I'm going to start with a fresh perspective. I'm going to explore all of the possibilities around me. I think that allowed my office to see a different side of me because I was different. I was re-invigorated. My passion was re-ignited."

If employers want to reap those benefits, they need to create the right culture for employees.



SUPPORTING NEW PARENTS

Beyond parental leave, there are other factors that need to be considered if the counseling and admission profession wants to support new parents in the workforce and make sure students are still being served.

We asked members what that support would look like in an ideal world.

Quincey Malauulu Otuafi, director of undergraduate admissions at Westminster College (UT), would like to reinvent parental leave as a parental transition period. This would take place for the entire first year after becoming a new parent and would include initial leave, part-time work, and then on-campus child care.

"Helping with child care within that first year would really retain your staff. That would be huge," she said. "I would never leave! I would have many children!"

Rob Lundien, a counselor at Park Hill South High School (MO), sought out a job that included adoption in its parental leave policy and he wants more employers to factor that in.

"It's two different sets of challenges. When you have a baby naturally or (by) C-section, there are all kinds of things you have to work through, the recovery time at home is important. Even though we didn't deliver a baby ourselves, there have been so many other things with adoption," he said, noting the monthly home visits and court dates that are added on top of the typical baby responsibilities.

Denise Dalton, division chair for student services at Lemont Township High School (IL), said that she wishes new parents could take all of the time they need with their children and not return to work until they are fully ready. But to make that happen she would want "a pipeline of substitutes like we have for teachers."

"I would want to hire a certified, competent counselor with experience to come in and swoop down like Mary Poppins to take over her caseload while she's gone and then go away when she's no longer needed. I would want the counselor to feel supported and loved, but I would want to have that outside experienced help. That is probably the biggest challenge," Dalton said.

"When you need somebody for six to eight weeks, where are they coming from? It's easy to find someone who can come in and teach US history for six weeks. It's a lot harder to get somebody that can handle everything from cutting (to self-harm) to coming back from hospitalization to having special needs to getting into Harvard... In a dream world, we'd have a temp agency of retired counselors or something like that who could pop in and do these things at a moment's notice."

—Ashley Dobson

"I know it depends on where you are in the country, and the strength of your school, and the history of your school, but there are plenty of really great policies out there and then there are also schools that offer nothing."

—Meghan Waddle, assistant upper school head,
The Overlake School (WA)

Denise Dalton, division chair for student services at Lemont Township High School (IL), said she wants to make sure her counselors feel supported and celebrated when they take leave for a new baby.

"Maternity leaves are never fun to cover and yet, 'Yes! Bring it on!' How do you ever not celebrate?" she said. "Our training teaches us to be flexible people so as a supervisor of course we're going to be flexible. We'll always make it through."


Wint, who manages 43 people, doesn't take his responsibility to shape the culture of their office lightly.

"It starts from the top... I've had several staff members since [my leave] come and say they want to take paternity/maternity leave and it's almost a pay-it-forward. That's the domino effect," he said.

"Because I received such uncompromising support to take my paternity leave, the requests for leave that have come, I've made a point to go out of my way to congratulate them and tell them that we'll be okay and that they should take full advantage of the benefit."

Otuafi also found that her position as a leader in the office and as a mother has made her an even bigger proponent of parental leave. She has an even stronger desire to combat any stigma that still exists around taking leave.

"We have to be accepting of these new identities as parents and all the things it entails, just as we would with cultural differences and identity differences. This is a component of diversification in the workplace," she said.

"It's a priority for me as I work with my staff. It's okay to want a family as a young professional. It's okay to take the time that you need for yourself and for your family." 

.....
Ashley Dobson formerly served as NACAC's senior manager of communications, content and social media.

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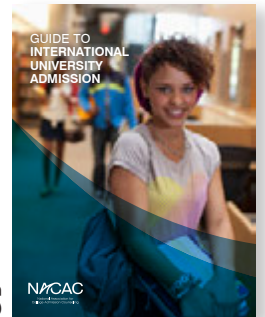
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By Jenika Heim



CONNECTING WITH CANADIAN STUDENTS

How to Build an Eh+ Recruitment Strategy

Being the sole EducationUSA adviser in Canada can have its drawbacks, such as choosing webinar times that are convenient for five time zones, but it is also full of perks. I get to travel all around this wonderfully diverse country learning about the provinces' different education systems and ultimately discovering what makes these students—separated by thousands of miles—Canadian.

As an American, born and raised in California, I learned little about Canada until I

moved to the nation's capital. (Pop Quiz: Name this city.) So, when I travel across Canada, I spend time getting to know the country, its citizens, and how American and Canadian students compare. I've found that our two countries have so much in common that our students can be approached in similar ways. Just like Americans, Canadians are incredibly diverse—foreign-born immigrants account for just 20 percent of the country's population. Canadians are also interested in majors across

the spectrum and believe in following their passion. Higher education is highly valued, as in the US, and is the goal for most students.

Differences do exist, however, which may make it a more challenging for a Canadian to decide to pursue study in the US. One of the major differences between nations is that American students are expected to "go away" to university. Living in the dorms is considered a rite of passage and essential to growing up. In Canada, it is very common for students to attend their local university as a commuter. The Canadian population is small

(only 37 million) and more than 80 percent live in urban centers, which are home to the major universities. Because of the expectation that the student will likely live at home and pay public tuition (almost all Canadian universities are public), families save with this in mind. Tuition varies by province and is approximately \$3,000 to \$10,000 CAD per year.

Although it's difficult to compete with local costs, according to the 2019 *Open Doors* report from the Institute of International Education, 26,122 Canadians are currently studying in the United States and 12,470 of those students are undergraduates. This makes Canada the fifth leading country of origin for international students studying in the US. So what are the motivations that can draw a Canadian south of the border? After interacting with thousands of Canadian students and college counselors, here are the factors I've found that make a difference.

Prestige: A degree from the Ivy League or other highly selective US university is a powerful draw. Thousands of Canadians are concentrated in the highest ranked American institutions. The most important thing to know about students applying to highly selective institutions is that they will draw a very specific line in comparison with their own local options. For example, if an Ontario student wants to pursue engineering, they may only apply to US universities that they perceive to be ranked higher than the University of Toronto, ranked 18 in the *Times Higher Education* World University Ranking. This, of course, will only be a small number of elite US institutions.

Competitive athletics: There are currently 4,190 Canadian NCAA Division I or II athletes attending US colleges and universities, accounting for a full one-third of undergraduate Canadian enrollments. If you consider Division III, NAIA, junior college, and club divisions, competitive athletes account for at least half of all Canadian students pursuing undergraduate education in the United States. I once spoke to an international admission officer who said, "We have 20 Canadians on campus and I have no idea why!" to which I responded, "Do you have a hockey team?" Low and behold, all 20 Canadians were athletes. I guarantee you

have at least one Canadian student-athlete on your campus right now.

Niche majors: Canada has 100 universities and 150 colleges with excellent programs in traditional and popular majors such as science, engineering, psychology, and business. But what about the student who wants to build musical instruments, manufacture scientific glass, or pursue a dual degree in the arts? These are all real examples of students who have looked to the United States because they simply cannot pursue their intended major in Canada, or, if they can, they have to move so far away that the United States is the closer (and warmer) option.

Networking opportunities: It is not lost on Canada's youth that the United States is their country's biggest trading partner. In almost any profession, having close US ties is an advantage. Many of the Canadian students I work with are interested in pursuing education in large city centers that are tied to international commerce and employment opportunities. They also want internships, co-ops, or any hands-on experience that will help them gain an edge when they return north. Currently, more than 3,500 Canadians are pursuing their Optional Practical Training (OPT) in the US, demonstrating the attractiveness of this post-graduate work option.

Small class sizes: Canadian universities are public institutions and tend to be medium to large. This means that a student who has become accustomed to a small, individualized experience in high school (particularly students at private or Montessori schools) will not find the same environment at the top-ranked Canadian options, all of which have more than 20,000 undergraduates. US liberal arts colleges can be a draw for these students and their families.

A truly American college experience: Canadian universities' identities have been formed around local commuter students and educational access. Campuses traditionally de-emphasize athletics and school spirit, and there is no Greek Life. The United States is a draw for students who want a residential campus, a college-town atmosphere, or the energy of "the big game."

The opportunity to learn English: Don't forget that French is the primary language for 7 million Canadians. Learning English in the US, especially for Quebecers, is an attractive option. Canada also has an ever-increasing international student population at all academic levels. Clearly these international secondary students have higher education options within Canada, but studying abroad in yet another country—the US—is an exciting draw.

Now that you can envision a few archetypal Canadian students, how should you approach recruitment in maple country? Here are some steps to take when creating a Canadian recruitment plan.

1. **Reflect on what makes your institution unique.** What is your university truly good at? What are your niche majors and work opportunities? What sports do you have and which coaches are recruiting internationally? What unique clubs and community experiences do you have?
2. **Conduct a Canadian audit.** Choose a major Canadian city, survey what the local universities offer, and see what you have that is different. I suggest going due north. Snowbirds tend to fly directly south. It's not logical for everyone to go to Toronto first just because it is the biggest market.
3. **Target your demographic.** After completing the audit, lean into the spaces that you can fill. This may mean going to high schools with highly specialized programs, like culinary arts, environmental specializations, or musical theater. Or it may mean connecting with organizations with a specific focus like robotics, cheerleading, or HOSA (a club for future health professionals).
4. **Consider Canadian specifics.** If you are able to make changes to your admission webpage, consider creating a section for Canadian students. There, make it clear that Canadian students don't need a visa to study in the US and provide information about TOEFL exemptions. These are the two biggest hurdles for most international students and they simply don't exist for

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

most Canadians. A special scholarship or Canadian pricing can also go a long way! If you are a border state, try to get your administration to buy into contiguous state/province pricing—especially if you already have it for your US neighbors.

Lastly, as you make your way to the friendly land of ice and snow, here are key questions you should be prepared to answer.

What makes your university unique? You already did your audit, so you got this.

Can I get a scholarship? For most families, cost will be the No. 1 consideration in decision-making.

Can I be recruited for my sport? Know your full athletic offerings. Canadians play more than hockey!

Is this degree transferrable? Canadians are very concerned with their employability when they return home. If you are promoting any professional degrees, such as law or medicine, take the time to see what provincial process students must follow to have their degree and credentials evaluated. Building a connection with that evaluating body is not a bad idea.


Do you know what a CEGEP is? If you are headed to Quebec, do your homework. Their education system is very different from the rest of Canada. Work with your evaluation team to

develop a policy on *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (in English, College of General and Vocation Education) credits before interacting with students.


If you are now super-psyched to visit Alanis Morissette's birthplace, come visit the EducationUSA advising office in Ottawa (Answer to the Pop Quiz!). Or better yet, join one of the Guidance Counsellor Forum events that take place in major cities across Canada. Contact Ottawa@educationusa.org for more information. [L](#)

Jenika Heim is an EducationUSA adviser in Canada.

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INCREASING THE TRANSFER INQUIRY POOL

Three admission leaders share best practices

For years, transfer student recruitment and enrollment has been pushed to the back burner, treated as a bonus to the entering class numbers for many four-year institutions. But as economic and demographic changes result in a smaller pool of first-year students, it will become increasingly important to refocus our efforts on transfer students—a segment largely untapped in the current recruitment paradigm.

Transfer student recruitment is, by its nature, an exercise in inclusive recruitment. Transfer students, especially those who began their

college career at a two-year institution, are more likely to identify as first-generation students and are more likely than their peers at four-year colleges to come from a limited income background or identify as a student of color. Two-year institutions also serve a larger share of nontraditional students than their four-year counterparts. A focus on supporting transfer students and facilitating seamless pathways between two- and four-year institutions is a necessary component of any equity and social justice plan within an admission office.

While the two- to- four-year pathway is the traditional approach to transfer recruitment, it is vital to recognize the importance of the four-year to four-year opportunities, particularly considering the steady downward trend in community college enrollment nationally. To address increasing the transfer inquiry pool, we must acknowledge the recent changes to NACAC's *Code of Ethics and Professional Practices* (CEPP). While the provision that prohibited poaching as a means of growing the inquiry pool has been removed from the CEPP, the following strategies can be used to grow transfer enrollments without utilizing this tactic.

TRANSFER TRENDS

Identify your target audience. Your admitted and enrolled transfer student profiles are a good starting point to identify the target audience that will become a reliable foundation for your inquiry pool. Identifying the students who choose to apply and enroll, while norming for ongoing recruitment and outreach initiatives, can provide valuable insights into what you are doing well. It also provides an opportunity to critically assess areas that need improvement, whether in your policies or practices. To expand your pool, study your National Student Clearinghouse data. You likely have former first-year inquiries and applicants who chose to enroll in two-year institutions. These campuses, particularly in secondary and tertiary markets, provide an opportunity to engage with an audience that has already developed institutional affinity and recognizes your brand, providing immediate momentum to grow your inquiry pool.

Allow students to easily opt into the transfer inquiry pool and easily reactivate their application. Opting out of the first-year pool should provide an opportunity to opt into the transfer pool, especially at the point of application withdrawal or declining an offer of first-year admission. This normalizes the transfer route and allows students to identify the path they intend to take.

Actively connect this population to the resources and opportunities available to them as a future transfer student. If your office has separate first-year and transfer recruitment staff, provide students who enter the transfer pool with a new point of contact and continue to send them transfer-specific messages. Develop a system of application reactivation for students who applied recently as either first-year or transfer students. Instead of asking students to formally defer their admission, allow them to simply reactivate their previous application/admission offer at any time within a year of that decision.

Create guided pathways. Provide wraparound support services to students that include both academic planning and transition support. This may take the form of structured

bridge programs, articulation agreements, or simply robust student support by admission staff. In Colorado, where we work, institutions can sign on to a data-sharing and student support memorandum of understanding with the community college system. The initiative allows four-year colleges to build their inquiry pool while also ensuring students receive structured guidance and support from baccalaureate-granting institutions during their time in the community college system.


While signing on to a large, structured program like this may not be an option for your college, each institution can create clear academic, process-oriented, and student experience pathways for prospective transfer students. If possible, work with your college's academic advisers to provide direct pre-transfer advising to prospective students. When students see a clear pathway to and through your institution, they become more likely to identify themselves as future students prior to submitting a transfer application.

Collect data at every turn. Though transfer students frequently enter the inquiry pool at the point of application, even with clear pathways, they often have previously spent time and energy indicating an interest in transferring. Simplifying the information request form on your website, adding a live chat feature to transfer admission webpages, or creating inquiry records when a student calls or emails to ask a question are easy ways to start collecting student data earlier in the process. Identify how your office's customer relationship management (CRM) system can help detect a transfer student "raising their hand," work with other departments to track additional indicators of student interest, and utilize that information in a meaningful and high-impact way.

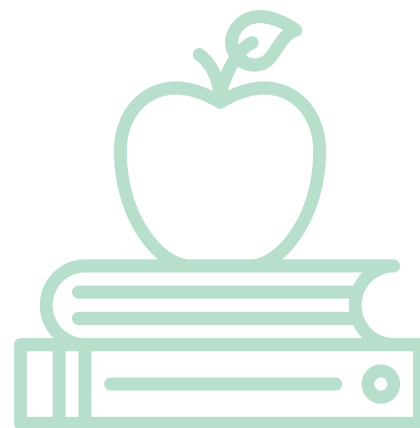
Engage in collaborative partnerships. Transfer recruitment, like all recruitment, should be a shared responsibility. One of the most important relationships to cultivate in this partnership is the relationship between the admission staff assigned to support first-year applicants and those tasked with assisting transfer applicants. Identify students in the first-year recruitment or application

review process who are highly engaged and have a desire to enroll in your institution, but want or need to take an indirect path to get there. And don't stop at identifying these transfer inquiries—actively engage with them.

Continuously improve your policies and practices. A natural extension of growing your transfer inquiry pool is patching the cracks that inevitably develop within your enrollment process. If you have cultivated a strong pool of highly engaged and qualified inquiries, but have made the application unnecessarily cumbersome or are delaying course registration until after courses have reached capacity, the energy and resources you committed to the top of the funnel will fail to yield improved returns.

Once a transfer applicant is in your pool, demonstrate your commitment to that student by quickly connecting them to the resources and opportunities they seek. This includes meaningful financial aid, expeditious credit evaluation, and clear information outlining their path to degree completion. A strategic, thoughtful, and student-centered approach to building your transfer inquiry pool is only the beginning of your journey to increased enrollment. 

NACAC members **Josh Gabrielson**, associate director of admissions at Metropolitan State University of Denver (CO); **Jack Kroll**, associate director at the University of Colorado-Boulder; and **Brittany Pearce**, associate director for transfer initiatives at Colorado State University, work with transfer students at their respective institutions.



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By Nicole Williams

LEANING INTO FIRST

Sometimes I feel like a sheep in wolf's clothing. A discerning and systematic higher education leader in front of others, confident in my questions and proposals, and always a voice for the forgotten and underserved. Yet, at the same time, I'm internalizing doubts of my abilities, the anxieties of being the face of one or more of my intersecting identities, and the (illogical) fear of being found out as an imposter.

Realistically I know that I have worked my way up through the ranks, constantly learning and honing my craft, while building a small but mighty network of education practitioners whose missions and values align with mine. I have diversified my skills and used the resources and individuals around me to grow my knowledge, and thus my opportunities within higher education.

But it feels like I worked so much harder to achieve what I have and deserve—an exhausting thought when recognizing I want to continue to move forward in a field and system that was not originally structured for me.

Many institutions of higher education have added career planning as a focus in their recruiting and retention strategies

for students. Some have even offered career development opportunities for their faculty and staff outside the traditional conferencing and networking events. I have had the privilege to take advantage of such opportunities as both an undergraduate and professional. Yet like many other first-generation individuals now navigating workspaces, as I balance various work responsibilities I must also overcome the cultural, financial, and social capital gaps that trainings just don't cover.

Being first-gen for many means figuring out how to negotiate the ins and outs of success and progress in the workplace. Especially in those early years as a professional, there is often little to no support available to help navigate salary realities (especially if you're relocating states away), new jargon, community-building, and personal social and emotional wellness. We as first-gen higher education practitioners, especially those who work in admission, have to balance the awareness of succeeding within a system we just started to learn ourselves, while also building pathways for our students' success.

And yet, year after year, we lean into resiliency and work our way through the challenges toward triumph. We find a way to make community where there isn't one. We code-switch and learn to lean into our identities as points of strength. We still often have to fight through feelings of survivor's guilt as we progress in our careers and work through times when we feel the imposter in institutions where we ironically search for student "fit."

But there is a strength in being "first." A lesson in overcoming and being resilient in spaces that seek to "other" you. A triumph in learning little by little to decode the hallowed halls of higher education. Individuals can lean into this, but institutions must do their part to create inclusive spaces where firsts can thrive, not just survive. [B](#)

NACAC member **Nicole Williams** is the associate director of admission for transfer students and an adjunct faculty member in the higher education master's program at Merrimack College (MA).

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