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Parent Involvement in the College Search Process

Abstract

This session is designed to stress the importance of parent involvement in the college search process for students of color. Attention will be given to programming ideas that challenge cultural, income, value, language and social barriers that have traditionally prevented parents of color from encouraging their students to pursue higher education.

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Why Involvement is Necessary

Many students of color have the desire to attend college, but are uncertain of how to prepare and become eligible for the college of their choice. By educating parents on college preparation topics we can help enable parents to become valuable resources to their students. This may at first sound like a simple project, but parents of color often experience barriers in believing that their children even have access to higher education.

These barriers may come in the form of cultural, income, value, language and/ or social experiences. Cultural barriers may include traditional ideas of higher education being a priority only for one gender, or being a secondary priority to working to help earn money to support a large family. Income barriers may come in the form of living in a low-income neighborhood, which in turn has under-funded schools. Value barriers may come from the parent's own experience of not attending college and still having a successful life. The value of a college degree may not be recognized or viewed as necessary to monetary success in today's world. Social barriers can be as basic as racism. While tolerance has improved in our country, racism is still a reality. Language barriers may be the most common. Many parents of color could be strong advocates for their students if they were able to communicate in English to school administrators.

For students who experience these same barriers, it is helpful for them to face and overcome them at the same time as their parents. Through educational and motivational activities like those listed below, students and parents of color will be encouraged to apply to a variety of higher education institutions, including those that enroll predominately white students.

Involvement Activities/Programming

In order to help overcome the barriers discussed above, parents need to be educated about access to and the rewards of higher education.

A. Information Sessions

Providing general information sessions that cover financial aid and college admission requirements are a good start, but parents of color need more. Targeted sessions on opportunities for low-income families are needed. Immigrant families also often need an explanation of the entire system of education in the United

States. It is vital that information sessions be offered in English and any other languages that may be dominant in the local community.

B. Campus Visits

One of the major problems with students of color not attending universities is that their parents did not attend. There is no model in place for the student to follow. While we cannot give parents a full college experience we can definitely help to get them on a college campus to get a taste of a day in the life of a college student. Interactive campus visits can be key in a parent realizing what their student may gain by attending a university. By visiting a campus the parent can see and sample resources that may help their child prepare for the future. Safety and separation issues can also be addressed by a personal conversation rather than by a description in a catalog. It is also important to include the entire family in the campus visit event, not just the prospective student. This offers both a welcoming feeling for the family and the opportunity for the parent not to have to worry about child care in order to attend the event.

C. Community Outreach

It is crucial that outreach efforts extend into the community setting. Most current parent programming is scheduled to occur at *K-12* school sites. While this may be convenient for the staff presenting the program, it may not be the most convenient for the audience that is being addressed. Programming should be scheduled during the evening and weekend hours at sites such as: local churches, service club meetings, youth program providers (YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, etc.) and work site locations.

Presenter

Nicole Jackson has ten years of experience working in Student Affairs and currently holds the position of Assistant Director for the Early Academic Outreach Program at the University of California-San Diego. She has earned an AS. in Business Education from San Diego Mesa College, a B.A. in Art History from San Diego State University and a M.A. in Educational Counseling from Point Loma Nazarene College. Professional organization memberships include: National Association for College Admission Counseling, California Career Education Association.