LESSONS from the
GO College Program

Making College Access a Priority at Four-Year Colleges and Universities
Making College Access a Priority at Four-Year Colleges and Universities

April 2016

Arnold L. Mitchem, Ph.D.
President Emeritus
Council for Opportunity in Education

Joan Becker, Ed.D.
Vice Provost for Academic Support Services and Undergraduate Studies
University of Massachusetts Boston
What is GO College?

GO College is an innovative model for delivering college access services to entire schools that enroll high percentages of low-income students. GO College embeds college coaches—staff of local colleges or community agencies—on-site in these schools on a full-time basis. Relying heavily on shared data and community collaboration, GO College works to align in-school and out-of-school programming to improve student achievement. Its ultimate goal is to increase college access and success for all students at each GO College high school.

GO College was chosen as one of the initial Investing in Innovation (i3) programs of the U.S. Department of Education. Additional support is provided by the GE Foundation.

What is COE?

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) is a nonprofit organization, established in 1981, dedicated to furthering the expansion of college opportunities for low-income, first-generation students, and students with disabilities throughout the United States. Its membership includes more than 1,000 colleges and agencies.
What Does the Term College Access Programs Include?

The term “College Access Programs” (CAPs) refers to a range of governmentally and privately-funded programs that have as their purpose preparing low-income students, first-generation students and minority students for college—and assisting them in applying for and securing financial aid. Many College Access Programs begin working with students in middle school, while others begin their interventions when students are in high school.

The oldest continually-operating College Access Programs are the federally-supported TRIO Talent Search and TRIO Upward Bound programs which together serve over 370,000 students annually.1 A second set of federal college access programs—that are hosted by states and partnerships of school districts, colleges, and community agencies — is GEAR UP.2 Several states fund pre-college efforts including California, New Jersey, and New York.3 A number of locally and governmentally funded programs belong to the National College Access Network and a directory of these programs can be found at http://www.collegeaccess.org/accessprogramdirectory/search.aspx. Additionally, several particular approaches to college access are noted here. These include: AVID, http://www.avid.org/; College Summit, http://www.collegesummit.org/; locally-funded scholarship programs, Posse, www.possefoundation.org/; Promise Scholarship programs, Say Yes to Education, http://www.sayyestoeducation.org and College for Every Student, http:// http://www.collegefes.org/.

---

1 More information about these programs, hosted by more than 850 colleges and community agencies in every state, can be found at http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html.


Making **College Access** a **Priority** at **Four-Year Colleges** and **Universities**

Who Should Use This Brief

The brief is intended for college and university leaders who are committed to equity and opportunity and are concerned that higher education in the United States is no longer a vehicle of upward mobility for people from low-income and minority backgrounds. Whether you are a trustee, the president, a faculty member or a college access program director or staff member, this brief is intended to provide a rationale for college access programs on four-year campuses and to highlight key characteristics of institutions that effectively use CAPs to advance institutional goals and priorities and maximize the impact on the success of low-income, first-generation students. The brief will also outline a set of steps institutional and CAP leaders can take to more fully integrate and leverage college access programs to fully impact college access programming.

“Once known for wide accessibility to and excellence within its higher education system, the U.S. now has an educational system that sorts students in ways that have profound implications for later life chances. More work is required to achieve the vision of ensuring all Americans have the opportunity to use their creative potential to realize the many benefits of higher education and advance the wellbeing and progress of the nation.”

Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the US 2016 Historical Trend Report
High Inequality and Widening Gaps:

In 2014, the 25 percent of dependent family members in the highest-income family quartile accounted for 54 percent of those bachelor’s degree attainees by age 24, while individuals from the bottom quartile accounted for 10 percent of the total. Together the top two quartiles accounted for 72 percent of the total bachelor’s degrees attained in 1970 and 77 percent in 2014. The bottom two quartiles accounted for 28 percent in 1970 and 23 percent in 2014.

Indicators of Higher Education Equity Indicator 5a: Distribution by family income quartile of dependent family members age 18 to 24 who attained a bachelor’s degree by age 24: 1970 to 2014

Indicator Status: High Persisting Inequality and Small Increase in the Gap
Between 1970 and 2014, representation of individuals in the lowest income quartile among dependent family members age 24 attaining a bachelor’s degree fluctuated between 14 percent in 1977 to 7 percent in 1992.

For Full Report See: http://www.pellinstitute.org/indicators
High Inequality and Widening Gaps: continued

20 percentage point gap in enrollment at 4-year rather than 2-year institution in 2012, compared with a 14 percentage point gap in 2001.

Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States, Equity Indicator 2a: Distribution of Pell and Non-Pell Grant full-time, first-time degree or certificate seeking students by level of institution attended: 2001 and 2012

Indicator Status: High Inequality and Widening Gap
Since 2001, the difference in the percentages of federal grant recipients and non-recipients attending 4-year rather than 2-year colleges and universities widened from 13 percentage points in 2001 to 19 percentage points in 2013.

For Full Report See: http://www.pellinstitute.org/indicators
College Access Programs and Institutional Interests

Many colleges and universities sponsor one or more college access programs (CAPs). While students who participate in quality programs gain important benefits, students who participate in a CAP that is located on a college campus gain additional benefits. Being on a campus regularly helps students belong, demystifies the college experience and students begin to learn how to navigate the world of higher education.

There are also benefits to the institution, although these may not be generally thought of as those that accrue to students. The central thesis of this brief is that the more the institution intentionally ties college access programs to institutional goals and priorities and integrates the CAP’s work into the work of the academic enterprise—teaching, research, scholarly activity, and service—the greater the impact the institution will have on access, opportunity, and equity.

Institutions have a variety of reasons for having college access programs. The mission of most public institutions includes an expectation that they educate the citizenry of their locality or state. Additionally, the mission of many private colleges and universities includes a service component. Helping low-income, first-generation students attain postsecondary degrees advances these missions. Increasing the academic preparation and thereby ensuring the college readiness of these students increases the likelihood that they will successfully complete a degree and also increase educational attainment in the community.

Diversity is another motivation. Colleges and universities are increasingly interested in establishing a racially and socio-economically diverse student body but they demonstrate troubling achievement gaps. College Access Programs help institutions increase their diversity in several ways. Pre-college students who have a positive experience with the institution form a pool of potential students. Strong and positive relationships with the target high schools increase the visibility and enhances the image of the institution with guidance and other school personnel and with the broader student population—further increasing the pool of diverse potential students. CAP students who enroll will be college-ready as a result of their participation. Also, the experiences of college access program students can inform institutional leaders’ understanding of the strategies and services that will increase such students’ enrollment and degree completion.
Guiding Principles for Maximizing the Value of College Access Programs

Most institutions that have CAPs have them because they are committed, at least on some level, to educational opportunity and equity. Many institutional leaders, however, don’t think strategically about how to position and leverage College Access Programs to advance the institution’s equity goals. Nor do they think about how to position the programs internally in the institution and externally in the community to maximize the impact they have, not just on students, but on the institution and the community. To reap the full benefits of having CAPs and ensure that the CAPs are demonstrably increasing access and equity, institutions should be guided by four core principles:

• Longevity
• Cultural competence
• Asset leveraging
• Strategic organization positioning — networking
Longevity:  
The commitment to College Access Programs is long-term

Institutional leaders who maximize the impact of their CAPs understand that it takes time to build relationships and develop trust with community and school personnel. They also understand how hard this is to accomplish in the face of historic neglect and broken promises to low-income communities. They must therefore make sure that the College Access Programs receive the support they need to ensure sustainability over the long haul.

This means that the institution provides oversight and guidance to safeguard that its college access programs are of the highest quality, are providing rigorous academic preparation, and are having maximum impact. Institutional leaders must first ensure that people are hired to lead the programs who have strong managerial skills in addition to their leadership and student development skills. Institutional leaders also need to pay close attention to the extent to which the CAPs are setting and meeting appropriately ambitious outcome objectives, the extent to which the academic interventions are in fact developing college-ready skills and the extent to which students, families, and schools are satisfied with the quality of program services. This also means providing support for using data to confirm that these outcomes are met and continually improved. Besides having a responsibility to provide the very best experience for the participants, none of the ancillary benefits of the CAP will accrue to the institution if the program is of poor quality.

A commitment to longevity also means that the institution ensures that CAPs have the resources to meet their objectives and to sustain the work as long as the need exists. If the institution is serious about college access, it will put its own “skin in the game.” Concretely, this means providing financial support. It also means providing critical in-kind support such as development and grants office staff to secure government and philanthropic resources to sustain and expand access programming. Proposal writing requires a particular set of skills and is time consuming; without assistance and dedicated time from staff with such expertise, CAP directors are generally unable to garner funding beyond the primary source. Leaders who are trying to maximize the impact of their access efforts actively pursue funding opportunities to enhance and expand existing programs as well as to implement new programs. A pre-condition to garnering additional resources is a good marketing campaign, aimed at a variety of audiences — faculty, administrators, alumni and external communities. Involvement of the communications team is vital.
Longevity and Funding Sources: Some funding sources are designed to promote continuity of programming in low-income communities and others are designed to support short-term interventions. Institutions should be cognizant of the differences as they put together a funding strategy.

TRIO Funding: Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Educational Opportunity Centers assist middle and high school students in preparing for and enrolling in postsecondary education (EOC’s also serve adults). These programs were established in conjunction with student financial aid programs and like financial aid, the legislation builds in a valuing of continuity of service to students and communities. TRIO funding is generally long-term, as long as institutions pay attention to these efforts and programs accomplish the outcome objectives set by the institution. Grantees that meet standardized outcome objectives receive additional or prior experience points in the funding competitions. Grantees must also demonstrate that there is need for the project—high numbers and concentrations of low-income, first-generation students who lack access to adequate academic preparation, advising, and college awareness.

GEAR UP: Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs were designed to promote reforms in schools that will eliminate the need for the program to be ongoing. Partnerships typically provide college awareness and preparation services for targeted 1-2 grade-level cohorts of students beginning no later than when the students are in the 7th grade through high school completion. State grants provide scholarships as well as awareness and preparation services. In addition to providing direct services to students, grantees provide services to teachers and administrators aimed at school improvement. Renewal applications for funding are considered de novo.
**HCOP:** The U.S Department of Health and Human Services aims to increase the diversity of the health care workforce through the recruitment and training of individuals, including non-traditional students and veterans, from educationally or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The HCOP grant program focuses on three key milestones of education:

1. graduation from high school
2. graduation from college
3. completion of a health profession degree program.

**Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented:** This students’ education program aims to carry out a coordinated program of scientifically-based research, demonstration projects, innovative strategies, and similar activities designed to build and enhance the ability of elementary and secondary schools to meet the special education needs of gifted and talented students. The major emphasis of the program is on serving students traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs, particularly economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient (LEP), and disabled students, to help reduce the serious gap in achievement among certain groups of students at the highest levels of achievement.

**AmeriCorps:** A number of colleges enhance their core college access programs by including recent college graduates in tutoring, mentoring and other roles. AmeriCorps “volunteers” receive stipends as well as funds to pay off loan debt or pay for additional education after they complete their service.

**Faculty Research Grants:** A number of agencies that fund federal research grants encourage the promotion of community outreach in these efforts. Faculty directing these research programs are often willing to involve college access program students in that research as interns or lab assistants in furtherance of that goal.
Cultural Competence: The institution staffs its College Access Programs with culturally competent personnel

Institutional leaders understand the importance of cultural competence. In addition to the basic qualifications for their position, CAPs staff members need to be culturally competent. One of the challenges facing those who develop and manage effective CAPs on college campuses is the necessity of understanding, valuing and being able to work effectively in and with different cultures. Clearly, staff members need to understand and relate to the cultures of the students they serve. But to be effective, CAPs need staff members who understand the culture of higher education generally and the culture of their institution. CAPs also need staff members who understand the culture of high schools. While it is not essential that all staff understand all of these venues, it is important that people are able to competently navigate the cultural contexts of varying settings. The college or university needs staff that can also act as their proxy in fast-moving situations.

The Culture of Students

It is essential that staff working directly with CAP students have a strong understanding of and high regard for the culture and/or cultures of the participants. This is more than simply having staff that are of the same ethnic or racial background as the students served, although race and ethnicity cannot be ignored. Similarly, in putting together a CAP team, the class experiences of the staff matter. Individuals whose only experience is that of a middle-class life, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, may not be equipped to understand the challenges facing CAP students. Every effort should be made so that at least some staff is from backgrounds similar to the students. Staff must be able to walk the walk and talk the talk. Students need role models who can transmit the cultural competencies needed to succeed in college through the lens of the student’s culture.
The Culture of Colleges and Universities

Colleges possess a distinct culture and the individuals who choose to work at these institutions do so, at least in some part, because of cultural factors – a commitment to learning and academic rigor, understanding defined areas of knowledge and the creation of new knowledge. But they also have to work within the norms of the primacy of the faculty, shared governance, and collegiality. Cultural dynamics vary—the culture of a public research institution, for example, is very different from that of a smaller, religiously-based, liberal arts college. It is important that at least some of the individuals working in the CAP appreciate and enjoy the cultural dynamics within colleges and universities. Absent this, the CAP is always on the outside and lacks the tools to access institutional resources and networks. A finding of GO College is that this skill is lacking in many CAPs.

The Culture of High Schools

High schools have their own unique culture and can feel to the uninitiated like worlds unto themselves. At least some staff of the CAP, if it is to operate as a genuine partner to the high schools from which it draws students, must be familiar with and able to negotiate the high school landscape. They need to know the language of the high school and school system procedures as well as the unwritten rules. Staff working within the schools also need to understand the accountability systems under which administrators, teachers, and students operate and the pressures these systems put on students and staff.
Asset Leveraging: The institution views and treats its College Access Programs as assets

Institutional and CAP leaders should look for synergies to create opportunities that leverage these assets to broaden and deepen access

Institutional leaders who are maximizing the impact of their CAPs understand that the programs are assets that can be leveraged in a number of important and mutually beneficial ways. Certainly, CAPs are an asset when their work advances the mission of the institution and creates tangible evidence of a commitment to service and a strengthening of the local community. Institutional leaders who want to fully maximize the impact of CAPs on access and equity will push further. They understand the value of using the knowledge they gain from the CAPs to inform their strategies and ensure successful enrollment and degree completion for low-income, first-generation students on their campus.

Institutional leaders and CAP staffs who are trying to push further seek opportunities to integrate CAPs into the institution and to advance institutional priorities and work. For example, CAPs hire tutors, mentors, teaching assistants, teachers, and the like and are a great source of employment for the institution’s undergraduate and graduate students, providing supervised pre-professional and professional training. A more integrated and impactful approach would be to build CAP internships and work experience into teacher, guidance counselor, school counselor, and other preparation programs. One example is to require students in the teacher prep program to tutor in a CAP for a portion of their pre-practicum hours.

CAPs are also a potential research partner for faculty and graduate students interested in K-12 student success, the transition to college, educational opportunity, and related scholarly activity. Institutional leaders can maximize faculty involvement by widely disseminating information about the CAPs, encouraging partnerships between individual departments and the college access office, and recognizing and compensating faculty and administrators who devote time and expertise to college access programs. The evidence of effectiveness and knowledge that is generated through partnerships between faculty and CAPs informs improvements in the CAPs. It also strengthens CAPs staff and their supervisors’ ability to make the case for the programs—internally to senior leaders and externally to funders.
Strategic Organizational Positioning and Networking:

The institution should position the CAPs so that staff has access to key leaders and departments within the institution as well as to networks internal to and external to the college. Institutions wanting to maximize the impact of their college access programs are intentional about where they place the CAPs in the organizational structure. More important than the specific unit in which the CAP is housed, is whether the program is in a reporting line with strong connections to the academic units and the areas housing retention and support services. It is also important that the director’s supervisor and intermediate supervisor be personally committed to and understanding of access issues.

CAPs staff need to be part of a network of relationships on campus that ensure the ongoing integrity of the program, and bring needed human and financial relationships from a variety of units and departments to the CAP. As discussed previously, this includes strong relationships with the grants, development, marketing, and governmental relations offices. It also includes strong relationships with faculty and key administrators. Things change; people retire or assume additional responsibilities. Institutional leaders understand that CAPs are vulnerable and they take reasonable steps to protect CAPs’ long-term viability by embedding them in an infrastructure of support.

In addition to strong internal networks, CAPs staff need to be part of important networks at the district, school and community levels to identify and effectively serve low-income, first-generation students. CAPs staff need to be visible in their target schools and serve on school-based committees. They also need to get involved in initiatives and committees at the district and community levels. These involvements and relationships provide CAPs with important information and resources. They also enable CAPs services to be more effectively integrated and coordinated with school and community resources.
Putting Together an Action Plan

Building the infrastructure for CAPs and integrating them into the institution does not just happen. The development of a strong base takes thoughtful planning and investment of a range of resources over a period of time. It also requires a range of skills and relationships that are also developed over time. While these principles might seem obvious on their face in academic departments, they apply equally to college access. A college or university doesn’t “become good” at college access with low-income, first-generation students and students from underrepresented groups right out of the box.

**Step 1** Shift the mind-set. Rather than looking at college access programs in isolation and outside of the institution’s academic mission and student success goals, view them as integral to advancing the mission and goals.

**Step 2** Create a College Access Partnership Council. Bring needed political intelligence and human resources to the CAPs and the institution that hosts them and needed resources to partnering schools and organizations by involving key internal and external leaders.

1. Involve the most senior person at the institution with a deep commitment to college access in the selection and appointment of members to the Partnership Council. That individual – the President, Provost, Academic Vice-President, should appoint the members to the council and welcome them to the first meeting each year.

2. Consider the constituencies and individuals that it will be most strategic to involve – the administration, faculty, alumni, the development office, community, the schools and district, employers.

3. Get powerful and resourced people on the Partnership Council, but not so powerful or resourced that they overwhelm the staff of the CAP.
4. Choose the Chairperson thoughtfully. Choose a person with time to devote to the work of the council; someone who is culturally competent and who has had experience with boards. Choose a person who understands the college/university and who has a real commitment to access.

5. Keep the Partnership Council to 10-12 committed people who meet three to four times per year. Keep the agenda focused to a small number of doable, but highly impactful action items.

**Step 3** Assess the extent to which the institution’s CAPs currently have the resources and infrastructure necessary to maximize their impact as well as the extent to which the institution is fully capitalizing on its college access assets. Involve members of the Partnership Council in the assessment.

**Check List**

- Is the pre-college access work explicitly tied to institutional mission and priorities? To what extent does the institution talk about the ways in which CAPs advance the priorities of the institution?
- How does the institution ensure quality and the attainment of ambitious outcomes? How and to what extent does it use data to assess quality and impact, and to inform improvement?
- Who is being served? Is there overlap; if so where? Gaps in who is being served? What works/doesn’t work?
- What resources (financial and in-kind) is the institution contributing to college access work? What is the plan to invest further?
- Is college access programming positioned in a way to maximize the impact it has on student access and success?
  1. To what extent and how do the CAPs inform institutional efforts with low-income, first-generation students?
  2. What departments/offices and faculty/staff do CAPs staff work with and in what ways?
Check List  CONTINUED

☑ To what extent are CAPs staff and the college access work strategically connected to internal and external networks?

1. What structures exist internally for cross unit work, teams, discussion? To what extent are the CAPs at these tables?

2. What external networks are the CAPs involved in? Should be involved in?

3. What networks do institutional leaders participate in that could be leveraged to enhance the capacity of the CAPs to engage in their work to better serve their students?

☑ What partners are the CAPs staff working with and what is the value-added for each partner?

Step 4  Analyze the data and develop an action plan. Based on the data from the assessment, look for and create opportunities to enhance the resources/infrastructure for the CAPs and to integrate the work of the CAPs into the academic mission of the institution. Develop a short and long-term plan for building from your current situation to the infrastructure needed to fully leverage the college access work, understanding that it will take time to build. Involve the Partnership Council in the development of the action plan.
Conclusion

To fully capitalize on and maximize the impact of College Access Programs, the colleges and universities that host these programs must invest time and resources to build needed infrastructure. This is necessary to ensure that the CAPs are providing excellent, high-impact services and are developing academically-prepared, college-ready students. Institutions must also invest time and resources into building the infrastructure needed to integrate the CAPs into the academic enterprise. Given that time and resources are always in short supply, it is important to think about how to build incrementally and strategically. One low-cost place to start is to talk more about the ways that CAPs are advancing the institution’s mission and interests. As the awareness of and mindset about CAPs shifts there will be more opportunities to connect CAPs work to the work of the faculty and staff.
Biographies

Arnold Mitchem
President Emeritus, Council for Opportunity in Education

Arnold Mitchem has been a voice for low-income, first-generation students and individuals with disabilities his entire career. Thanks to his work, the federally funded TRIO Programs have expanded by nearly 400% and now serve more than 872,000 students at 1,200 colleges and universities.

He began his career on the History faculty at Marquette University in Milwaukee and was named the Director of the Educational Opportunity Program in 1969. He relocated to Washington, D.C. in 1986 to serve as President of the Council for Opportunity in Education until October 2013.

Dr. Mitchem has been awarded Honorary Doctorates from eleven universities: CUNY-Lehman College in New York; DePaul University; University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana; the University of Liverpool, England, Marquette University; Marycrest College; University of Massachusetts at Boston; Lewis University; St. Joseph University in Philadelphia; St. Louis University; and SUNY Buffalo State.

Joan Becker
Vice Provost for Academic Support Services and Undergraduate Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston

Joan Becker provides leadership for Undergraduate Studies and the University Advising Center, Academic Support Programs, the Office of Career Services and Internships, the Ross Center for Disability Services, and Pre-collegiate and Educational Support Programs. She oversees seven grant-funded programs which generate $3 million annually and are an important pipeline for low-income, first-generation students. Among the university committees she has recently served on are the Undergraduate Research Task Force, the University Assessment Council, and the Graduation Rates Workgroup. She is currently co-chairing the Strategic Planning Implementation Group. Becker co-directs the Training Core for the university’s partnership with the Dana-Farber Harvard Cancer Center and is a member of the partnership’s executive committee. Becker represents Boston’s higher education institutions on the Success Boston Strategy Group and is a member of the Boston After School and Beyond Partnership Council. Becker received her bachelor’s degree from Wellesley College and her Doctorate in Education from Harvard University.

LESSONS from the GO College Program
LESSONS from the GO College Program

Developed and Made Available Through Support from the GE Foundation

About the GE Foundation

The GE Foundation, the philanthropic organization of GE, is committed to building a world that works better. We empower people by helping them build the skills they need to succeed in a global economy. We equip communities with the technology and capacity to improve access to better health and education. We elevate ideas that are tackling the world’s toughest challenges to advance economic development and improve lives. The GE Foundation is powered by the generosity and talent of our employees, who have a strong commitment to their communities. We are at work making the world work better.