

COLLEGE ACCESS: FINDINGS ON THE FAFSA COMPLETION INITIATIVE

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A dissertation submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Baltimore, Maryland

June, 2016

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Abstract

This paper discussed research that was conducted on college access and the impact on counselor practice resulting from participation in the FAFSA Completion project. The key concepts of lack of academic preparation, absence of encouragement and role models, environmental constraints, and shared belief in myths about college and other cognitive defeatisms were explored from a social cognitive and socioeconomic perspective. Recurring themes of student academic preparation, counselor access to data, training and counselor outreach were determined to be crucial to effective counseling of high school students

Keywords: FAFSA, college access inhibitors, barriers to college, high school counseling

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SCHOOL of EDUCATION

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Acknowledgements

To my parents, Keith D. and Dr. Nancy C. Essex.

Thank you for your unconditional love, support and encouragement.

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Chapter 1: Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential changes in professional practice resulting from high school counselors' participation in the national FAFSA Completion Initiative. Because FAFSA completion has been demonstrated to positively impact college selection and college enrollment, even incremental improvements in high school counselor college advising have the potential to impact college access.

Summary

This study examined college access and the impact on counselor practice resulting from participation in the FAFSA Completion project. A literature review explored the concepts of (a) educational attainment, (b) differences in individual student attributes, (c) variability in school characteristics, (d) importance of effective college counseling, (e) importance of effective college financing advising, and (f) role of the FAFSA and the U.S. Department of Education as college access impact factors. Within the framework of a qualitative research design, FAFSA Completion Initiative high school sites were identified, participant high school counselors were selected, and information was collected and analyzed. Key findings were identified following the collection of data via two instruments; a survey and an interview. Findings were analyzed and correlated across instruments, as the two instruments were different in format and intent. Findings were grouped into four key emergent themes of (a) counselor preparation and training, (b) FAFSA-specific outreach, marketing and community engagement, (c) FAFSA convenings and resultant change in professional practice, and (d) student and family engagement best practices and peer sharing. Data collected from the two instruments

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indicated a strong positive relationships between the activities of the FAFSA Completion convening(s) and changes in individual school counselor practice. Participants reported positive changes in their professional practice in the areas of (a) peer sharing, (b) networking effectiveness, (c) provision of tools, information and service; (d) customization of outreach to targeted audiences, and (e) enhanced student and family engagement.

Chapter 2: Introduction of the Problem of Practice

Overview of POP

This study was informed by the real and perceived barriers students face when transitioning from high school to college and the factors that can serve to mitigate or remove such barriers. In the broadest sense, this research sought to inform the historical problems of educational immobility, socioeconomic lock and inequity in access to information and resources that impact a student's ability to make an informed decision about his or her postsecondary educational opportunities. The Problem of Practice is rooted in the inconsistent and insufficient lack of information high school students receive from school counselors about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The impact of the national FAFSA Completion Initiative on counselor professional practice in the area of college access was explored.

Literature Review

Factors impacting college access.

Educational attainment.

Successful completion of high school is arguably the most important factor in college access (Perna & Titus, 2005). The good news is that for the 2012-2013 academic year, the U.S. high school graduation rate reached an all-time high at 81% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This reflects a seven point gain, from 74%, in 1990 (NCES, 2015). The increase could be attributed in part to bold national goals that have been put in place and the continuity of effort over time. During the 1990 State of the Union address, President George H.W. Bush established a goal of 90% high school graduation rate by 2000. Although the goal was not reached, it was reaffirmed by

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Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama (America's Promise Alliance, 2013) and the U.S. is making slow, but steady, progress toward the goal (NCES, 2015). Additionally, an important factor to consider is that the official high school graduation rate does not reflect the actual national high school educational attainment rate because it does not count individuals who pursue a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) credential after high school. In 2014, some 9% of 25- to 29-year-olds had received at least a high school diploma or its equivalent (NCES, 2015). Unfortunately, as will be discussed more in-depth in the following section, despite an all-time high graduation rate large groups of students are being left behind.

If high school graduation rates are viewed as a measure of students' level of readiness for college or career then college graduation rates can be seen as a proxy for the nation's level of preparedness to compete in a global economy (Deborah, 2001). In 1995, the United States was first among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries in proportion of the population that had completed a postsecondary education, with 33% of Americans having attained a college degree. But in the last twenty years as more countries focused on boosting their proportion of college graduates, the average OECD college completion rate increased from 20% to 38%. As a result, even though the U.S. increased its college completion rate from 33% to 46%, the U.S. still fell from 1st to 12th position among OECD members (OECD, 2014). Even with increases in overall postsecondary enrollment, the U.S. has failed to grow the number of college graduates enough to offset the increases in 11 other OECD countries.

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Despite great progress in increasing secondary and postsecondary graduation rates, the U.S. is at risk of not being able to sustain prosperity over the long-term nor compete in a global economy that is characterized by rapid change and highly educated workers (Deborah, 2001). Recently, research has begun to focus on the shifting paradigm of global leadership and the potential for a diminishing U.S. role due in part to an inability to increase education within the population fast enough (Hanushek, 2002). Clearly, there is justification for concern with regard to the current structure of secondary schools and their ability to significantly increase high school completion and successful transition to college and career. Hanushek (2002) suggests those who resist comprehensive school reform woefully misunderstand the nature of economic growth and its connection to educational achievement.

Having discussed educational attainment and college access from a national perspective, we now turn our attention to ways in which a student's individual attributes can impact college access. Special attention is paid to the attributes of race, socioeconomic status, language, gender, parental impact and influence, and variability in school characteristics as potential impacts upon an individual's thinking about college planning, application, financing and attendance.

Differences in individual student attributes.

Race.

In the United States, race plays a significant role in the calculus of educational attainment. Gaps in students' educational completion which are clearly connected to race are a social justice concern, both because of the serious long-term social and economic consequences, and because despite decades of research and reform, these gaps have

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proven to be worryingly recalcitrant (Braun, Wang, Jenkins, & Weinbaum, 2006). The past several decades have seen a renewed emphasis on school reform and focus on increasing the graduation rates of students, but virtually no reduction in the completion gap that exists between races has resulted, even though that gap has been demonstrated to follow minority students well after they have successfully transitioned to college (Lee, 2006). Despite a rising high school graduation rate, a stark disparity exists in high school completion among racial groups. For high school students who graduate within 4 years of first starting 9th grade, the graduation rates for Whites (85%), Blacks (68%), Hispanics (76%) and Asians (93%) clearly demonstrate a graduation gap that is delineated by race (NCES, 2015). The gap is particularly significant between Asians and Blacks (25 points) and Asians and Hispanics (17 points) which is often lost in the discussion on race and attainment that has traditionally focused on Whites and Blacks.

With regard to college completion, great strides have been made in increasing postsecondary attainment in the U.S. during the past 25 years. The improvement in college completion nationally is supported by increases in attainment among all racial groups in the U.S. From 1990 to 2014, the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds who had attained a bachelor's or higher degree increased for Whites (from 26% to 41%), Blacks (from 13% to 22%), Hispanics (from 8% to 15%), and Asians (from 43% to 61%) respectively (NCES, 2015). At the same time, the gap in the attainment rate between Whites and Blacks widened from 13 to 20 percentage points, and the gap between Whites and Hispanics widened from 18 to 25 percentage points (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

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Minorities in the U.S. continue to confront barriers to higher education such as lack of academic preparation (Flowers & Pascarella, 2003), lack of college admission information (Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, & Toliver, 2005), limited social and cultural capital (Wassmer, Moore, & Shuloc, 2004) and insufficient planning and savings (Fisher & Montalto, 2010).

Socioeconomic status.

The Socioeconomic Status (SES) of a student's family impacts the student's educational aspirations and accomplishments (Duncan, Rodrigues, & Morris, 2011). According to recently released data, the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for the 2010-2011 school year was 81% for all students nationally, but economically disadvantaged students had only a 70% graduation rate (NCES, 2015). Trent, Lee and Owens-Nicholson (2006) posit that lower income students often struggle to resolve conflicting expectations of home and school, while middle- and upper income students benefit from the rule-based, time-limited, chronological nature of secondary education. Middle and upper income students benefit in numerous other ways in the academic process, including with enhanced summer learning (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001), disproportionate access to gifted programs (Sparks, 2015) and extensive tutoring (Glessner, 2015). As youth plan their transition to college, the SES status of their family continues to be a not-so-hidden constraint on their educational aspirations. In fact the likelihood that a child in the U.S. will continue on to college drops in tandem with declining family income; with family income, rather than personal ability, being a better predictor of which students will enroll in college (Bernhardt, 2013) and which will graduate from college (Lewis, 2006). Although tremendous improvement has been made

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in enrolling low- and middle income students in college over the past thirty years (Hycock, 2006) the participation and completion rates for low income students remains well below the rates for middle- and upper income students (NCES, 2015). The NCES data highlights the differences in degree attainment among SES categories. For those enrolled in a 4-year college in 2006, the completion rates were 50% (low SES), 60% (middle SES) and 77% (high SES).

If the college planning and preparation process is analogous to a game, then it could be said that the rules of the game are rigged in favor of those with social and financial capital. Jez (2014) leveraged the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (1997) and the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to examine the impact of family financial resources on college going. Not surprisingly, a strong positive correlation was found between wealth and college enrollment. These findings were echoed in research conducted by Kim and Sherraden (2011) to determine if parental assets had a positive impact upon students' educational attainment from high school to college. Their findings indicated that family assets are associated with children's educational attainment, with key attributes like home ownership and accumulated financial assets being most strongly associated with attainment. In fact, a \$1,000 increase in a family's annual income increases a student's achievement by 5%-6% of a standard deviation (Duncan, Rodrigues, & Morris, 2011). Studies show that many parents overestimate the cost of college and are therefore less likely to encourage their children to attend college. This may be especially true for low-income students who show a greater likelihood to be pessimistic about their ability to pay for college than their mid- and high income student peers (Avery & Kane, 2004; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2008).

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Language and citizenship status.

Language and communication in the student's home also have an impact upon college access. The gaps to access begin in high school where Hispanics, the largest English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) population, graduate well below the national average. For high school students who graduate within 4 years of first starting 9th grade, the graduation rates for Hispanics (76%) is below that of Asians (93%), Whites (85%), and the national average (81%) (NCES, 2015). While national high school graduation rates for specific foreign languages other than English and Spanish are not readily available, studies have determined a significant difference in graduation rates between English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and English-speaking students. In a study of Florida high school graduates, Watson, Miller, Driver, Rutledge and McAllister (2005) determined that LEP students not enrolled in ESOL programs for the 2000-2001 school year attained a 20.7% graduation rate, a 15.7% dropout rate, and a 7.2% retention rate. Limited-English-proficient students enrolled in ESOL programs had a 36.2% graduation rate, a 5.2% dropout rate, and an 8.7% retention rate (Chung, 2006). To put the student population in perspective, during the 2003-2004 academic year there were an estimated 1.6 million LEP students in the United States, with the highest concentrations in California (1,598,535), Florida (282,066) and Texas (660,707) (Batalova, 2006). As the number of ESOL and LPP individuals increase, school systems are going to be increasingly challenged to sustain rising graduation rates while simultaneously modifying college access practices to meet the unique needs of ESOL and LEP students and their families.

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Students whose parents do not speak English may struggle to navigate the path to college, particularly with regard to learning about and applying for financial aid (Burdman, 2005). Students whose primary language is not English confront gaps with their English-speaking student peers with regard to income, parent education levels, access to advanced placement courses, and performance on standardized exams; all of which impact college planning and enrollment (Contreras, 2005). In a national survey, Zarate and Pachon (2006) found that Latino parents and students lacked significant information about financing college and often received information much too late to realistically make informed choices about college. In addition, the citizenship status of an estimated one million undocumented students (Fix & Passel, 2003) serves as a perceived or real barrier for college thinking and planning.

Gender.

During the 2011-2012 school year, 84% of girls graduated high school in four years, compared to 77% of boys (NCES, 2015). And the graduation gap that appears between females and males in secondary school appears to expand as they enroll in college. Recent enrollment and completion data indicate a dramatic change in the status quo with women's college rates eclipsing those of men (Riegle-Crumb, 2010). Women are not only more likely to enroll in college, they are also more likely to persist and complete their postsecondary education (Adebayo, 2008). In 2014, the percentage of females attaining a bachelor's degree (37%) was 6 points higher than the percentage for males (31%) (NCES, 2015). For the same time period, females who had completed a master's degree (9%) reflected a 3 point advantage over males (6%) with master's degrees. The disparity in educational attainment between males and females is especially

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strong among minorities. Within public postsecondary institutions, 43.3% of Black females earned degrees within six years compared to 34.2% for Black males. At private institutions, the graduation rate for Black females was 48.5% compared to 39.2% for Black males (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; JBHE, 2014). And while females of all races are completing colleges at higher rates than males, there are significant differences between female racial groups with Whites and Asians pulling away from other racial groups (Garcia & Bayer, 2005). Youth experiences with regard to educational opportunities and self-efficacy vary widely and there is evidence that minority girls face obstacles that are very similar to the obstacles faced by their minority male counterparts; all of which serve to inhibit the successful completion of high school for minority girls (Morales & Sanz, 2007; Schneider, Carnoy, Kilpatrick, Schmidt, & Shavelson, 2007).

Parental impact and influence.

The parental role in facilitating college access for their students is well documented in the literature. Studies have shown that some students from disadvantaged backgrounds have very low educational aspirations, but with the involvement of even one parent or adult influencer in the student's academic work and college thinking, the student's aspirations can be dramatically raised (Bergerson, 2009). This is in part because adults pass on to children a system of attributes such as cultural knowledge, self-efficacy, language skills and behavior, often referred to as cultural capital, which collectively define an individual's class status (Bourdieu, 1986). McDonough (1997) posited that the cultural capital passed on to students by middle- and upper SES parents is the most highly valued capital in society and the closest fit with the design and expectations of secondary schools systems in the U.S.. Social capital, which is closely related to cultural

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capital, derives from a system of relationships with other individuals, particularly through relationships with groups and networks (Morrow, 1999; Perna & Titus, 2005). The primary function of social capital is enable individuals to gain access to other forms of capital, such as institutional resources, assistance and support (Coleman, 1988).

One of the most important manifestations of capital is financial literacy, which Yates and Ward (2011) define as the information and dispositions necessary to make informed and confident decisions on all aspects of personal financial management. There is broad agreement in the literature that financial literacy is very important but inconsistently (or poorly) transmitted to students. Explicit teaching and implicit examples of parents helps shape the financial literacy some students (Alien, Edwards, Hayhoe, & Leach, 2007) and teach them that managing resources is the means to achieving goals (Goldsmith, 2005). But most parents do not discuss financial issues in the home (Lyons & Hunt, 2003). A study by Jorgensen and Savla (2010) found that parents were perceived to influence children's financial attitudes and behaviors, but not their financial knowledge. Evidence indicates that the gap between financial capability and the increasing financial requirements of young people can have a significant impact upon college access and college persistence (Joo, Grable, & Bagwell, 2003; Yorke & Thomas, 2003).

With regard to college access specifically, the educational attainment of parents influences and is a predictor of college enrollment of students (Feeney, 2013; Trent, Lee, & Owens-Nicholson, 2006). Students with one parent who has attended college are also more likely to file their FAFSA earlier than those with parents who did not attend college, and in doing so hypothetically qualify for greater amounts of financial aid

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(Feeney, 2013). In addition to early applications, students from middle- and upper SES families are less constrained in their thinking about where they will go to college. In her study of SAT registrations, Niu (2015) found that students with college educated parents are most likely to send their standardized test scores to out of state schools and are most likely to attend college.

Variability in school characteristics.

The wide variability in U.S. high school characteristics is rooted in part in the historical, and continuing, effects of school segregation (Wells & Crain, 1994). Negative consequences of segregation impact instruction, facilities and safety as well as access to college planning tools and information (Richards & Stroub, 2014; Braddock, 1980). Perna (2006) suggests that the social and environmental context of the student is very important with (a) habitus; the school and community context, (b) the higher education context, and (c) the broader social, economic, and policy context suggesting multiple potential explanations for differences across groups in the acquisition and use of information about college costs and basic understanding of the financial aid process. Students attending poor high schools face a digital divide in obtaining information about college (Gunkel, 2003) and lack of motivation and encouragement to obtain the information through other means (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009). As a result these students are misinformed about the kind of preparation necessary for college (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Dounay, 2006, & Perna, 2005). High school institutional characteristics such as tracking, school type, size, composition and level of racial integration impact students' experiences of instruction and counseling (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). Habitus, the school and community

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context, are also significant influencers on a student's college-going thinking (Perna, 2006; McDonough, Antonio, Walpole & Perez, 1998; Bergerson, 2009). The attributes of traditional school benefit middle- and upper income students when navigating the college admission and financial aid processes and create potential barriers for low income students (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001). One of the mitigating factors in the traditional school setting is an effective high school counselor. Counselors that are engaged, informed and proactive with students about college planning can help increase the likelihood that low income students will successfully transition to college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). One factor in the lack of equity in college access is the diversity of high school student populations, with the racial composition of Black students' high schools having a negative effect on postsecondary school enrollment (Braddock & McPartland, 1982). This is in part because black students disproportionately attend under resourced high schools, and as a consequence, are more likely to be unprepared for college (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

The importance of academic preparation for successful transition from high school to college cannot be overstated. Students bring to the classroom inherent cognitive abilities, but the learning culture and environment at school have a tremendous impact upon students' thinking about their college potential (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). Students that attend schools with fewer resources, less challenging curricula, and student peers drawn from disadvantaged households are less likely to consider college to be a possibility, regardless of their own ability to perform well academically. Students in these learning environments are less likely to travel outside of their home state, less likely to

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follow news or current events from abroad and more likely to have a localized interpretation of events that impact their lives (Perna, 2006).

An important component of academic preparation involves equipping the student with the information and dispositions that he or she will need to navigate a world that is increasingly financially complex. The role that parents can play in helping a child develop these dispositions, collectively referred to as financial literacy, has been previously discussed. Now we will discuss how schools vary in their approach to delivering important financial capability content to students. At the federal level, the impetus for integrating financial literacy arrived with the final report from the President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy (Maloney, 2010). The 2008 report to President Bush contained 15 recommendations for improving financial literacy across organizations, including schools, colleges and universities. Acting in part on this call to action, the National Association of State Boards of Education recommended that (a) state boards of education be fully informed about the status of financial literacy in their states, (b) states consider financial literacy and investor education as a basic feature of K-12 education, (c) states ensure that [teaching staff] charged with teaching financial literacy concepts be adequately trained, (d) states include financial education in their academic standards and (e) states cooperate with each other to develop a common assessment tool for financial education (NASBE, 2006).

In a recent study funded by the National Endowment for Financial Education, researchers Way and Holden (2009) determined that 80% of the states have adopted personal finance education standards and guidelines, up from 42% in 1998. However, only 29.7% of teachers are teaching financial education in any way. Clearly more needs

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to be done to ensure adequate financial literacy education at all levels of education and to equip teachers with the tools, information and resources they need to do the job. Within the literature, there is wide variation on the approach to financial literacy pedagogy.

Ameser (2009) strongly asserts that financial literacy can easily be incorporated into all academic courses throughout a child's education. Kelly (2002) takes this proposition a step further by advocating laws that would mandate financial education in all schools in order to reduce the economic drain of over spending, lack of budgeting and general incompetence about financial matters.

Importance of Effective College Counseling

Having an understanding of the importance of the high school counseling role naturally raises the question as to why every high school does not have engaged, informed and proactive school counselors. Part of the explanation lies in the nature of the job within most school contexts. Today's school counselors work in a rapidly changing environment in which they are expected to provide education and counseling to large numbers of students while also preparing students for success in a technologically sophisticated, globally-oriented economy (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Within this changing environment, the evolution of counselor practice has not been gradual or incremental, but seems to be marked by dramatic shifts (Capra, 1996) to meet economic, political and education needs of the community. In a recent study Natividad (2010) described seven contemporary key areas of focus for school counselors as being (a) college, career, and class planning; (b) school programs and communication; (c) student personal issues; (d) working with staff; (e) student learning; (f) technician, teaching, and supervision; and (g) rules, regulations, and discipline. The key areas articulated by Natividad incorporate core

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competencies first proposed by Brown and Trusty (2005) and offer a framework for conceptualizing student advocacy and for developing advocacy competencies (see Appendix A). The breadth of focus of the key areas underscores the pivotal connecting role that counselors play within schools (Suero-Duran, 2010).

The effect of globalization and school reform policies have put pressure on schools to produce graduates that are equipped to compete in an increasingly global market place (Dahir & Stone, 2010; Feller, 2003; Ripley, Erford, Dahir, & Eschbach, 2003; Stone & Dahir, 2012). As states have mandated career and college planning for students, school counselors have been tasked with helping students match their high school curriculum with their postsecondary education plans (Trusty & Niles, 2004; Trusty, Niles & Carney, 2005). Many school counselors are also responsible for assisting students to be career ready (Gysbers, 2013; Holcomb-McCoy & Young, 2011) and to prepare for one of the most competitive job markets in decades (Anderson & Vandehey, 2006; U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2010). Lack of understanding about what constitutes either college- and career readiness has led to confusion within schools and the broader community (Gysbers, 2013). Bryan and Henry (2012) discuss the importance of school counselor collaboration with school personnel, families, and community members to foster strengths-based partnerships. Such partnerships are vital in drawing together the assets found in schools, families and communities to aid students' social and academic development. Collaboration with individuals and organizations outside of the school is especially important for minority and low SES students in aiding their construction a college-going mindset (McDonough, 2005)

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The expansion of school counselors role is occurring in the midst of a national counselor shortage (Belasco, 2013; Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Klaus, 2003; Portman, 2002; Venezia & Kirst, 2005) which means even less time is being spent on counseling duties (Bemak, 2000; DeMato & Curcio, 2004). And the expansion of counseling duties is not new. Several decades ago (Lortie, 1965) concluded that role confusion had been present in the school counseling field for some time. More recent studies (Murray, 1995) have confirmed that the confusion continues for many counselors. And it is not just counselors that are negatively impacted by role expansion and ambiguity. As school counselor roles expand, there is a risk of conflict with school colleagues over perceived encroachment in areas that others feel is their exclusive domain (Drury, 1984). Such conflicts are frequently escalated for resolution to school administrators who may or may not have a clear understanding of the school counselor role.

Research indicates that there is a gap in knowledge and expertise that prevents counselors from moving effectively into nontraditional ancillary roles (Colbert, Vernon-Jones, & Pransky, 2006). There is tremendous variance in counselor practice within the United States and counselors often lack the time or resources to interact and learn from peers in high performing schools (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). Variances between best practices and actual practice have negatively impacted school counselor identity and the establishment of national standards of practice for college and career counseling (Franklin, 2010). School counselors are also increasingly called upon to obtain and interpret data to inform their professional practice (Whiston, 2002; Whiston & Sexton, 1998) and face increased pressure for accountability in counseling interventions and programs (Dahir & Stone, 2003; Isaacs, 2003). The use of data plays an integral role in

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implementing school reform and assessing student outcomes in efforts to close the achievement gap, and to support of these efforts, counselors are called upon to transform school counseling and demonstrate the alignment of the school's counseling program with the school's academic mission (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011; ASCA, 2005).

The relationship between research and practice in school counseling (Bauman, 2004; Brown & Trusty, 2005) and the state of school counselor training (Astramovich, Coker, & Hoskins, 2005; Rowell, 2005) has emerged as a key theme of contemporary school counseling. Coordination among federal, state and school district officials has been identified as a key component of creating a system of accountability that links high school activities with college enrollment. A multi-year research project by the Consortium on Chicago School Research found that few states have made postsecondary enrollment and success a component of their secondary school accountability system (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2009). Teachers, administrators and staff tell students to think of their education as a continuum that begins in primary school and continues through college, but there are seldom performance measures, or accountability tracking systems, in place to demonstrate that schools sharing the responsibility of transitioning students from secondary school to college.

The tension that exists between official duties and de facto responsibilities can have significant consequences for counselors. Bryant and Constantine (2006) found that school counselors face an increased risk of experiencing mental health difficulties due to their multi-faceted, service-oriented role and lack of agreement on what constitutes successful counselor practice. Stress is known to be a factor in counselor performance, and the level of stress among practicing counselors is linked to their perception of what

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school counselors should be doing and their belief that they received adequate training prior to becoming counselors (Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005). The myriad roles and functions of school counselors leads to a feeling of being overwhelmed by the responsibilities of the job and the expectations of school leadership, students and the community (Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994). For example, school counselors often are tasked with performing case management duties, such as coordinating special education programs for students with disabilities, and feel that core counseling functions suffer when ancillary duties are added to their list of responsibilities (Franklin, 2010). However, college aspirations often can be encouraged by non-school entities, such as for- and non-profit organizations, which can take on critical roles in creating a college going culture within the community and augment the often overstretched and underfunded activities of local school counselors (Foley, Mishook, & Lee, 2013).

Importance of Effective College Financing Advising

School counselors serve as high school students' primary source for information about applying to and paying for college, and yet very little is known about counselors' impact upon students' college planning and enrollment. Data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 indicates that students who visit with a counselor for college entrance information are more likely to attend college and that the impact is greatest for students with low socioeconomic status (Belasco, 2013). In addition, researchers have demonstrated that low socioeconomic students are most at risk for having insufficient or inaccurate information about college admissions and financial aid (Bettinger et al., 2009; Perna, 2006; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Examples of the pitfalls that low socioeconomic

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students encounter include (a) overestimating the cost of college, (b) misinformation about the potential for financial aid awards, and (c) insufficient knowledge about how to academically prepare for postsecondary education (Hoxby, 2004; Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010). Students are not only impacted by their family's socioeconomic status, but by their socioeconomic environment as well. McDonough (1997) and Perna (2006) assert that the availability of college planning information is closely tied to environment and that students from low socioeconomic environments are unlikely to have adequate access to someone in their home who can advise them on college. As a result, low socioeconomic students more than any other group are at risk of failing to transition to college due to lack of access to a school counselor, lack of information received or inaccurate beliefs about planning for college (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). The importance of the counseling role is magnified when considering that parents of low socioeconomic students also obtain the majority of their information about planning for college from school counselors (Kim & Schneider, 2005). Therefore it is crucial that school counselors incorporate into their outreach efforts specific strategies for reaching parents. Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore and Day (2011) posit that the importance of the school counselor-student relationship reaffirms what human and social capital theories suggest, namely, that with time and opportunity schools counselors can increase the likelihood that underrepresented students will forge a path to college. Unfortunately, there is a negative correlation between the likelihood that a school counselor is sufficiently trained in advising for college and the proportion of the student population that is of low-socioeconomic status, with counselors situated in lower socioeconomic school environments demonstrating less mastery in college advising skills than

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counselors from middle- and upper socioeconomic school environments (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). The disparity in mastery of college advising skills exists, in part, due to the fact that at present only 25% of high schools require their school counselors to complete college advising (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011) and less than 10% of postsecondary counselor training programs offer information on college admissions or financial aid advising (National Association of College Admission Counseling, 2004; Savitz-Romer, 2012).

Added to the risk that school counselors may not be adequately prepared to provide counseling is the fact that students are being asked at earlier ages what their plans are for college and career. The push toward earlier planning has increased the pressure on school counselors to develop and implement effective college- and career planning curricula and outreach (Trusty & Niles, 2004; Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005). But not all students have access to the tools, information and assistance they need in order to make informed decisions about college. Bemak and Chung (2005) encourage school counselors to challenge policies and practices that do not promote equity in access, and to strive to ensure that all students have equal access to college preparation materials and resources. Such efforts to establish equity in access have less effect on students from medium- to high socioeconomic families since they are less vulnerable to the potential lack of school counselor preparation due to their ability to seek outside sources of information, tools and assistance to help them plan and pay for college (Espenshade & Radford, 2009; McDonough, 1997).

After conducting interviews with college counselors in urban school districts, McDonough and Calderone (2006) concluded that a disconnect can exist between

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middle-income school counselors and low-income underrepresented students' assessments of affordability. Therefore, when counseling students on college costs, staff would be aided by referencing the gift aid (i.e. free money) that is available through federal, state and college financial aid programs to help allay student and family concerns about overall cost. Middle-income and low-income families perceive college affordability differently and an awareness of the difference in perception can benefit the counseling efforts of CCR staff.

FAFSA and College Access.

Role of the FAFSA and the U.S. Department of Education.

Student access to financial aid for college is tightly linked to the FAFSA, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Since its creation in 1980, the U.S. Department of Education has been tasked with overseeing federal efforts to ensure equal access to education and promote educational excellence nationwide. This is accomplished by (a) establishing policies on federal financial aid for education, and distributing as well as monitoring those funds, (b) collecting data on America's schools and disseminating research, (c) focusing national attention on key educational issues, and (d) prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These tasks are a challenge for the organization because much of the authority for assuring equity in access is delegated to the states, with oversight by the courts, thereby narrowing the federal executive role to tasks such as monitoring enrollment data, sharing information about best practices, distributing grants and other funds that encourage best practices, and identifying those states or institutions that are not ensuring equitable access.

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The Higher Education Amendments of 1992 created a new financial aid application process, the FAFSA, which was designed to consolidate disparate federal, state and college financial aid forms into a common application. When students complete the FAFSA they are essentially applying for funds from the three largest providers of financial aid: the federal government, state governments and from the colleges and universities the student is considering. FAFSA applicants can have their processed FAFSA information sent to up to ten colleges in order for the college(s) to calculate potential institutional awards for the student. In addition, the student's state of legal residence automatically receives the processed FAFSA data in order to consider the student for state-based financial aid. Finally, the U.S. Department of Education uses the processed FAFSA data to determine the student's eligibility for federal student assistance. By streamlining and consolidating the process, the FAFSA enables students to access a wide array of financial aid with just one form.

Cognizant of the purposefully limited role of the federal government, an opportunity has emerged for the agency to focus on what role college and career counseling plays in enabling or inhibiting the successful transition to college for underrepresented and majority student populations, and to examine specific barriers to college for high school students and how they might be different for underrepresented student and majority student populations. The ongoing challenge for the U.S. Department of Education is to respond to changing congressional laws and Presidential directives that seek to mitigate or reverse some of the inhibiting factors of college access. The most recent was articulated during a State of the Union speech in which President Obama announced a new national target, known as the 2020 Goal, challenging the U.S. to regain

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the top position among OECD countries by once again having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020 (Kanter, 2011).

The myths and beliefs about college attendance serve as a major impediment to FAFSA completion and these barriers continue even into college (MacCallum, 2008). In a comprehensive survey of California community colleges, MacCallum documents that financial aid office characteristics and financial aid policies and procedures affect the enrollment, retention, and success of financial aid students. Dynarski's (2003) study of recent college students found that those who had successfully transitioned from high school to college with the assistance of financial aid were more likely to stay in college and continue schooling later in life than those students who had never attempted college. The need for closer collaboration between secondary counselors and postsecondary financial aid officials is clear to assure not only the successful transition of students to college, but also the long-term persistence of students once enrolled in college.

A critical component of increasing FAFSA completions will be the work that CCR professionals do to reach out to low income students and their families with information, tools and resources they can use to access and complete the FAFSA. Davidson (2013) posits that the four reasons why students do not complete the FAFSA are (a) the belief (either from experience or heard from others) that the form is too complicated to complete, (b) a generalized concern about the necessity of taking on student loan debt, (c) "other" reasons, and (d) a feeling that the student and his or her family had no financial need. Dowd (2008) found that many low income families are concerned about their students taking on loan debt, and in fact, colleges increasing reliance on student loans as a college financing tool dampens the college aspirations of

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lower-income students. Effective counseling from CCR staff can educate the student and his or her family on the array of financial aid for which the student may qualify, in addition to student loans. The establishment of a personal relationship between a student and college advisor has shown to be impactful on a student's decision to complete the FAFSA and enroll in college (Albert & Christopher, 2010). Another factor impacting the intervention is the timeliness of individual FAFSA submissions. Each year, ED makes changes to the FAFSA based upon Congressional law and Departmental policies and launches the online FAFSA form on January 1st. Therefore, the earliest any high school student can apply is on or after January 1st of his or her senior year in high school. Adults can apply at any time, based upon when they anticipate being enrolled in school. The FAFSA filing cycle runs from January 1 through June 30 of the following year, essentially meaning there is no application deadline during the academic year (King, 2004). During this time, the primary federal education benefits (e.g. Pell grant, student loans, etc.) are available to all who qualify. However, benefits from the states and schools are often limited to first come, first served. LaManque (2009) found that an individual's FAFSA filing timeline is related to their individual FAFSA knowledge, underscoring the importance of timely and effective college counseling. One of the challenges for CCR professionals is helping educate students and their families on the multiple, concurrent tasks that students must undertake during their final years in high school. Failing to submit a FAFSA before the relevant state deadline for state benefits can result in the student being considered ineligible for state benefits. Significant differences in the timeliness of FAFSA submission among low-income students has a negative impact on their financial aid prospects (Feeney, 2013).

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The financial aid programs administered by the federal government were established to assist the neediest students with their college financing, but over time the benefits of financial aid have been shifting to middle- and upper-income families (Long & Riley, 2007). This is compounded by a shift in how university operations are funded, with an increasing reliance upon student tuition dollars, of which student loans comprise a significantly higher proportion than 20 years ago (Dowd, 2008; Heller & Rogers, 2006). Widespread media coverage of the cost of increasing college and soaring student loan debt levels has further complicated the mission of helping students understand that gift aid is available, and that student loans are but one component of the financial aid package. The reliance on self-help aid, as opposed to gift aid, has promoted the myth that only the rich go to college (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). This underscores the value of assisting students with FAFSA completion efforts so they, and their families, can have an accurate picture of the aid the student will be receiving.

Previous Interventions within the Literature.

H&R Block FAFSA experiment.

An example of a successful community intervention involves a partnership between a tax preparation business and college access researchers. In a randomized field experiment, H&R Block staff provided tax preparation and FAFSA completion assistance to low income families to determine if assistance resulted in increased college enrollment (Bettinger, Terry-Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2009). Following the successful completion of the tax returns, clients were asked if anyone in the household is or would be attending college in the foreseeable future. For those families that indicated yes, the H&R Block professional provided one-on-one personal assistance in completing the

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FAFSA, in real time, using much of the data that had already been provided in the tax return. In follow-on research, Bettinger et al. (2009) discovered that clients who had received assistance with completing their FAFSA following the completion of their tax returns were substantially more likely to have a family member enroll in college in the fall, and receive more financial aid.

Chapter 3: Research Procedures

Research Design

This study was designed to identify changes in the professional practice of high school counselors as a result of participating in the FAFSA Completion Initiative. The study utilized a qualitative-based descriptive research design to analyze self-reported data collected from participants who are employed as high school counselors at FAFSA Completion Initiative participating high schools. The school setting was neither manipulated nor controlled and the collected data was not be altered or changed once it was obtained through survey or interview. No new variables were introduced to the school setting and any interpretation was based on a combination of researcher perspective informed by the literature and collected data.

Site Identification and Selection

As described in greater detail in Chapter 4, the intervention that is the focus of this study, the FAFSA Completion Initiative, was deployed as a pilot at secondary school sites nationwide from 2011 to 2014. A prerequisite for inclusion in this study, therefore, was a school site's participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative during this timeframe. In addition, because the literature on college access had demonstrated a clear disconnect between college access for students from low socioeconomic households and for students of color, potential sites were analyzed and prioritized based upon the ranking factors high enrollment of students of color and high enrollment of low socioeconomic students. Preference was also given to school sites that were geographically located on the East Coast to enable the researcher to physically travel to school sites without the need for air travel. After sorting the 92 potential school sites by these criteria, the

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researcher selected three large urban school districts to be the focus on this study. As indicated in Table 1 below, the three districts have similar student populations, characterized by a high proportion of low socioeconomic students (55 percent or higher), high percentages of students of color (85 percent or higher), and geographic proximity to the researcher.

Table 1: Selected High School District Sites, 2006-2007 School Year

	Percent FARM eligible	Percent Black Non-Hispanic	Percent Hispanic	Geographic Region of the U.S.
District A	70.1	64.4	16.4	East coast
District B	72.2	89.2	2.1	East coast
District C	55.6	82.1	10.3	East coast

Participant Identification and Selection

The identification and selection of study participants was guided by the study's purpose, the qualitative nature of the study's design and federal law as it relates to information collection by agents of the federal government. As previously discussed, the pool of 92 potential participants was predetermined by their participation in Phase 2 of the FAFSA Completion Initiative (see Appendix C) and the researcher's estimated ability to recruit and retain the potential respondents for both the survey and the subsequent interview (Cook, Godiwalla, Brooks, Powers, & John, 2010). Nine study participants were selected through an availability sampling approach (Schutt, 2012; O'Leary, 2012), also known as a convenience sampling, to enable the researcher to target specific high school counselors that have (a) served in both a non-FAFSA Completion environment and a FAFSA Completion environment, (b) worked with low socioeconomic student populations, (c) been professionally situated in urban LEA's, and (d) indicated a willingness to participate in the data gathering activities of this study.

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Role of Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study (Creswell, 2002). The researcher for this study serves as a senior federal education official within the agency that develops and deploys the FAFSA. He has been only marginally involved in the FAFSA Completion pilot and was not responsible for its development or rollout, but has previously worked with specific pilot high schools to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program. He believes these experiences enhance his understanding and awareness of the intricacies of the FAFSA Completion initiative and will greatly assist in his study of changes in professional practice resulting from participants' participation in the Initiative. He recognizes the need to be open to the thoughts and opinions of others and to set aside his experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study. Prior to beginning any work, the researcher completed National Institutes of Health (NIH) training in the protection of human research participants, and obtained all necessary permissions and approvals for the collection of human volunteer data from Johns Hopkins University's Institutional Review Board. Finally, the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1965 requires all federal agencies to obtain approval from the Office of Management and Budget before collecting information from the public if an agency, or a representative of the agency, requests information from ten or more individuals (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The researcher for this study is employed by a federal agency which has determined it will not seek information collection approvals for activities that are not being carried out in an official capacity. The researcher conducted

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this study in a personal capacity, therefore, the number of study participants was restricted to a maximum of nine per instrument.

Information Collection and Analysis

The study utilized two data collection instruments, the Student Advocates Survey and the Student Advocates Interview, to explore the participant experiences, perceptions, ideas and suggestions for improvement related to the FAFSA Completion Initiative process and its impact upon counselors' professional practice. Both instruments were designed to collect primary data, as opposed to secondary data, and to enable a qualitative assessment of counselors' experience with the FAFSA Completion intervention within their particular professional context. Although participation in this study involved minimal risk, there was still a risk of potential loss of privacy. This potential risk was minimized by taking all necessary steps to properly maintain control of all personally identifiable information collected by the researcher. This process began by assigning all research participants pseudonyms (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) known only to the researcher and password protecting participants' identification and other associated information in an Excel workbook.

Student advocates survey

The Student Advocates Survey (see Appendix E) was a participant-completed survey designed to explore the diversity of responses from study participants within the sampling population (Patton, 2002) regarding experiences within the FAFSA Completion Initiative. The survey was distributed first and the collection of survey responses was used to identify any desired changes to the subsequent in-depth interviews. The survey was distributed to study participants on Tuesday March 8, 2016 with responses requested

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by Saturday March 19, 2016. Surveys were sent to participants via the survey software Survey Monkey. By utilizing the data analytics within Survey Monkey, the researcher was able to collect, review and analyze the responses (O’Leary, 2004) more quickly and accurately than would be possible through a paper-based approach. The response rate for the survey was 100 percent.

Student advocates interview

The Student Advocates Interview (see Appendix H) was an in-depth, 50-minute interview conducted in-person by the researcher with study participants. The interview dates and times were scheduled with participants via telephone. Participants received an emailed copy of the Student Advocates Interview Consent Form (Appendix F) prior to their scheduled interview and their signature was obtained on the consent form before beginning the interview.

The interviews were conducted with study participants within a 2-week window in the early spring of the AY2015-2016. Immediately prior to beginning the interview, participants were asked to complete the College Advocates Demographic Information form (see appendix G) to assist the researcher with gaining insight into the personal and demographic characteristics of the interviewees. Completion of the form was voluntary and did not include the participant’s name. Completed forms were reviewed by the researcher only after the interview had been conducted so as not risk researcher bias and to aid in an informal comparison of interview participants across the three school sites. The interviews were semi-structured and audio recorded. Ten open-ended questions (Patton, 2002) were used in the interviews. The questions were designed to generate study participant perspectives about their ideas, opinions, and experiences with the

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FAFSA Completion Initiative. To augment the recording, the researcher made notes during the interviews to capture participants' emotional and physical delivery of information, as well as to identify key themes and ideas that emerged. The interviews were not rigidly conducted, and in instances where participants' wanted to discuss something tangential to the question, the researcher allowed conversation to continue, only bringing the conversation back to the interview questions when the topic moved to far away from the interview purpose.

Qualitative Data Coding

Following the interviews, key themes and patterns were identified through a narrative analysis of the interview notes and audio transcripts. The researcher used an open coding approach, whereby sections of text were quickly scanned and key concepts and beliefs were circled for categorization and coding. Words and phrases that were circled were then examined more closely to determine if they could be grouped with other key concepts and words from across the nine interviews. 58 codes were developed following the open coding process. Examples of codes are provided below in a non-hierarchical list:

- Counselors conducting outreach
- Impact of school environment
- Counselors FAFSA knowledge
- Counselors in communities
- Students' academic efforts
- Parental involvement
- Counselors negative attributes/beliefs

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- Counselor positive attributes/beliefs
- Counselors beliefs about FAFSA training

The codes were categorized into coherent groupings that summarized or brought meaning to the data and a letter code (a-z) was assigned to each grouping along with a descriptive label for each category (Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2015). Further analysis of the coherent groupings resulted in the identification of four themes. The themes were (a) counselor preparation and training, (b) FAFSA-specific outreach, marketing, and community engagement, (c) FAFSA convenings and resultant change in professional practice, and (d) student and family engagement in best practices and peer sharing. A narrative summary of findings was subsequently developed based upon the four emergent themes.

Chapter 4: Intervention Description and Evaluation

FAFSA Completion Initiative

For those who counsel high school students on financial aid, the FAFSA process can be a point of frustration. Nationwide, the FAFSA completion rate among high school graduates was 55% as of 2012. Twenty-four states had statewide completion rates under 50% and four states had statewide completion rates under 40% (Aldeman, 2013). College and Career Readiness (CCR) and other college access professionals are able to provide students with assistance in completing the FAFSA, but once the form is submitted, they are essentially cut out of the process since communications regarding corrections that are needed or actions that should be taken occur exclusively between the U.S. Department of Education and the student. In addition, CCRs and school counselors have to rely on a student's feedback regarding whether a FAFSA was filed by the student and if that FAFSA was successfully processed. This process is, obviously, heavily influenced by the truthfulness of the student and his or her ability to understand and act on the communications received from ED. As a consequence, CCRs must continually broadcast messaging about completing the FAFSA to all high school seniors and repeatedly seek out students individually to determine if they have successfully completed a FAFSA. Many CCRs require students to bring in paper documentation of their FAFSA submission; an onerous and time consuming process for students and CCRs. To address this problem, an initiative to share student level FAFSA completion data between ED and individual school districts was pilot tested and implemented over the course of three phases as outlined in Table 2 below.

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Table 2: FAFSA Completion Initiative Roll Out

	Formally Announced	School Year(s) Affected	Number of Participating LEAs	Treatment Group?
Phase One	April 13, 2010	2011-2012	18	No
Phase Two	May 30, 2012	2012-2014	92 (including 18 Phase One)	Yes
Phase Three	March 14, 2014	2014-present	Nationwide	No

FAFSA Completion Initiative Phase One

On April 13, 2010 the Chief Operating Officer of Federal Student Aid, William Taggard, formally announced a process which would allow administrators from a limited number of secondary schools and local educational agencies (LEA's) to obtain student level data about FAFSA submission status for their high school seniors. With the launch of the FAFSA Completion Initiative, LEAs could submit, via the internet, identifiers (not including social security numbers) of their students for whom the LEA wanted FAFSA submission information. Federal Student Aid (FSA) would respond with student specific FAFSA submission information through a secure downloadable file. Specific information would be provided as to whether the student had submitted a FAFSA and, if so, whether that initial submission was complete.

Because of limited resources to support the project, the number of participating schools and LEA's was limited to 20. Participants were selected on a first come, first served basis with the first 20 entities being accepted into the pilot project (see Table 4). Two of the selected LEAs subsequently withdrew from the FAFSA Completion Initiative, leaving a total cohort of 18 LEAs participating in Phase One. In spite of the non-scientific selection process, participating LEAs did represent a cross-section of high school districts nationwide.

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FAFSA Completion Initiative Phase Two

On May 30, 2002 the U.S. Department of Education launched phase two of the FAFSA Completion Initiative. Purposefully limited in scope, phase two began with 90 participant LEA's (see Table 5) that were accepted as Initiative participants on a first come first served basis. As with phase one, LEA's were responsible for querying the FAFSA database to obtain FAFSA completion information for their high schools seniors. In a change from phase one, each LEA (if it was a multiple high school LEA) was asked to designate 50% of its high schools as a treatment group, which would have access to FAFSA completion data, and 50% of high schools designated as a control group, which would not be given access to FAFSA completion data for their students. This process, designed by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), was to facilitate a quantitative study of the outcomes of the FAFSA Completion Initiative on actual student FAFSA filings. This process was only in place for phase two and was designed to be a two-year study (2012-2014) with the results being analyzed by IES to inform future FAFSA Completion Initiative efforts.

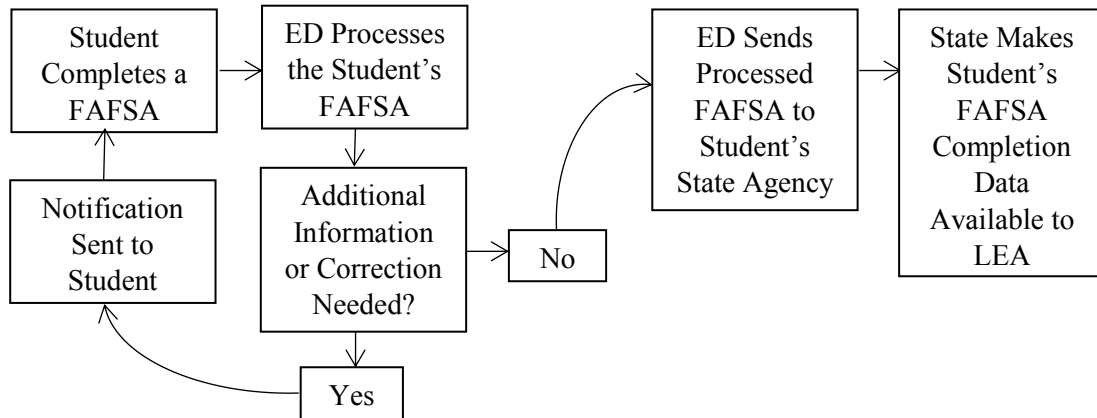
FAFSA Completion Initiative Phase Three

On March 14, 2014, the Initiative was expanded to a nationwide program. Any state that receives FAFSA information for state residents can request to participate in the Initiative. In a significant change of procedure, for phase three CCRs no longer have to query ED's FAFSA database for FAFSA completion data, instead, FAFSA completion data is being made available to all fifty states through the existing Institutional Student Information Record (ISIR) which is received by states to make state-based award calculations. Through the new process, students' FAFSA completion data is transmitted

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from ED to the state, from the state to individual LEAs. CCRs use the process established by their state to request or download FAFSA completion data for their high school seniors.

Figure 1: FAFSA Completion Initiative Process Flow – Phase Three



ED informed state grant agencies that a revised “Student Aid Internet Gateway Application for State Grant Agencies” (SAIG Application) was available for execution in order to begin sharing FAFSA completion data. The revised SAIG Application includes a provision allowing a state grant agency to disclose defined “FAFSA Filing Status Information” to local educational agencies (LEAs), to secondary schools, and to other entities that have been designated by the Secretary of Education. Obtaining this information will allow the LEA, secondary school, or designated entity to identify students who should be completing a FAFSA. Under the SAIG Application a designated entity that can receive FAFSA Filing Status Information from a state grant agency is a public or nonprofit entity that the U.S. Department of Education has designated as eligible to receive FAFSA Filing Status Information. To receive FAFSA Filing Status Information for a student, the designated entity must have an established relationship with the student. An established relationship exists between a student and a designated

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entity when the student is enrolled in, has registered with, or is receiving services from the designated entity to assist the student in the pursuit of postsecondary education. As is the case for the release of FAFSA Filing Status Information to secondary schools and to LEAs, designated entities may receive FAFSA Filing Status Information from a state grant agency only if (a) the state grant agency has submitted to the Department the completed SAIG Participation Agreement (Part Two of the SAIG Application), (b) the state grant agency has executed a written agreement with the designated entity as provided in Section G of the SAIG Participation Agreement, and (c) the designated entity has an established relationship with the student, as defined in Section C (Definitions) of the SAIG Participation Agreement and above. FAFSA Filing Status Information provided to an LEA, secondary school, or designated entity may only be provided to authorized personnel of the LEA, secondary school, or designated entity and only for the authorized purpose, as provided in Section B (Purpose of the Agreement) of the SAIG Participation Agreement, of providing assistance to the student in completing the FAFSA.

In tandem with the nationwide launch, ED began to publish aggregate FAFSA completion data online, for free, for every high school in the nation. For the first time, the public could compare FAFSA completion rates among high schools, with the hope that communities would begin to put pressure on underperforming school districts. High school counselors with responsibilities for multiple high schools could also make informed decisions about where to spend more time on FAFSA-specific messaging and where to focus on other college access messaging, such as standardized test requirements, college admission application, academic preparation, essay completion, scholarship application, and socioemotional aspects of high school to college transition.

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FAFSA Completion Initiative Training and Assistance

During each phase of the FAFSA Completion Initiative, teachers, counselors, CCRs and administrators from participating LEAs were invited to participate in a FAFSA Convening event. With generous financial and logistical support from the Lumina Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, individuals from all participating LEAs were provided an all-expenses paid trip to the convening (see Table 3) to receive information, tools and resources they would need to successfully participate in the FAFSA Completion Initiative.

Table 3: FAFSA Completion Initiative Convention Events

	Location	Date	Number of Participants	Maximum Number of Participants from each LEA
Phase One	Dallas, TX	January 2011	18	1
	Indianapolis, IN	September 2011	100+	4
Phase Two	Indianapolis, IN	October 2012	300+	4
Phase Three	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD

At the FAFSA Completion meetings (FAFSA Completion convenings) individuals had the opportunity to (a) network with other CCR and data professionals, (b) take part in policy and programmatic briefings, (c) discuss concerns or challenges they might be facing in the administration of the FAFSA Completion Initiative within their LEA, and (d) hear from current FAFSA Completion participants regarding what worked, what did not work, and what should change. A special focus on the convenings was the technology that was used to provide the data transfer and the protocols to assure the safety and privacy of that data. The convenings also provided significant time for LEAs to work as teams.

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Chicago, which undertook an independent FAFSA completion effort prior to the launch of the federal initiative, was highlighted during each event due to its trailblazing role. Between 2007 and 2011, Chicago schools saw a more than 150% increase in the percentage of senior students completing the FAFSA. The project also spurred action at the school level. Nagaoka et al. (2009) from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research noted that the FAFSA tracking system worked by:

- Utilizing strong district leadership around college access;
- Breaking down the problem of college access into a manageable size;
- Embedding the FAFSA into a larger set of efforts to improve financial aid awareness among students, parents and school staff;
- Spurring continual interaction between practitioners and district data people and researchers;
- Breaking data into student subgroups, enabling school staff to build tailored strategies;
- Providing real-time data to allow tracking and comparing progress between schools; and
- Providing real-time data to allow school staff to focus on students as individuals.

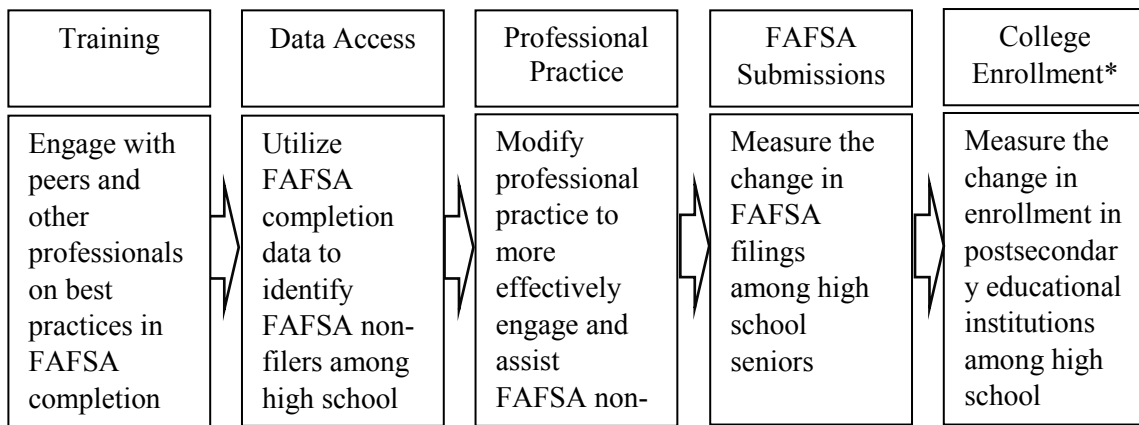
Research Questions

Previous research has focused extensively on student outcomes, including variables impacting FAFSA submissions (Owen, 2012), FAFSA submission assistance (Bettinger, Terry Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2009), and FAFSA submission outcomes by high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). Therefore this study will focus not on outcomes, but on the reported changes in CCR professional practice

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resulting from training received under the FAFSA Completion Initiative. Participants in the FAFSA Completion Initiative received training and information, at three convenings between January 2011 and October 2012, as previously detailed. In addition, as participants in the Initiative, CCRs had access to student-specific FAFSA completion data for high school seniors enrolled within LEA. The question then emerges as to whether and how the provision of training and access to data impacted the professional practice of the CCRs (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Theory of Change for FAFSA Completion Initiative as an Intervention



* The FAFSA Submissions and College Enrollment components of Figure 2 are not the focus of this study, but are important outcomes of the FAFSA Completion Initiative.

The literature heavily documents the various causes of inequity in college access and the importance of the school counselor role in aiding students in making decisions about college. A recurring theme is the vital role that training and preparation play in equipping high school counselors and college and career readiness professionals with the information, tools and resources they need to effectively provide college counseling and college financing information to students and their families. Such assistance is shown to be particularly impactful on the college aspirations and behaviors of underrepresented students.

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Table 4: Generalized Counselor Practice Variables Identified in Literature Review

Variable	Abbreviation
Level of educational attainment of the counselor(s)	LEAC
Vocational training received on the job	VTRJ
Awareness of FAFSA	AOF
Access to FAFSA completion data	AFCD
Utility of data to which counselors have access	UDCA
Outreach practices of the counselor	OPC
Training needs vs. training opportunities	TNTO
Collaboration with other counselors	COC
Access to and sharing of best counselor practices	ASBCP
Awareness of college access barriers	ACAB
School funding for counselor activities	SFCA
Counselor practice as impacted by non-counseling activities	CPINA
Counselor involvement in broader community	CIBC

A gap in the literature involves the role that the newly launched FAFSA Completion Initiative plays in reducing inequity in college access by providing training and information to CCRs and, most importantly, student level data regarding FAFSA completions among their high school seniors. Considering the phenomena of FAFSA Completion Initiative training and information, the follow questions emerged:

1. What changes, if any, did CCRs perceive in their professional practice as a result of training they received as part of their participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative?
 - a. How did CCRs receive evaluate the training they received to access, download, sort and act on data received from the U.S. Department of Education as part of the FAFSA Completion Initiative? What suggestions did CCRs have for how the training could have been more useful?

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- b. Did participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative assist with key CCR tasks such as career and college assessment, college affordability and career entry and college admissions processes?
 - c. What components of student outreach did CCRs use for the first time as a result of participating in the FAFSA Completion Initiative?
 - d. What are CCR perceptions regarding need for additional training and support to equip them to provide services that will lead to an increase in the number of lower SES students enrolling in college?
2. To what extent did CCRs feel that their professional practice benefitted from collaborating and sharing of best practices with other FAFSA Completion Initiative participants?
- a. To what extent did participants who received training share what they had learned with other counselors in their schools and/or districts? What successes and challenges did they experience in this process?
 - b. Did the CCRs customize communications and outreach to FAFSA non-filers or FAFSA filers? If so, how?
 - c. What are CCR perceptions regarding chief barriers to student enrollment in college and how FAFSA Completion ranks among these barriers?

The Summary Matrix that follows illustrates how each of the above research questions is related to the counselor variables identified in Table 3. It also indicates the data collection instrument that was intended to address the research question. In some instances, the research questions are informed by both the survey and interview.

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Summary Matrix

Table 5: Summary Matrix

Research Question	Counselor Variables from Table 3	Source of Data: Survey (S) or Interview (I)
RQ 1: What changes, if any, did CCRs perceive in their professional practice as a result of training they received as part of their participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative?	VTRJ, TNTO	S14, S20, I7
RQ 1a: How did CCRs receive evaluate the training they received to access, download, sort and act on data received from the U.S. Department of Education as part of the FAFSA Completion Initiative? What suggestions did CCRs have for how the training could have been more useful?	UDCA, ASBCP	S17, I9
RQ 1b: Did participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative assist with key CCR tasks such as career and college assessment, college affordability and career entry and college admissions processes?	ACAB, AOF	S15, I3
RQ 1c: What components of student outreach did CCRs use for the first time as a result of participating in the FAFSA Completion Initiative?	OPC, ASBCP	S16, I5, I7
RQ 1d: What are CCR perceptions regarding need for additional training and support to equip them to provide services that will lead to an increase in the number of lower SES students enrolling in college?	TNTO, VTRJ	S7, S8, S18, I10
RQ 2: To what extent did CCRs feel that their professional practice benefitted from collaborating and sharing of best practices with other FAFSA Completion Initiative participants?	COC	S17, S20, I8

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RQ 2a: To what extent did participants who received training share what they had learned with other counselors in their schools and/or districts? What successes and challenges did they experience in this process?	COC, ASBCP	S16, I6, I7
RQ 2b: Did the CCRs customize communications and outreach to FAFSA non-filers or FAFSA filers? If so, how?	OPC, UDCA	S17, I10
RQ 2c: What are CCR perceptions regarding chief barriers to student enrollment in college and how FAFSA Completion ranks among these barriers?	LEAC, ACAB	S5, S6, I1, I4

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the findings from the participant surveys and interviews as they relate to the research questions identified for this study. The chapter consists of several sections. First, using information collected via the College Advocates Demographic Information form, I developed participant profiles to aid in better understanding the experiences and attributes of the individual participants. The individual profiles subsequently informed the development of a summary of group characteristics. Second, key findings from the data gathering activities are articulated. Finally, a thematic analysis of the key findings is provided. Through each of my interactions with the study participants, I took seriously the stories that each participant shared that would provide depth and meaning to the data I was collecting. I wanted readers to really connect with the counselors not just as study participants, but as people. The profiles of these counselors may help to dispel the stereotypes that too often are associated with working in inner-city schools, namely that the work is futile and unrewarding.

Key Findings

The Student Advocates Survey (Appendix E) and Student Advocates Interview (Appendix H) instruments were deployed in an attempt to answer this study's research questions. Findings were analyzed and correlated across instruments, as the two instruments were different in format and intent. Key findings were identified following the collection of data via the instruments and connections between the findings and the research questions are identified below. The survey featured forced-choice responses and was designed to gauge the strength of agreement, or disagreement, with counseling-related concepts, activities and dispositions. Following receipt of the survey data, the

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researcher analyzed and identified the strongest and weakest trends among the responses (see Appendix J). The interview was designed to enable a more in-depth discussion of counselor views and, specifically, to provide an opportunity for participants to explain why they responded to survey questions as they had, and to answer new interview questions that were designed to explore their beliefs, ideas and experiences in greater depth. Following the conclusion of the interviews, key themes and patterns were identified. Information was categorized into coherent groupings that summarized or brought meaning to the data.

Research question 1

What changes, if any, did CCRs perceive in their professional practice as a result of training they received as part of their participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative?

Research question 1 was embedded in the survey through questions 14 and 20. In response to survey question 14 (I encourage FAFSA completion) none of the participants disagreed, and all of the participants agreed or strongly agreed. In response to survey question 20 (I know how to get more information as a result of my participation) none of the participants disagreed, and all of the respondents were neutral or agreed. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with questions 14 and 20, thereby suggesting the participants had modified their professional practice as a result of their participation and training received.

Research question 1 was also embedded in the interview through question 7. In response to question 7 (how did your engagement with students change as a result of your participation) there was significant feedback about the quality of the training provided by

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the FAFSA Completion Initiative. Likewise, participants were overwhelmingly positive about their improved practice resulting from FAFSA Completion Initiative participation and training. Examples include:

“Training is great in concept, but when am I going to attend training?! I have 90 students to counsel, just in the senior class, and it’s hard to get away. But at the [FAFSA convening] trainings, I learned a lot because we were able to devote time and attention to our craft.”

“After the training, my school decided to start using Facebook and Twitter more frequently and to make our messaging more relevant to the FAFSA Completion messaging. And we’ve seen big results”

“Personally, I think it should be more than once a year. The information is so valuable that we need it more frequently. And the sharing of ideas....incredible!”

Research question 1a

How did CCRs evaluate the training they received to access, download, sort and act on data received from the U.S. Department of Education as part of the FAFSA Completion Initiative? What suggestions did CCRs have for how the training could have been more useful?

Research question 1a was embedded in the survey through question 17. In response to survey question 17 (How do you evaluate the training your received) none of the participants disagreed with the statement, while 88% agreed and 11% strongly agreed. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, thereby suggesting the participants had a positive evaluation of the training they received as part of the FAFSA Completion Initiative.

Research question 1a was likewise addressed during the interviews through interview question 9 (Do you use data to inform your outreach to students and families). Data collected from study participants indicated a high degree of satisfaction with

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training delivery around data access and management. Participants expressed strong opinions about the importance of data access and the utility of the FAFSA Completion web tool. Suggestions for improvement included making all of the processes-web based, increasing access for end users to additional FAFSA data questions, and the ability import data into proprietary student management systems that are used within the secondary education school community to help track student actions and communications.

Research question 1b

Did participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative assist with key CCR tasks such as career and college assessment, college affordability and career entry and college admissions processes?

Research question 1b was addressed in the survey through question 15. In response to survey question 15 (Did you participation assist you with basic counseling tasks) none of the participants disagreed with the statement, while 77% agreed and 22% strongly agreed. This indicates that the participants felt that the training and assistance they had received as part of the FAFSA Completion Initiative had enabled them to more effectively carry out basic counseling tasks. Because the training provided to participants was a pivotal part of the FAFSA Completion Initiative, it is vital to better understand the value the training provided to participants and its impact upon their professional practice. Further study of this research question appears to be warranted to determine what aspects of the training were most valuable and how the training might be improved for future cohorts of FAFSA Completion Initiative participants.

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Research question 1b was also addressed in the interviews through question 7. In response to question 7 (how did your engagement with students change as a result of your participation) there was significant feedback about the quality of the training provided by the FAFSA Completion Initiative. Likewise, participants were overwhelmingly positive about their improved practice resulting from FAFSA Completion Initiative participation and training. Participants found that participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative did have a strong impact upon their ability to discuss college affordability, but it was less clear that participation impacted a counselor's ability to discuss career options. The participants did express an enhanced ability to discuss nuances of the college admissions process and found that peer sharing during the FAFSA Completion Initiative trainings was invaluable in identifying strategies for assisting with the college admissions process.

Research question 1c

What components of student outreach did CCRs use for the first time as a result of participating in the FAFSA Completion Initiative?

Research question 1c was captured in the survey through question 16. In response to survey question 16 (I have discussed new tactics for outreach) none of the participants disagreed with the statement, while 100% agreed. This was the only question on the Student Advocates Survey for which the respondents were in complete agreement, indicating a strong likelihood that the discussion of new outreach strategies and tactics might be one of the most impactful topics of the FAFSA Completion Initiative convenings.

Research question 1c was also queried in interview questions 5 (customers familiarity with the FAFSA) and 7 (change in counselor practice after FAFSA convening

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participation). In their responses, the study participants discussed a wide range of tools, strategies and tactics they deployed as a result of their participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative. Examples include new or improved use of digital engagement tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The participants also greatly expanded the types of in-person engagement they offered, including enhanced college awareness nights, FAFSA training programs, faith-based outreach activities and community events. Based upon this positive feedback, it appears that the identification and use of new outreach tactics did indeed increase among participants as a result of the FAFSA Completion Initiative participation and convenings.

Research question 1d

What are CCR perceptions regarding need for additional training and support to equip them to provide services that will lead to an increase in the number of lower SES students enrolling in college?

Research question 1d was addressed through survey questions 7, 8, and 18. Survey question 7 (I have the tools I need) showed mixed results, with 11% disagreeing with the statement and 33% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This indicates an almost even split among respondents regarding whether or not they feel they have the tools they need to do their jobs. Survey question 8 (I can acquire new knowledge about my practice) also produced mixed responses, with 22% indicating disagreement, and 33% indicating neither agreement nor disagreement. As with survey question 7, these results suggest that respondents are not in agreement on whether they can acquire new skills and knowledge to positively impact their professional practice. The survey input for Research Question 1d was survey question 18 (As a result of the convenings, I have the tools and

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information I need). Respondents to question 18 indicated that 22% agreed with the statement, and 77% strongly agreed. Looking at the survey and interview data obtained, it is clear that counselors need additional training, support and information in order to effectively conduct outreach to students, particularly low SES students.

Research question 1d was also informed by interview question 10 (what works, what does not work, and what would you change about college access). The anecdotal evidence indicates that counselors are hard pressed to provide significant, meaningful assistance to low SES students for primarily two reasons: time and funding. A recurring theme in the participant feedback was the lack of support from school administration in funding activities that would be helpful specifically to low SES students (e.g. weekend home visits). The literature indicated, and this study reinforced, the notion that counselors do not have enough hours in the day to accomplish the counseling mission. One suggested remedy might be to narrow the scope of counseling duties such that counselors can focus on their core mission.

Research question 2

To what extent did CCRs feel that their professional practice benefitted from collaborating and sharing of best practices with other FAFSA Completion Initiative participants?

Research question 2 was informed by survey questions 17 and 20. In response to survey question 17 (How do you evaluate the training your received) none of the participants disagreed with the statement, while 88% agreed and 11% strongly agreed. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, thereby suggesting the participants had a positive evaluation of the training they received as part of the FAFSA

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Completion Initiative. Survey question 20 (I know how to get more information) had somewhat mixed results with 44% indicating neither agreement nor disagreement, while 55% strongly agreed.

Research question 2 was also embedded in the interviews in question 8 (Training provided by Lumina Foundation was helpful). There was significant feedback about the benefits from collaborating made available through the FAFSA Completion Initiative. Likewise, participants were overwhelmingly positive about their sharing of best practices that was one of the hallmarks of the convening. Examples include:

“I think peer sharing is so important! And it is hard to do if you are alone, or feel alone, within you school or district. That’s why the convening was so helpful, because it broke down the barriers that are between us as counselors.”

“I think collaboration and the exchange of best practices doesn’t have to be expensive, or even involve travel. We could all hop on a conference call and talk about what worked for us this week! We could peer share through email!”

Research question 2a

To what extent did participants who received training share what they had learned with other counselors in their schools and districts? What successes and challenges did they experience in this process?

Research question 2a was captured in the survey through question 16. In response to survey question 16 (I have discussed new tactics for outreach) none of the participants disagreed with the statement, while 100% agreed. The strength of agreement indicates a strong likelihood that the discussion of new outreach strategies and tactics might be one of the most impactful topics of the FAFSA Completion Initiative convenings.

Research question 2a was also addressed in the interviews in question 6 (Are you involved in or aware of financial aid events at your school) and question 7 (Can you tell

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me more about your experience with the FAFSA convenings). There was overwhelming agreement during the interviews that counselors undertook activities of sharing information they had gained during the FAFSA Completion Initiative convenings. A theme from the feedback was the lack of training opportunities, so the participants emphasized the sense of obligation they felt to share their knowledge with other CCRs.

Research question 2b

Did the CCRs customize communications and outreach to FAFSA non-filers or FAFSA filers? If so, how?

Research question 2b was embedded in the survey through question 17. In response to survey question 17 (How do you evaluate the training your received) none of the participants disagreed with the statement, while 88% agreed and 11% strongly agreed. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, thereby suggesting the participants had a positive evaluation of the training they received as part of the FAFSA Completion Initiative.

Research question 2b was also addressed through interview question 10 (open-ended conversational question) about general thoughts and experiences of counselor participants. There were mixed results for this research question as the majority of counselors did customize their communications for different audiences (i.e. FAFSA non-filers) but two counselors indicated that this was something they “intended to do” but have not done yet. The training FAFSA Completion Initiative participants received was focused on creating proactive outreach approaches, and the majority of respondents did utilize the student-level FAFSA data to target outreach activities and messaging to underrepresented high school students and their families.

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Research question 2c

What are CCR perceptions regarding chief barriers to student enrollment in college and how FAFSA Completion ranks among these barriers?

Research question 2c was explored through two survey questions. Survey question 5 (Counselor opinions about students' perceptions of barriers) and survey question 6 (Counselors beliefs about key factors enabling college access). In response to question 5, 66% of the respondents felt that parents and family are more influential on students' thinking about college than peers (22%) or high school staff (11%). These findings are echoed in the literature review and underscore the potential importance of friends and family on a student's college-going thought process. In response to question 6, the respondents felt that key factors which help underrepresented students (including first generation college students and minorities) successfully transition from high school to college are access to high school counselors (55%), access to college staff (22%), and personal knowledge about financial aid (22%).

Research question 2c was also informed by interview questions 1 and 4. Interview question 1 asked the participants to describe their role within their school and an overview of their college counseling approach. Question 4 asked counselors whether they felt that the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) was an important component of college access. The primary barriers articulated by the counselors were: household income, family support and academic preparation. They felt that FAFSA was a barrier, as did the literature, but not a significant one if mitigated by an informed, engaged CCR or other college advocate.

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Four emergent themes and their connection with this study's research questions were identified:

- Counselor preparation and training
- FAFSA-specific outreach, marketing and community engagement
- FAFSA convenings and resultant change in professional practice
- Student and family engagement best practices and peer sharing

A narrative summary of findings was then developed, guided by the above groupings and the key findings within each group. Using a qualitative research approach enabled a richly detailed description of the phenomena of the FAFSA Completion project as situated and embedded in local high school contexts. To assist with the narrative summary development, the researcher used a grounded theory approach to inductively generate tentative but explanatory theories about the data provided and to provide the framework for new theories about college access within the FAFSA Completion context (Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2015). The pages that follow present the experiences as expressed by the participants and are the major findings that emerged in accord with each of the above themes. Quotes from the participants are written, to some extent, in everyday vernacular. They are presented in this style to allow the reader an opportunity to draw on the reflection of thought given to the participants' responses.

Counselor preparation and training.

Counseling preparation and training was one of the most frequent themes that emerged in the literature review, and it was also a frequent theme resulting from the counselor engagement. The survey results indicated the majority of the study's participants value training, but the majority do not have access to or attend all the

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trainings they need. Study participants indicated that they neither agree nor disagree that they have attended at least one in-person training or event that provided new information to better assist their primary customers (66%). This is a concern because access to tools, information and peer engagement has been shown to be a critical component of improving counselor practice. During interviews, a significant amount of time could be best characterized as broad discussions about the need for more training, the barriers counselors face in request, funding and attending training, and the confusion that exists among counselors regarding which training activities should be prioritized. There was an overwhelming consensus on the benefit derived from the FAFSA convening trainings. Following are examples of participant statements about training. Participants are identified by their study participant pseudonyms (see Appendix I)

Respondent 2 had strong feelings about the training topic, stating:

I am constantly searching for, and requesting permission, to attend training! But even if the training request is approved, it is so hard to get away from my daily routine to attend the training. That's why the FAFSA convenings were so great...we didn't have to fight to attend.

Respondent 8 echoed this sentiment by sharing that:

Training is great in concept, but when am I going to attend training?! I have 90 students to counsel, just in the senior class, and it's hard to get away. But at the [FAFSA convening] trainings, I learned a lot because we were able to devote time and attention to our craft.

Respondent 9 volunteered that training was hard for her to make time for as well, saying:

Our [the counselors] performance plan requires that we build career and college assessment into our professional toolkit, but in reality, they [school administrators] put this requirement on us and then don't make it possible for us to actually attend training. It is very frustrating.

Respondent 3 had a slightly different take on training, commenting:

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I think if counselors really [emphasis] made an effort to attend training, they could. But you have to make it a priority which means letting other things go. Many counselors are control freaks [laughs] and we find it hard to not be on top of everything all the time. Also, we are fixers. We want to make everything right, all the time. But we can't! We're human too. We have to realize that sometimes we have to put ourselves first in order to make ourselves better for the next group of students. If we devote all of our time only to our students, our ability to learn and grow as counselors will be negatively impacted. It's not hard to figure out, what most counselors need is balance and the ability to say no.

Respondent 5 talked about the difficulty in finding funds to pay for outside training:

The training I really want to take, and need, isn't offered by my district. And it usually costs money. Most of the time we [counseling staff] are told that there is no money for outside training, which we should look for low- or no cost training opportunities. That frustrates me. It also shifts the burden of professional development directly onto the counselor. Career and college assessment is something that should be a shared responsibility; we shouldn't always have to be the ones that are asking.

Respondent 5 went on to describe some past scenarios when she had sought out training, which required extensive research on her part, only to be told that the training wasn't aligned with the principal's objectives for counseling staff. She expressed frustration that some principals in her district defer to counselors regarding the counselor's training needs, but other principals micro-manage all aspects of the teaching and counseling staffs' professional development. She did not feel this was fair.

Respondent 5 added:

If we [counselors] are in agreement about a training we need, who is he [the principal] to tell us we don't need it, or shouldn't have it?! It doesn't make sense. Let counselors determine what their individual and collective training needs are and support them!

Respondent 7 was the participant with the most years of counseling experience so I was anxious to hear her thoughts on training. She shared that:

I think training is critical. The counseling profession has changed a lot since I started! Without training, I don't know that kind of counselor I would be. It is vital. And yet it is hard to make time for training. And there are so many training opportunities

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available, and counselors get confused. I know the counselor at my school talk frequently about which trainings were good and which ones weren't. This is so important. Without that kind of dialogue you could end up wasting an entire afternoon, or a day, attending a training that isn't helpful. I also talk a lot with my counseling friends around the country to see what trainings they are excited about.

As apparent in many of the comments above, one of the most important constraints on training opportunities was the counselors' lack of time. Survey results indicated that the study participants were pressed for time and this impacted their ability to constructively engage in other activities, like professional development. When asked if they are given the adequate time to carry out their duties during the day, 22% strongly disagree, 33% disagreed, and 44% neither agreed nor disagreed. None of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, indicating very strong agreement among counselors that they do not have adequate time during the day. This finding is very revealing. If counselors are strongly aligned in their opinion that they do not have adequate time during the day to perform their normal duties, then one can imagine how difficult it is to make time for training. Respondent 8 shared that:

When I was in the military, training was a requirement. We did it all the time. We took pride in our ongoing education. And counselors do too. But the difference is that [the administrators] pay lip service to training. They make it a requirement, and then pull the funds. Or they offer free training that isn't any good. It's a shame. There are counselors in other districts that have huge training budgets. Not us. As an inner city school with a disadvantaged population, we just don't get priority.

Respondent 8 went on to add that the counseling organization, The American School Counselor Association, had some very good suggestions regarding professional development of high school counselors and the suggested competencies for successful counseling practice. He suggested that the problem, not necessarily with his district, but with other districts was that they were not aligned in their counseling educational requirements and professional competencies. He added that:

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In my experience, the mindset and behaviors of school counselors are, for the most part, right on target. The problem usually is that the district is not onboard with what research has shown promotes effective counseling. Counselors that are coming out of school now are great, but once they slam up against the bureaucracy of a school, it negatively impacts their practice.

FAFSA-specific outreach, marketing and community engagement.

The data received via the instruments demonstrated a recurring theme involving FAFSA-specific outreach to students and their families, and the marketing and community engagement strategies and tactics that support the outreach resulting from FAFSA Completion Initiative training. The literature review revealed wide disparity in school counselor practices around FAFSA completion efforts, so I was anxious to hear how these professionals approached the important task of FAFSA outreach. Data collected from the survey indicated that the study participants overwhelmingly agreed with the statement that they encourage all of their primary customers to complete the FAFSA if they, or anyone in their household, is considering college. Among respondents, 55% agreed with the statement while 44% strongly agreed. No participants indicated that they were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Information collected during the interviews also indicated a strong agreement among respondents that FAFSA-specific outreach, marketing and community engagement are important and carried out as part of their practice. Following are examples of participants' statements about FAFSA-specific outreach, with participants again being identified by their study pseudonyms.

Respondent 1 indicated that she felt very strongly about FAFSA-specific outreach, saying:

As you know [name of interviewer], I have been doing this for a while and I can tell you that one of the most important things we can do at the school level is make

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students and their families aware of the FAFSA and the importance of filling it out. These kids, they don't know that financial aid is even a thing. They have to be taught that, by me. And by my fellow counselors, and their teachers, and the principal. We all have to take a "it takes a village" approach to helping students understand how important the FAFSA is.

Respondent 1 added that she has seen significant progress at her district, with much of the credit going to teachers and counselors working together. She mentioned several of the events they had brainstormed to provide, including FAFSA and pizza night, FAFSA completion prizes, and FAFSA guidance being provided in the high school computer lab. Other tactics included sending notes to parents, and providing baby-sitting services for nighttime FAFSA activities. Other participants comments that their FAFSA completion activities had become more important than school-wide activities, such as football and field trips. Respondent 2 shared that:

We used to have to beg, borrow and steal for resources and attention to get our FAFSA activities going. But it seems like as the word spreads about which schools are doing well [with FAFSA completion] and which schools are doing poorly, we have seen a huge shift in that. Everyone at my school understands that college is expensive, and without FAFSA dollars, our kids probably won't be going. So this is more important than a football game or prom. This really is about our students' future!

Respondent 6 had similar sentiments, saying:

We try to make our FAFSA events as fun and engaging as possible. Let's be honest, kids aren't going to get excited about filing out a government form, but when we offer pizza or give them a shot at prizes, the whole attitude changes. They're like, okay yah this is boring, but at least I'm getting some pizza! And food brings out the parents and families too. We partnered with [name of a pizza chain] to provide free pizzas to our FAFSA workshop attendees. We've got lots of students, and their families too. It was an awesome event.

Several of the participants mentioned the tactics they deployed to create FAFSA awareness and completion opportunities. There was also much discussion about how to effectively promote these events. Participants described the challenges, and successes, of their particular market and outreach efforts. Respondent 9 said:

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We sent out flyers with our high school seniors the first day they were back after the Christmas break. We said that for every flyer brought back to an event, the bearer would receive a free t-shirt featuring the school mascot [a dragon] with the words “FAFSA Slayer” on the front. The students loved this incentive and it was a huge success.

Respondent 9 added that where possible, school counselors should partner with private and non-profit organizations to provide inducements for students to attend the events. She said that few students want to be on campus after school hours, but counselors have learned through the years to provide things that might appeal to students, and the events are well attended. She added that there are always bureaucratic or administrative burdens that make such partnerships [public and private] difficult, but her school benefitted from school leadership that actively encouraged and promoted such partnerships. Respondent 9 said that the benefits of partnering are numerous, but the most attractive aspect [for leadership] is probably the cost savings or cost avoidance. There are ways in which you can start the conversation with school leadership, she shared, by:

Reminding them [the principal] that FAFSA completion is increasingly becoming a performance measure for schools. Everyone now has access to the FAFSA completion tool on your [the interviewer’s] website. We’ve started to hear from some parents that, “...Hey, the FAFSA completion rate at West Side H.S. is much higher than the rate at East Side H.S. What’s going on?!”

She added that it is natural that parents want their students to have all of the support and assistance that other families’ students have. There is a natural competition, she added, that means schools are increasingly held accountable for their FAFSA completion rates:

Knowing how important the FAFSA is for college attendance, I’m glad the rates are available to the public for every high school in our district. Parents need to know if their children are attending a school that has low rates. Our school has made tremendous progress on FAFSA completion in the last couple of years, so we know it can be done even for disadvantaged student populations like ours. But some schools are just not doing it. Parents need to know that.

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The sentiment shared by Respondent 9 was echoed by Respondent 5, who said:

I'm not saying that all indicators are created equal. Some of the performance indicators for teachers, like student test scores, are simply not valid in my opinion. But with FAFSA, how can you argue against the score? Either your students are completing the FAFSA, or they're not. If they're not, that's a problem.

Respondent 4 described her community engagement approach as being based on the three C's: churches, courts and commutes. She explained that:

We do active outreach to the faith-based community in my district. Churches here are influential and we [counselors] work our formal and informal connections with churches and other houses of worship for outreach. We also try to reach students after school...and by courts I mean BASKETBALL courts. [Laughter]. We have to go where our customers are. Also, we know that many, many of our parents and students use mass transit, so we partnered with [name of transit system] to display free ads about our FAFSA events at certain bus stops and stations.

Respondent 4 talked at length about the power of partnering with other schools in order to develop and deploy city-wide outreach efforts, and the lessons she had learned regarding individual outreach versus city-wide outreach.

FAFSA convenings and resultant change in professional practice.

The school counselors in this study were Phase 2 participants (see Appendix C) of the FAFSA Completion initiative, and as such, were able to describe how their professional practice had changed as a result of their participation in the Initiative.

Attaining such information is central to this study, and several of the survey and interview questions were designed to elicit information about participants' individual and collective experience at school counselors at a FAFSA Completion site.

Survey questions 17 and 20 specifically inquire about the FAFSA Completion Initiative training that all nine participants had received. Question 17 asked the participants to indicate their agreement, or disagreement, with the statement: As a result

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of my participation in the FAFSA convenings, I have shared information, tools, or resources about engaging FAFSA non-filers with other counselors in my school or district. The respondents overwhelmingly agreed with this statement, with 88% agreeing and 12% strongly agreeing. No participants were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed. Question 18 asked the participants to indicate their agreement, or disagreement, with the statement: As a result of my participation in the FAFSA convenings, I have customized the information and resources that I provide to prospective college students at my school. The respondents were strongly aligned in their responses, with 22% agreeing and 77% strongly agreeing. Finally, question 19 asked participants to agree, or disagree, with the statement: As a result of my participation in the FAFSA convenings, I have all of the information I need to effectively engage and counsel FAFSA non-filers. Respondents indicated strong agreement, with 33% agreeing and 66% strongly agreeing. These data were then compared to the information that was obtained through the interviews to analyze the consistency of responses regarding the FAFSA Completion Initiative impacts on practice.

Information collected during the interviews also indicated a strong agreement among respondents that the FAFSA convenings resulted in positive changes in their professional practice. Following are examples of participants' statements about changes in practice, with participants again being identified by their study pseudonyms.

Respondent 5 provided one of the most detailed responses to interview question 8, which asked: Regarding the training provided by Lumina Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education, did you find it helpful? Please tell me how it did (or did not) help you. Respondent 5 said that:

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I went to the FAFSA Completion Initiative event [in Indianapolis, IN] without really knowing what to expect...and I was blown away by how good it was. I was shocked to see so many other high school counselors in attendance, and the sessions were just awesome. My thinking about how to do FAFSA outreach was just completely transformed. I had a kind of epiphany that I needed to stop being such a solo act. Everyone at the event was sharing their amazing partnering successes and ideas, and I committed myself to coming home and doing just that. And that's exactly what I've done!

Respondent 5 went on to describe some of the partnership opportunities she has explored and established in her district, including a collaboration with a local university to bring FAFSA experts from the college's financial aid office to her high school for FAFSA Completion talks and workshops; a partnership with a local car dealership that raffles a used car to a lucky high school student that has successfully submitted his or her FAFSA; and a partnerships with a local restaurant chain that provides free FAFSA messaging in their restaurants and coupons for free food and beverage to FAFSA completers.

When asked for feedback on the training, Respondent 8 remarked that:

The training there was excellent. It really provided a lot of details about how we, as counselors could think outside the box when it comes to student engagement. The descriptions about how to leverage social media, how to use email communications more effectively, and how to even do things like phone trees, were all just excellent. After the training, my school decided to start using Facebook and Twitter more frequently and to make our messaging more relevant to the FAFSA Completion messaging. And we've seen big results.

Respondent 3 had similar thoughts about the FAFSA Completion Initiative convening and the training she had received. She also had some suggestions for improvement, such as making the training available online, moving the location of the convening each year so that different groups of counselors could benefit from local travel, and publish a quarterly report on best practices of FAFSA Completion sites. She also shared that:

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Other than the location [laughs] I thought the convening was perfect. Just what I and my colleagues needed. It was the right balance of counselor peer engagement and expert presentation.

Respondent 7 suggested that:

Personally, I think it should be more than once a year. The information is so valuable that we need it more frequently. And the sharing of ideas....incredible!

Respondent 1 was asked to co-conduct a presentation at the convening and said that:

I really enjoyed sharing with the attendees what I knew about using Facebook to reach parents. I think they learned some things, and I learned from them too. I found the topic-specific workshops during the day to be hugely beneficial. I'd suggest more of those next time. When I came home from Indianapolis, one of the first things I did was pull out my convening participant guide and start to think about how I could boost my FAFSA Completion efforts by doing some of the smart things my peers around the country were doing!

Respondent 1 also mentioned that the most impactful sessions were the ones that were presented by fellow counselors. She suggested more of the peer-expert approach in the future. She felt that the other non-counseling experts were excellent, but that there is something especially engaging when you learn from peers:

Whenever a session was lead, or co-lead, by a counselor, I put a star by that session title in my participant guide! I really wanted to hear from people who had walked the walk. And some of the high schools in attendance were clearly from wealthy districts. Their success stories don't always transfer to a district like mine. I mean, it's great if you can give scholarship to every FAFSA completer, but that's just not going to happen in [name of her city]. Let's be honest. So I wanted to hear, especially, about the success stories from places like mine. It's the one thing that kind of went unmentioned at the convening – that some of us were coming with minimal resources to use and others were coming with everything practically they needed and wanted. One lady stood up and told us about how she met the mothers at carpool and gave them flyers. We don't have carpool! And we hardly ever see the mothers. We have to go and find them.

Student and family engagement best practices and peer sharing.

Much information was obtained during the data gathering that involved student and family engagement best practices and peer sharing. The literature review did not

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reveal a significant body of work around best practices and peer sharing strategies specific to FAFSA completion, so this theme became a focus of several of the survey questions. Survey questions 16 and 17, specifically, solicited more information about these themes. In question 16, survey respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: As a part of the FAFSA convening, I networked with other FAFSA Completion school representatives to discuss best practices in student outreach and engagement. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive, with 100% agreeing with the statement. In question 17, survey respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: As a result of my participation in the FAFSA convenings, I have shared information, tools or resources about engaging FAFSA non-filers with other counselors in my school or district. Respondents again were very much aligned in support of the statement, with 88% agreeing with the statement and 11% strongly agreeing.

Information collected during the interviews also indicated a strong agreement among respondents that the FAFSA convenings resulted in positive changes in their professional practice. Following are examples of participants' statements about student and family engagement best practices and peer sharing, with participants again being identified by their study pseudonyms. A good example of the group sentiment was shared by Respondent 7:

I think peer sharing is so important! And it is hard to do if you are alone, or feel alone, within you school or district. That's why the convening was so helpful, because it broke down the barriers that are between us as counselors.

Respondent 6 also expressed her delight with peer sharing at the convening:

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There were so many good ideas. The Lumina Foundation folks were amazing. I loved that that event organizers captured notes from the discussions so that we could have them waiting for us in our email inbox when we got home.

Respondent 6 had noticed that not everyone came equipped with laptops and other technology:

It struck me that some of the counselors, I guess from districts with less funding, did not have technology that many of the rest of had. They didn't have (or bring) laptops and didn't seem to be connected to their office (i.e. with mobile phones) like the rest of us. It made me a little sad. But it was an important thing for us to see – that there is such a wide disparity in funding out there. And even though I come from a relatively poor inner city school, we do have the technological resources we need to do our jobs and stay connected with our school while we are away.

Respondent 1 had a slightly different perspective:

I think peer sharing and the exchange of best practices doesn't have to be expensive, or even involve travel. We could all hop on a conference call and talk about what worked for us this week! We could peer share through email!

Respondent 2 talked about the best practices exchange and how pivotal that was to her once she returned to school. She mentioned that she started a group within her district to meet once a month and talk about what works, what does not work, and what should change. She found it to be an invigorating and engaging activity:

For the past two years we do these virtual meet ups! We'll do something like WebEx or some other virtual meeting technology, and just have a great time sharing ideas with each other. We do some social stuff when we together too [laughs] but I really try to make the focus our professional practice improvements. We usually don't have more than 3-5 people on, so it is a manageable conversation.

Several of the participants mentioned the value of peer sharing, specifically, because of the creditability factor of counselors teaching counselors. Respondent 5, during her interview, said that best practices sounds good on the surface, but not all practices are appropriate for her student population:

We have a lot of students that are not performing academically, and I hate to say it, but broadcasting the FAFSA message to everyone in your senior class is almost cruel. You know that some of those students are not prepared for college. Won't be accepted to college. Many have behavioral issues. Or mental health issues. So when I hear folks from wealthy suburban schools saying they Tweet their entire senior class with "great success", it just makes me realize how different school districts are across the nation.

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Respondent 3 said she really enjoyed the convenings. She especially enjoyed the focus on families and communities. She said she believed the black community, which is the population that she serves in her school, are very much influenced by community and religious leaders:

My best practice is to get out from behind the school walls and get into the community. My fellow counselors and I loved the discussions at the convenings that focused on things like that. We work with teachers to identify students that are just off track, not significantly off track, and we try to conduct one-on-one outreach to those students and their families. For the ones that are just off-track, sometimes one home visit or community event can be enough to encourage them or motivate them to get back on track. So I think that having access to data is really important, otherwise, as counselors, we don't necessarily know who is just off track either academically or attendance-wise.

Respondent 5 talked about how the best practices discussion(s) at the convenings affected her practice by sharing that she now reads more online about what is happening in other states.

At the convening, it was so cool, you might be sitting next to a counselor from Alabama on your right, and a counselor from California on your left. But so often you had the exact same concerns! Yes, the districts are different wherever you go, but we also have many of the same challenges AND opportunities. I really enjoyed hearing about the challenges of reaching rural students in Alabama, and the challenges of integrating immigrant families in California. It made me realize that every district has its benefits and disadvantages. So we need to embrace the facts about our district: we are poor and disadvantaged. But that doesn't mean we can try new things like online engagement, which they are doing well in Alabama for rural students, and near-peer mentoring for young immigrant students, which they are testing in California. These ideas excite me and make me want to test out new approaches at home!

Participants also talked about how they appreciated the access to FAFSA Completion data. Having the access enables them to, for the first time, measure changes in FAFSA completion among their high school seniors. Clearly a best practice is to target your outreach to FAFSA non-filers, said Respondent 9, and having access to who is a non-filer is a game changer:

In the past, students would tell us that they had completed and submitted the FAFSA, and we didn't have any way to verify that, so we just believed them. Now we

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can proactively query the [FAFSA] database and find out exactly who has done the FAFSA and who hasn't. So when we ask our kids if they've done the FAFSA now, we are astounded at how many say yes, when in fact they haven't. And it's not always intentional deception on their part. The college admissions, application and financial aid processes are confusing! Sometimes they think they've applied for financial aid, when in fact they've just applied or admissions. So having this data, in a way, takes the pressure off everybody. We can just proactively check their status.

Summary of Findings

Key findings were identified following the collection of data via the Student Advocates Survey and the subsequent Student Advocates Interviews. Findings were analyzed and correlated across instruments, as the two instruments were different in format and intent. Findings were grouped into four key emergent themes of (a) counselor preparation and training, (b) FAFSA-specific outreach, marketing and community engagement, (c) FAFSA convenings and resultant change in professional practice, and (d) student and family engagement best practices and peer sharing. Data collected from the two instruments indicated a strong positive relationships between the activities of the FAFSA Completion convening(s) and improvement in individual school counselor practice. Participants reported positive changes in their professional practice in the areas of (a) peer sharing, (b) networking effectiveness, (c) provision of tools, information and service; (d) customization of outreach to targeted audiences, and (e) enhanced student and family engagement.

Counselor preparation and training.

A recurring theme resulting from the data collection was the importance of, and challenges in attaining, sufficient counselor preparation and training. Several participants indicated the difficulty in finding and participating in training that could benefit their professional practice. One participant indicated that she was continually searching for training, and requesting permission to attend training, but that even when training is

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approved it is difficult to allocate time in her weekly schedule to attend due to competing priorities. Another participant described scenarios in which she had done extensive research, on her own, to identify training that could help her more effectively engage students with college access strategies, only to encounter push-back from her school's leadership that the training she had identified did not align with their administrative objectives. The discontinuity between school administrative objectives and counselor objectives creates additional barriers for students and has an adverse effect on college access. Research has shown that counselors who are well trained, engaged and proactive with students regarding college planning positively impact the likelihood that students will transition to college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Feedback on preparation and training provided by Respondent 7 was of particular interest to the researcher because this participant had the longest tenure of service as a high school counselor of all the individuals participating in the study. Respondent 7 emphasized how important it is to attend trainings that are appropriate for the counselor's current work responsibilities and years of experience. She indicated that she identifies potential trainings by frequently communicating about training with peer counselors nationwide. The lack of uniformity in training approaches and utilization among the study participants reinforced the findings of the literature review which indicated that variances between best practices and actual practice have negatively impacted school counselor identity and the establishment of national standards of practice for college and career counseling (Franklin, 2010).

The responses from participants also indicated a perceived gap in knowledge that inhibits counselors from effectively moving into nontraditional ancillary roles, as is often required of high school counselors (Colbert, Vernon-Jones, & Pransky, 2006).

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Respondent 9 provided extensive feedback on the training requirements that are placed upon high school counselors and the lack of alignment between the training programs and the work that she and her counseling peers are actually doing. Respondent 8 said that she found the most value in the training programs that she identified herself, as opposed to those training programs identified by her school leadership. Respondent 3 brought this topic into focus with her comment that some counselors may be experiencing a gap in knowledge because they are not making training a priority. These participant responses reinforce the findings from the literature review that emphasize the importance of making training a priority and the impact that highly-qualified counselors and teachers can have on the college readiness of high school students (Perna, 2006).

FAFSA convenings and change in professional practice.

The literature review demonstrated that there is tremendous variance in counselor practice within the United States and counselors often lack the time or resources to interact and learn from peers in high performing schools (Fitch & Marshall, 2004). Additionally, high school counselors frequently lack the data they need to be successful (Dahir & Stone, 2003) and fail to use effective counseling practices to increase college access among students (Young & Keffenberger, 2011). The opportunity to participate in the FAFSA convenings, and the benefits from participation, was a recurrent theme among the study participants. Multiple questions on the study survey and interview were designed to solicit information and feedback on the FAFSA convenings. Participants indicated that convenings were overwhelmingly beneficial and increased their ability to successful counsel prospective college students. Respondent 5 described her experience at the convenings as transformative and provide great detail about how the information

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and sharing at the convenings positively impacted her practice. She indicated that the convenings were a unique opportunity for her to discuss her professional practice with peers from other parts of the country to engage in activities that helped her increase her understanding of successful college access practices. Respondent 3 emphasized the importance of the FAFSA convenings by suggesting that the event be held bi-annually rather than just once a year. She detailed how her practice had benefitted from the convenings, including her increased use of social media. She also uses virtual communication, such as a new counseling web page, to help students and their families by providing online access to tools, information and resources. By providing tools and information online, Respondent 8 felt she was providing a much needed resource to families, especially low income families, which were not able to attend school events in person due to competing priorities such as maintaining multiple jobs or balancing the family finances, particularly as it relates to transportation expenses.

Another participant described the importance of the peer-to-peer design of the convenings. She described how learning from other counselors in the field had a positive impact upon her practice because the information that was provided had been operationalized within school settings that were similar to her own, and the counselors in these settings had the benefit of lessons learned from the design, deployment and measurement of college access strategies. The research shows that counselors nationwide feel overstretched and underfunded (Foley, Mishook, & Lee, 2013) therefore highlighting the importance of having counselors with similar experiences learn from each other. Respondent 7 emphasized that while she enjoyed hearing from counselors from more affluent high school districts, the information and advice provided by these counselors

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often had little practical applicability within her district. Other participants also discussed their experiences with interacting and collaborating with peers from similar high schools. Respondent 1 described a feeling of invigoration in collaborating with other schools, but stressed that collaborations between counselors with similar students were profoundly more impactful. This was particularly true when discussing tactical communication and outreach tools. Study participants indicated that core issues like equity in access and availability of funds for college are the focus on counseling efforts in low socioeconomic communities, with less emphasis on college choice and potential fields of study. This aligns with research findings that students' needs reflect the socioeconomic level of the community (Espenshade & Radford, 2009).

Student and family engagement.

The study findings revealed significant connections between the literature and counselor practice with regard to student and family engagement. Within the literature, student attributes and family influence were second only to academic preparation in influence on a student's college-going beliefs and perceptions. The participants in this study frequently discussed the importance of family on their students' college-going plans. Respondent 5 discussed the impact of family on her students by describing the behavioral, intellectual, financial and environmental barriers that her students face. She expressed feelings of dismay and sadness that so many of the students in her school were academically underprepared. She, and other participants, frequently circled back to family involvement when describing the struggles that their students face.

The literature discussed in great depth the advantage that middle- and upper socioeconomic students have in part because adults pass on to their children a system of

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attributes such as cultural knowledge, self-efficacy, language skills and behavior, often referred to as cultural capital, that are highly valued within the contemporary school context (Perna & Titus, 2005). Low socioeconomic students frequently struggle to align their cultural capital with the system of rewards and punishments within schools (Goldsmith, 2005) and this negatively impacts students' persistence through secondary school and on to college. Respondent 9 described the need to construct more effective outreach tools to low socioeconomic families, including strategies such as home visits, community meetings and partnerships with influencing entities such as churches, membership organizations and local businesses. She acknowledged that counselors too frequently rely on long-established outreach strategies designed to reach middle- and high socioeconomic students and their families despite their lack of applicability within low socioeconomic community contexts. At the convenings, she described the new and innovative tactics that her counseling peers are using, such as customized blogs, Facebook pages and email campaigns to reach low socioeconomic students and their families. Respondent 7 described outreach to families as one of her top priorities because of her belief that families are the pivotal factor in whether students are seriously consider college. Respondent 8 provided his perspective in providing outreach to families and the lessons he had learned in communicating with and motivating low socioeconomic students and families, particularly with regard to messaging. This is echoed in the literature with research showing that it is critical to match messaging with audience (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore, & Day, 2011) and to incorporate specific messaging for parents (Kim & Schneider, 2005).

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Several participants described the struggles faced with conducting outreach to households that frequently move, are headed by a single parent, or experience transitions of responsibility for child-rearing, in which grandparents and other family members temporarily assume the parental role. Faced with pressing concerns about housing, nutrition and household-related expenses, many low socioeconomic families were found to place a low priority of college planning, thereby presenting challenges for the study participants. Research by Perna (2006) supports the participants' assertion that challenges confronted by low socioeconomic students and their families are unique and tremendously difficult to mitigate or remove. Successful strategies included relationship-building between counselors and families, flexibility in counseling service hours, and customization of content and tools for low socioeconomic students and their families. The opportunity to participate in the FAFSA convenings, and the benefits from participation, was a recurrent theme among the study participants. Participants indicated that convenings were overwhelmingly beneficial and increased their ability to successful counsel prospective college students. Several participants described their experience at the convenings as transformative and provided great detail about how the information and sharing at the convenings positively impacted their practice. There was overwhelming agreement that the convenings were a unique opportunity for study participants to discuss their professional practice with peers from other parts of the country and to engage in activities that helped them increase their understanding of successful college access practices.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions

This chapter begins with a restatement of the purpose of this study and a review of the methodology and results. Next, the summary of procedures describes the data collection and analysis activities. Recommendations for practice are provided for high school counselors who advise students on college as well as for other college access professionals that are engaged in the important work of increasing access to college. Then, recommendations for future research that could add to the body of knowledge around college access, FAFSA completion, and specific high school counselor strategies for college advocacy are included. Finally, concluding remarks are provided serve as a high-level closing statement for this study and an opportunity to reflect on the overall aspects of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential changes in professional practice resulting from high school counselors' participation in the national FAFSA Completion Initiative. Because FAFSA completion has been demonstrated to positively impact college selection and college enrollment, even incremental improvements in high school counselor college advising have the potential to impact college access (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2009). The research, data gathering, and data analysis protocols of this study were designed to facilitate the examination of high school counselor perceptions, beliefs and dispositions about their participation in the FAFSA Completion Initiative and to identify factors that could positively impact the ongoing rollout and operationalization of the FAFSA Completion program. To satisfy this purpose, high school counselors that are professionally situated in FAFSA Completion-participating high schools were

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identified, recruited and participated in a series of data collection activities to inform the study.

Summary of Procedures

Following the identification and recruitment of participants, data was gathered via two instruments; an electronic survey and an in-person interview. The survey was distributed first and the data collected was analyzed to inform the subsequent interviews. Participants voluntarily participated in both data gathering activities without inducements or remuneration. Survey data was captured electronically and the interview data was audio recorded and captured by interviewer notes. Data analysis procedures were then applied and resulted in the identification of four themes that connected across various research questions. The themes were (a) counselor preparation and training; (b) FAFSA-specific outreach, marketing and community engagement; (c) FAFSA convenings and resultant change in professional practice; and (d) student and family engagement, best practices and peer sharing. Coding of the interview data led to the identification of categories within the themes that provided further insight into the participant responses. To further elucidate the findings, reflexive journaling and peer debriefing were used.

Recommendations for Research

As a result of conducting this study, and specifically through activities related to data gathering and communicating with high school counselors, several important areas for future research were revealed. First, there is anecdotal evidence that various high schools and LEAs throughout the country are engaged a wide array of FAFSA completion experiments such as requiring all high school seniors to complete the FAFSA. Second, there is evidence that various high schools and LEAs are conducting innovative

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forms or outreach to students and parents, such as using text messaging to remind students and their families to complete and submit the FAFSA. While these creative approaches are to be applauded, a critical missing component is an evaluation of the efficacy of these approaches and discussion regarding how they might be scaled nationally. Research in these areas could significantly add to the body of knowledge around college access and counselor strategies for college access advocacy, and could bring clarity to discussions about outreach activities and tactics that are currently being used without the benefit of a robust assessment. The four areas for recommended study are:

1. Initiatives involving a mandatory FAFSA completion requirement for high school seniors, and its impact on FAFSA completion rates;
2. Initiatives involving a mandatory FAFSA completion requirement for high school seniors, and its impact on subsequent college enrollment among high school seniors;
3. Specific high school-initiated FAFSA completion events for students and their families and the effect on FAFSA completion rates;
4. Specific high school-initiated FAFSA completion events for students and families and the effect on college enrollment among high school seniors.

Limitations of the Study

This study did not quantitatively measure the impact of college counseling and college financing advising practices on student enrollment in college. Future study is recommended to determine the statistical impact of the college counseling and college financing advising strategies discussed in this study to determine the efficacy of those

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approaches. A random sampling of high school counselors as part of a larger study could illuminate the data provided by the limited selection of counselors in the study. In addition, sampling from heterogenic communities might provide interesting insight into the problems with college access that are not specific to low socioeconomic communities, thereby allowing counselors representing divergent student populations to work together or developing, implementing and measuring effective strategies for reaching students that are at-risk of not continuing their education.

Concluding Remarks

The literature heavily documents the various causes of inequity in college access and the importance of the school counselor role in aiding students in making decisions about college. A recurring theme is the vital role that training and preparation play in equipping school counselors and college access professionals (CCRs) with the information, tools and resources they need to effectively provide college counseling and college financing information. The recommendations for further research highlighted by this study (see above) seek to address specific problems within the counseling practice. Additionally, data gathered from participants during the study consistently demonstrated that when school counselors are equipped with the tools, information and resources they need, then they are well positioned to initiate and champion the kind of systemic reform that is needed to fully mitigate and dismantle barriers to college access for students. The FAFSA Completion Initiative became a nationwide project in 2014, with LEAs participating on a voluntary basis. As data from this study indicates, significant benefits accrue to participating districts through FAFSA Completion data sharing.

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Appendix A

Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors

Table: Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors

Dispositions	Knowledge	Skills
Advocacy	Resources	Communication
Family	Parameters	Collaboration
Support/Empowerment		
Social Advocacy	Dispute Resolution	Problem-Assessment
Ethical	Advocacy Models	Problem-Solving
	Systems Change	Organizational
		Self-Care

(Brown & Trusty, 2005)

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Appendix B

FAFSA Completion Initiative Phase One Participants

Table: Phase One Participants

Local Education Agency:	Location:	
Fresno Unified School District	Fresno	CA
Riverside Unified School District	Riverside	CA
Denver Public Schools	Denver	CO
Miami-Dade County Public Schools	Miami	FL
Muscogee County School District	Columbus	GA
Boston Public Schools	Boston	MA
Minneapolis Public Schools	Minneapolis	MN
Gateway Institute of Technology	St. Louis	MO
Alamance-Burlington School System	Burlington	NC
Albuquerque Public Schools	Albuquerque	NM
New York City Department of Education	New York City	NY
School District of Philadelphia	Philadelphia	PA
Austin ISD	Austin	TX
Goose Creek CISD	Baytown	TX
Dallas ISD	Dallas	TX
Houston Independent School District	Houston	TX
San Antonio ISD	San Antonio	TX
Bellingham Public Schools	Bellingham	WA

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Appendix C

FAFSA Completion Initiative Phase Two Participants

Table: Phase Two Participants

Local Education Agency:	Location:	
Pulaski County Special School District	Little Rock	AR
Mesa Public Schools	Mesa	AZ
El Monte Union High School District	El Monte	CA
Elk Grove Unified School District	Elk Grove	CA
Long Beach Unified School District	Lakewood	CA
Shasta Union High School District	Redding	CA
Sequoia Union High School District	Redwood City	CA
Alvord Unified School District	Riverside	CA
Jurupa Unified School District	Jurupa Valley	CA
Sacramento City Unified School District	Sacramento	CA
San Francisco Unified School District	San Francisco	CA
Stockton Unified School District	Stockton	CA
Whittier Union High School District	Whittier	CA
Hartford Public Schools	Hartford	CT
Appoquinimink School District	Odessa	DE
Fulton County Schools	Atlanta	GA
Davenport Community School District	Davenport	IA
Iowa City Community School District	Iowa City	IA
Sioux City Community Schools	Sioux City	IA
Jerome Joint School District 261	Jerome	ID
Indianapolis Public Schools	Indianapolis	IN
Shelbyville Central Schools	Shelbyville	IN
Jefferson County Public Schools	Louisville	KY
Bossier Parish	Benton	LA
St. Mary's Parish School System	Centerville	LA
Springfield Public Schools	Springfield	MA
Baltimore County Public Schools	Baltimore	MD
Washington County Public Schools	Hagerstown	MD
Prince George's County Public Schools	Upper Marlboro	MD
Bay-Arenac ISD	Bay City	MI
Ottawa Area Intermediate School District	Holland	MI
Ionia County Intermediate School District	Ionia	MI
Lansing School District	Lansing	MI
Van Buren Intermediate School District	Lawrence	MI
Montcalm Area Intermediate School District	Stanton	MI
Utica Community Schools	Sterling Heights	MI
Austin Public School District	Austin	MN
Deer River Independent School District 318	Deer River	MN
Osseo Area Schools, Independent School District 279	Osseo	MN

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Rockford Area Schools	Rockford	MN
Warren-Alvarado-Solo School District 2176	Warren	MN
Ferguson-Florissant School District	Florissant	MO
Hope Academy Charter School	Kansas City	MO
Pattonville School District	Maryland Heights	MO
Mehlville School District	Mehlville	MO
Rock Port School District	Rock Port	MO
Francis Howell School District	St. Charles	MO
St. Joseph School District	St. Joseph	MO
Wake County Schools	Cary	MO
Mainland Regional	Linwood	NJ
Westwood Regional School	Washington Township	NJ
Carson City School District	Carson City	NV
Washoe County School District	Reno	NV
Buffalo Public School District	Buffalo	NY
Syracuse City School District	Syracuse	NY
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	Cleveland	OH
Columbus City Schools	Columbus	OH
Pittsburgh Public Schools	Pittsburgh	PA
Providence Public Schools	Providence	RI
Spartanburg District One	Campobello	SC
Lexington School District One	Lexington	SC
Bradley County Schools	Cleveland	TN
Carter County School System	Elizabethton	TN
Greene County Schools	Greeneville	TN
Memphis City Schools	Memphis	TN
Giles County School System	Pulaski	TN
Franklin County School District	Winchester	TN
Amarillo Independent School District	Amarillo	TX
Bastrop ISD	Bastrop	TX
Brownsville Independent School District	Brownsville	TX
Fort Worth ISD	Fort Worth	TX
Cypress Fairbanks ISD	Houston	TX
Galena Park ISD	Houston	TX
Spring Branch ISD	Houston	TX
Pasadena Independent School District	Pasadena	TX
Richardson Independent School District	Richardson	TX
Rockwall Independent School District	Rockwall	TX
Northside Independent School District	San Antonio	TX
Southwest Independent School District	San Antonio	TX
Cache County School District	Logan	UT
Granite School District	Salt Lake City	UT
Salt Lake City School District	Salt Lake City	UT
Culpeper County Public Schools	Culpeper	VA
Augusta County Public Schools	Fishersville	VA

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Lynchburg City School Division	Lynchburg	VA
Curlew School District	Curlew	WA
Everett Public School District	Everett	WA
Sedro-Woolley School District	Sedro-Woolley	WA
Spokane Public Schools	Spokane	WA
Greendale School District	Greendale	WI
Sheboygan Area School District	Sheboygan	WI

Appendix D

FAFSA Completion Initiative Technical Requirements

Table 7: FAFSA Completion Initiative Technical Requirements

To participate in the FAFSA Completion Initiative, an entity must be a secondary school or LEA. It also must have software and hardware compatible with the Department's systems, as described below, so that staff can effectively interface operationally with those systems. Participating entities need to have, at a minimum, the following technical capacity:

- IBM or fully IBM-compatible PC with a 1.2 GHz processor.
- 512 MB RAM memory.
- 60 GB hard drive.
- 48X CD-ROM drive (CD-RW recommended).
- Windows compatible keyboard and mouse.
- SVGA graphics adapter capable of 800 X 600 screen resolution or higher.
- 56 kbps analog modem using V.90 and an Internet Service.
- Laser printer capable of printing on standard paper.
- Windows 2000 Professional or Windows XP Home or Professional.
- Provider (ISP) or a direct connection to the Internet.

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Appendix E

Student Advocates Survey Instrument

Dear Student Advocate:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. The following questions are part of a larger research project to illuminate the challenges and opportunities for students transitioning from High school to college and your thoughts about many of those issues. This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Q1 The following best describes my professional role:

- Career and College Professional (CCR) (1)
- High school counselor (2)
- High school teacher (3)
- Other (4)

Q2 I work primarily with:

- High school seniors (1)
- High school seniors and underclassmen (juniors, sophomores, etc.) (2)
- Parents and families (3)
- A mix of all of the above (4)

Q3 I have worked in my current role for:

- Less than one year (1)
- 1 - 5 years (2)
- 6 - 10 years (3)
- More than 10 years (4)

Q5 Which of the following, in your opinion, is more influential on a student's thinking about college?

- Peers (1)
- Parents and family (2)
- High school staff (3)
- Other (4)

Q6 For traditionally underrepresented college students (including first generation college students, minorities, etc.) what key factors help bridge the gap between high school and college?

- Personal knowledge about college financial aid (1)
- Access to college staff (2)
- Access to high school counselors (3)
- Other (4)

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Q7 I have the tools I need to successfully advise and assist my primary customers (see question 2).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q8 I am given the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and tools to assist my primary customers.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q9 I have adequate time to carry out college access advising during my day.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q10 The assistance I provide is considered to be a valuable service within my organization

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q11 I have attended at least one in-person training or event that provided new information to better assist my primary customers.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q12 The average student is well prepared for successfully transitioning from high school to college in my organization

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

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Q13 I have a thorough understanding of the financial aid process and how it can positively impact a student's thinking about college

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q14 I encourage all of my primary customers to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) if they, or anyone in their household, is considering college

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q15 With regard to FAFSA Completion, I found the training during the FAFSA convenings to be helpful in my outreach and counseling of students.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q16 As a part of the FAFSA convening, I networked with other FAFSA Completion school representatives to discuss best practices in student outreach and engagement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q17 As a result of my participation in the FAFSA convenings, I have shared information, tools or resources about engaging FAFSA non-filers with other counselors in my school or district.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q18 As a result of my participation in the FAFSA convenings, I have customized the information and resources that I provide to prospective college students at my school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

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Q19 As a result of my participation in the FAFSA convenings, I have all of the information I need to effectively engage and counsel FAFSA non-filers.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q20 I know where I need to go to get more information and assistance on effectively counseling FAFSA non-filers.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q21 As a result of my participation in the FAFSA convenings, I have been more effective in engaging FAFSA non-filers at my school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Appendix F

Student Advocates Interview Consent Form

Title: College Access: Findings on the FAFSA Completion Initiative Participation (HIRB ID: HIRB00003837) Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Yolanda Abel, EdD
Johns Hopkins University, School of Education, Teaching and Learning

Student Investigator: Adam Essex
Doctoral student (EdD)
Johns Hopkins University, School of Education

Date: February 2, 2016

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

The objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that are present in the FAFSA completion-participating high school sites by obtaining information directly from high school counselors in those sites. The information received as a result of this study has the potential to positively impact the operations and processes of the FAFSA completion project at the U.S. Department of Education, which is where the student researcher is employed. An additional objective is to contribute to the body of knowledge around best practices for increasing college enrollment in the U.S., particularly among low-SES and minority students.

PROCEDURES:

The Student Investigator, Adam Essex, is enrolled in the School of Education's Doctor of Education (EdD) program and this project supports the Applied Dissertation requirement of that program. The Principal Investigator, Dr. Yolanda Abel, serves as the student's EdD advisor and has consulted with the student on the development of this interview and its protocols.

You are being asked to participate in a survey and a one-on-one interview. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes of your time and can be completed at a time of your choosing. The follow-on interview will be approximately 50 minutes and will focus on your experiences, disposition, knowledge and viewpoint on topics ranging from counselor professional responsibilities to student advocacy approaches. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon location, such as the high school where the school counselor is employed.

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Your participation in both activities will be completely anonymous and you will not be identified by name in the results or data analysis. Your consent is being sought prior to the start of the survey and interview. Electronic results from the survey will be maintained in an encrypted virtual location. Paper notes resulting from the interviews will be locked in a file cabinet. The interviews will be digitally recorded and stored in a password-protected electronic storage system.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. In the unlikely event that keeping your information confidential puts you or someone else, especially a child, in serious danger, then the student investigator will notify the appropriate authorities.

BENEFITS:

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. Participants may benefit from the knowledge that they are contributing to the understanding around counselor practices within a FAFSA completion context and that their viewpoints, information and experiences could have a positive impact upon the future deployment of FAFSA completion project activities.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You choose whether to participate. If you decide not to participate, there are no penalties, and you will not lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled during the normal course of your life. If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop your participation at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits for the normal course of your life.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Homewood Institutional Review Board of the Johns Hopkins University. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study. Records will be created, stored and maintained to protect confidential information. Interviews will have a code number for the purposes of identification. No names will be used to identify the saved interview recording.

COMPENSATION:

You will not receive any monetary or non-monetary compensation for your participation, but your willingness to participate is greatly appreciated.

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IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:

You can ask questions about this research study now or at any time during the study, by talking to the student investigator working with you, Adam Essex, or by calling Yolanda Abel, EdD, the principal investigator, at (410) 516-6002. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or feel that you have not been treated fairly, please call the Homewood IRB at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

Appendix G

College Advocates Demographic Information Form

Dear High School Counselor:

Date:

As the Student Investigator for this study, I am seeking to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that are present in the FAFSA completion-participating high school sites by obtaining information directly from high school counselors like you. The information received as a result of this study has the potential to positively impact the operations and processes of the FAFSA completion project at the U.S. Department of Education, which is where the Student Investigator is employed.

An additional objective is to contribute to the body of knowledge around best practices for increasing college enrollment in the U.S., particularly among low-SES and minority students. To help me better understand the demographic information of the selected participants, there are a few questions that I would like to ask. If you do not wish to provide information for any of these questions, please skip the question(s). Otherwise, please check the appropriate box for each question.

What is your gender identity?

- Male Female Transgender

What is your highest level of education achieved?

- High School Graduate Tech School/License Some College/No Degree
 College Graduate (2 yr.) College Graduate (4 yr.) Graduate School

Are you employed as high school counselor?

- Yes No

What is your employment status?

- Full-Time Part-Time Other

What is your income range?

- <\$25,000 \$25,000-\$50,000 \$50,000-\$100,000 >\$100,000

What is your marital status?

- Single Married Marital Equivalent Separated/Divorced

Do you have children or other dependents for whom you provide support?

- Yes No

Appendix H

Student Advocates Interview Instrument

Dear Student Advocate,

Thank you for consenting to participate in this interview! We just discussed the purpose of this research study, the procedures and the various aspects of your voluntary participation, however, do you have any final questions before we begin?

1. Describe your typical duties in the area of college counseling?
2. Who are your primary customers (i.e. parents, students, community members, etc.)?
3. How prepared are your primary customers when it comes to college planning and application? What do you base this on?
4. Do you feel that the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is an important component of college access? Please elaborate on why you feel it is or is not.
5. How many of your customers have familiarity with the FAFSA, and how does the rate of familiarity change during the school year?
6. Are you involved in, or are you aware of, financial aid events in your school or community? Can you describe you how your involvement (or lack of involvement) impacts your duties as a counselor?
7. Can you tell me more about your experience with the FAFSA Completion Project convenings? Specifically, how did it – or didn't it – change the way you engage with students?
8. Regarding the training provided by Lumina Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education, did you find it to be helpful? Please tell me how it did (or did not) help you.
9. Do you access or use any data around college application and enrollment as part of your outreach to high school seniors and their families? If so, how? And if not, why?
10. Finally, let's have a more open-ended conversation about college access within your organization. What works, what does not work, and what should change with regard to college access?

Again, thank you for your participation! If you would like to follow-up with me on anything we have discussed tonight or my research in general, please feel free to contact me using the contact information I provided to you today.

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Appendix I

Study Participant Profiles

Participant	Pseudonym	Job Title	Educational Attainment	School:
1	Respondent 1	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school
2	Respondent 2	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school
3	Respondent 3	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school
4	Respondent 4	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school
5	Respondent 5	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school
6	Respondent 6	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school
7	Respondent 7	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school

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8	Respondent 8	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school
9	Respondent 9	Counselor	Master's degree	Large urban public high school

Appendix J

Student Advocates Survey Responses Matrix

		Number of respondents selecting the first, second, third or fourth position response			
Survey Question #		First position	Second position	Third position	Fourth position
Section One	Q1 Describe your role	9	*	*	*
	Q2 With whom do you work?	5	4	*	*
	Q3 How long in current role?	*	1	5	3
	Q4 What influences students' thinking?	3	5	1	*
	Q5 Whom more influential on thinking?	2	6	1	*
	Q6 What are the college access factors?	2	2	5	*

		Number of respondents selecting the first, second, third, fourth or fifth position response				
Survey Question #		First position	Second position	Third position	Fourth position	Fifth position
Section Two	Q7 I have the tools I need	*	1	3	5	*
	Q8 Can acquire new knowledge	*	2	3	4	*
	Q9 Adequate time	2	3	4	*	*
	Q10 My assistance if valuable	*	*	2	5	2
	Q11 I have attended training	*	*	6	3	*
	Q12 Students are well prepared	4	5	*	*	*
	Q13 I understand financial aid	3	1	3	2	*
	Q14 I encourage FAFSA completion	*	*	*	5	4
	Q15 FAFSA training is helpful	*	*	*	7	2
	Q16 I have networked	*	*	*	9	*
	Q17 I have shared tools and info	*	*	*	8	1
	Q18 FAFSA convenings and tools	*	*	*	2	7

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Q19 FAFSA convenings and info	*	*	*	3	6
Q20 Know how to get more info	*	*	4	5	*
Q21 Convenings and performance	*	*	*	8	1

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About the Researcher

Adam Essex, a former Presidential Management Fellow, and current Director of Communications at the U.S. Department of Education, is a nationally recognized expert in college access and equity. He holds a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, a Master's Certificate in Information Technology and Project Management from George Washington University and a Master's in Public Administration from American University. The research detailed herein, and the successful defense of the research findings in June 2016, fulfill the final requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education from Johns Hopkins University.