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Minority College Students' Perceptions of College Preparation Experiences and Their High School Counselors: One Year Later – A Revised Perspective

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Abstract

There are major problems with high schools preparing minority students for college. These problems stem from many issues, one being the lack of school counselor training in college preparedness. The need for this research is shown by the lack of literature on this topic. This paper will present the results of a study examining minority college students' high school experiences related to college-going and their perceptions of high school counselors in the process of college admission and preparation. A survey was given to the scholars of Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate program at the University of Maryland College Park. The participants (n = 15) completed the online 68-item survey. The survey included items that asked the students about their high school college preparation courses, activities that prepared them for college, and their high school counselor's involvement in their college readiness process. The results from my research demonstrated that current college students did not feel that various high school experiences and courses prepared them for college. The results also found that parents/guardians and high school counselors were considered the most influential in current college students' decisions regarding college preparation and overall decision to further their education.

Purpose and Research Questions

The statement of the purpose of this research was to identify contributing factors in minority high school students' decision to attend college or some form of higher education. While identifying these contributing factors, the researchers of this study addressed the following questions:

1. What types of college preparation experiences (academic, social, and family) did minority college students experience in high school?
2. What are minority college students' perceptions of their high school counselors' role in preparing them for college?

The purpose for this study is to find possible reasons why academic achievement may be challenging for some urban African American high school students in choosing to continue on with education after high school. This study will also show

important roles high school counselors can play in ensuring urban African American high school students' academic success. The difficulty for this research is trying to find previous studies and credible sources to support the claims suggested in this study. This study was performed due to lack of research for the given subject.

Summary of Literature Base

All youth should be able to take advantage of educational opportunities beyond high school. However, the pathway to college for students in the U.S. is marked by vast disparities in college awareness, preparation, and access (McDonough, 2004). Although comparable percentages of African American and White high school sophomores expect to finish college (Nettles & Perna, 1997), smaller percentages of African Americans and Latinos than of Whites actually enroll. Only 32% of African American and 23% of Latino high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in college in 2003, compared with 42% of Whites (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005). Also, even more disappointing is the fact that only 17% of Native American high school graduates attend any level of college, compared to the national college going rate of 67% (Benally, 2004).

From an economic perspective, for the past 30 years, high school graduates from the top income quartile have enrolled in college at a rate 25–30 percentage points higher than students from the lowest income quartile (Hawkins & Lautz, 2005). And in 2004, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 82% of students whose parents were college-educated enrolled in college directly after high school, but only 54% went to college if their parent had completed high school. Clearly, based on the preceding statistics, there is a burgeoning college access and preparation gap between racial and economic groups.

As stated previously, the need for this research is shown by the lack of literature and studies on this topic. There is a study underway that will start during the fall of 2007. This project will be performed by the College Board along with the University of Maryland College Park's Department of Counseling and Personnel Services. The title of this 3-year longitudinal study is as followed: Investigating the Influence of School Counseling Programs on Urban, Low-Income, Minority Students' College Preparation. The participants of this study will include Students and school counselors from urban high schools with racial and economic diversity. This study will examine the influence and effect of school counselor programs and activities on the college preparedness of low-income, minority, urban high school students.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were students of the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Program at the University of Maryland College Park. The students were chosen due to the time period given, six weeks, to perform this study. The program

includes rising juniors and seniors. Students of this program have backgrounds of either being low income, first generation college students, or underrepresented in their field of study. The Ronald E. McNair program includes in total 29 students. The genders of the students are seven men and twenty-two women. The minorities included in this program are African American, Hispanic, and Asian American.

Instrument

The materials used for this study were the Ronald E. McNair students, Survey Monkey, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The students of the Ronald E. McNair program served as a sample sized of the population of students who have graduated from high school and have made it to a college institution. Survey Monkey is survey software that allows anyone to create professional online surveys. This software was chosen because it was an easy, fast, secure, and a secretive way to respect the privacy of the participants in the survey. SPSS is a computer program used for statistical analysis. SPSS was chosen because it combines the broad range of capabilities of the analytical process. The analytical process includes: Planning, data collection, data access, data management and data preparation, data analysis, reporting, and deployment. SPSS allows the researcher to produce decision-making information quickly. The results from the data in SPSS, allows the researcher to find key facts, patterns, and trends in the study.

Design

This study will use a survey design in which relationships between variables will be explored.

Procedure

The researcher gathered the email addresses of Scholars from the graduate assistant working with the McNair Scholar Program. As previously mentioned, the survey was developed using Survey Monkey. The survey was distributed to all 29 Scholars via email. The email contained an introduction to the survey's purpose and directions for completion. A follow up email was sent to all participants a week later. To encourage the students to participate, the researchers simply explained to the students the basis of my research and the importance of the study.

Results

When reviewing the data of the demographics from the study, there were many similarities and differences. As stated previously, the participants were chosen due to the time period given to perform this study. The genders of the students were seven men and twenty-two women. Only 15 of the 29 participants completed the online 68-item survey. For the first question, are you male or female, 1 (6.3%) male and 15 (93.8%) females responded. The second question, what is your age, 7 (43.8%) were from the 18–20 range, 8 (50%) from the 21–23 range, and 1 (6.3%) was from the 27–older range. The third question, what is your university classification, 6 (37.5%) were juniors, 7 (43.8%) were seniors, 2 (12.5%) were super seniors, and 1 (6.3%) was

a graduate student. Majority of the students, 12 (75%) were African American while the other represented ethnicities were Asian American 1 (6.3%), Latino/Hispanic 1 (6.3%), and 1 (6.3%) classified themselves as other. Half of the respondents, 8 (50%), reported their cumulative grade point average was between 3.1-3.5 The question, what was the highest level of education obtained by your mother and father, showed very different views. The question gear towards the participants' mother, majority of the respondents, 5 (31.3%) reported their mother had some college (community/junior college or some 4-year college study). The question gear towards the participants' father, majority of the respondents, 4 (25%) reported their father was a high school graduate or received a GED. The final question, how many siblings (brothers and sisters) attend college or are college graduates, the results show 5 (31.3%) respondents either had none or one sibling.

The following data tables were the questions focused towards the participants' college readiness.

Table 1.0 (Below) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the Honors and Advanced Placement courses taken in high school by the scholars. This table shows the majority of the scholars, in bold, took 5-6 Honors/ Advanced Placement courses. This table shows the scholars were able to take advanced classes during their high school career.

Table 1.0 Frequencies of Honors/ Advanced Placement Courses Taken in High School by Scholars

Number of courses	N	%
0	1	6.3
1-2	5	31.3
3-4	3	18.8
5-6	6	37.5
7-8	1	6.3
9 or more	0	0.0

Table 1.1 (Page 92) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the Standardized Tests taken in high school by the scholars. This table shows the majority of the scholars, in bold, took the SAT I during high school more than any other of the other standardized tests. This shows many of the scholars were required to take the SAT I over any the other standardized tests.

Table 1.1 Frequencies of Standardized Tests Taken in High School by Scholars

Standardized Tests	n	%
PSAT	9	60.0
SAT I	13	86.7
SAT II	5	33.3
ACT	9	60.0
Advanced Placement	7	46.7
PLAN	0	0.0

Table 1.2 (Page 93) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the Math, English and Science courses taken in high school by the scholars. This table shows the majority of the scholars, in bold, took Pre-calculus, English Literature, and Biology in high school.

Table 1.3 (Page 93) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the first time the scholars took the SAT/ACT in high school. This table shows the majority of the scholars, in bold, took the SAT/ACT in the 12th grade. This shows there was some reason the scholars

Table 1.2 Frequencies of Math, English, and Sciences Courses Taken in High School by Scholars

Course	n	%
Algebra I	2	12.5
Algebra II	5	31.3
Geometry	2	12.5
Trigonometry	2	12.5
Pre-calculus	7	43.8
Calculus	3	18.8
Statistics	4	25.0
Other- Applied math/ SAT class	1	6.3
Composition	6	37.6
American Literature	3	18.8
English Literature	9	56.3
British Literature	1	6.3
World Literature	2	12.5
Other- AP English	2	12.5
Don't know	1	6.3
Biology	7	43.8
Earth Science (Environmental)	1	6.3
Chemistry	5	31.3
Physics	6	37.5
Other- Don't know	1	6.3

Table 1.3 Frequencies of the First Time Scholars Took the SAT/ACT

	n	%
Never took either test	1	6.3
7th grade or earlier	2	12.5
8th grade	1	6.3
9th grade	1	6.3
10th grade	3	18.8
11th grade	3	18.8
12th grade	5	31.3

Table 1.4 (Below) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the various people the scholars spoke with in high school about college admissions. This table shows the majority of the scholars, in bold, spoke with people like family, friends, counselors, teachers, and many others. This table shows the students were able to find a person they could relate to and discuss college admissions.

Table 1.4 Frequencies of People Whom the Scholars Spoke With About College Admissions

	n				%		
	Many Times	Once or Twice	Never	Total #	Many Times	Once or Twice	Never
Parents/ guardians	13	1	0	14	92.9	7.1	0
High school counselor	10	1	3	14	71.4	7.1	21.4
High school teacher	6	6	2	14	42.9	42.9	14.3
Friends or other students	12	1	1	14	85.7	7.1	7.1
Siblings	7	4	3	14	50.0	28.6	21.4
Other relatives	6	6	2	14	42.9	42.9	14.3
Family friends	6	4	4	14	42.9	28.6	28.6
College recruiter	6	4	4	14	42.9	28.6	28.6
High school coach	4	4	6	14	28.6	28.6	42.9
Private college counselor	1	4	9	14	7.1	28.6	64.3
Clergy Member	3	3	8	14	21.4	21.4	57.1

Table 1.5 (Page 95) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the various educational setting preferred by the scholars after graduating. This table shows majority of the scholars wanted to attend a public or private university out of state.

Table 1.5 Frequencies of Educational Settings that the Scholars Preferred after High School Graduation

Educational Setting	n	%
Didn't consider any schools	0	0.0
U.S. Military Academy	1	7.1
A 2-year Community or Junior College	1	7.1
Public or Private University (In-state)	5	35.7
Public or Private University (Out of state)	6	42.9
A technical or trade school	0	0.0
Transferring from one institution to another	1	7.1

Table 1.6 (Below) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the first person to give advice to the scholars on taking courses to gain college admission. Majority of the scholars received advice from their high school counselors.

Table 1.6 Frequencies of the FIRST Person Who Gave the Scholars Advice on Taking Courses to Gain College Admission

	n	%
Middle school counselor	0	0.0
High school counselor	9	64.3
Parents/guardians	3	21.4
Friend	0	0.0
Siblings	1	7.1
Other relatives	0	0.0
High school coach	0	0.0
Other	1	7.1

Table 1.7 (Below) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the counselor's role in preparing the scholars for college. With regards to gaining admission to a state college or university, college of the scholars choice, and completing applications for college; majority of the scholars felt their counselor prepared them extremely well. For securing funding for college and writing college essays; the majority of the scholars felt their counselors did not prepare them at all. For choosing the "right" college the scholars felt their counselor prepared them somewhat. In the area of gaining admission to a community college, majority of the scholars felt their counselor's role was either somewhat or not well at all.

Table 1.7 Frequencies of High School Counselors' Role in Scholars College Preparation

	n and %				Total #
	Extremely Well	Somewhat Well	Not Well	Not Sure	
Gain admission to a state college/ university	6 (42.9%)	4 (28.6%)	4 (28.6%)	0 (0%)	14
Gain admission to the college of your choice	7 (50%)	3 (21.4%)	4 (28.6%)	0 (0%)	14
Completing applications for college	7(53.8%)	2 (15.4%)	4 (30.8%)	0 (0%)	13
Secure funding for college	2 (14.3%)	5 (35.7%)	7 (50%)	0 (0%)	14
Writing college essays	3 (21.4%)	3 (21.4%)	7 (50%)	1 (7.1%)	14
Choosing the "right" college	4 (28.6)	5 (35.7%)	5 (5.7%)	0 (0%)	14
Gain admission to a community college	2 (14.3)	4 (28.6%)	6 (42.9%)	2 (14.3%)	14

Table 1.8 (Page 97) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the rates in which the scholars felt they were prepared after graduating from high school. When asked going to a 4-year college in state, the majority of the scholars felt they were very prepared. But when asked about going to a 4-year college out of state, majority of the scholars felt they were not prepared at all. When going to a college, the majority of the scholars felt they were very prepared. They only question the scholars were not sure on was about being prepared for trade school.

Table 1.8 Frequencies of Scholars' Perceptions of Their College Preparation After Graduating From High School

I believe I was prepared to...	n and %					Total #
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	
Go to a 4-year College (In-State)	7 (50%)	3 (21.4%)	3 (21.4%)	1 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	14
Go to a 4-year College (Out of State)	3 (21.4%)	3 (21.4%)	5 (35.7%)	1 (7.1%)	2 (14.3%)	14
Go to a community College	7 (50%)	1 (7.1%)	3 (21.4%)	1 (7.1%)	2 (14.3%)	14
Go to a Trade School	4 (28.6%)	2 (14.3%)	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)	5 (35.7%)	14

Table 1.9 (Below) would be appropriate for displaying the results of the scholar's satisfaction of the high school counselors. Majority of the scholars were very satisfied with their counselors in all areas.

Table 1.9 Frequencies of the Scholars' Satisfaction with their High School Counselors

My counselor was...	n and %					Total #
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	
Concerned about my future	8 (57.1%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	3 (21.4%)	1 (7.1%)	14
Knowledgeable about colleges/universities	9 (64.3%)	3 (21.4%)	0 (0%)	2 (14.3%)	0 (0%)	14
Knowledgeable about the college admission process	9 (64.3%)	3 (21.4%)	0 (0%)	2 (14.3%)	0 (0%)	14
Believed that I could go on to college	9 (64.3%)	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)	2 (14.3%)	0 (0%)	14
Dependable	9 (64.3%)	1 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	2 (14.3%)	2 (14.3%)	14
Easy to talk to	8 (57.1%)	3 (21.4%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	14
Good listener	8 (57.1%)	3 (21.4%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	14
Responsible for getting me into college	5 (35.7%)	4 (28.6%)	2 (14.3%)	3 (21.4%)	0 (0%)	14
A resource for college information	7 (50%)	4 (28.6%)	0 (0%)	3 (21.4%)	0 (0%)	14

Table 2.0 (Page99) would be appropriate for displaying the results of what the high school counselors helped the scholars with college. The only disagreement the scholars had with their counselors was in the area of writing a college essay.

Table 2.0 Frequencies of the High School Counselors' Performance

My counselor helped me to...	N						Total #
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	N/A	
Enroll in a SAT prep course	3 (20%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	15
Enroll in college-track courses	4 (26.7%)	5 (33.3%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	15
Write a college application essay	2 (13.3)	3 (20%)	5 (33.3%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	0 (0%)	15
Complete a college application	6 (40%)	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15
Explore different types of colleges and universities	7 (46.7%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15
Explore financial aid options	5 (33.3%)	3 (20%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15
Prepare for college	4 (26.7%)	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	15
Decide which college to attend	5 (35.7%)	2 (14.3%)	4 (28.6%)	3 (21.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14
Understand the college application process	3 (20%)	8 (53.3%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	15
Do better in school	8 (53.3%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.7%)	15

Discussion and Conclusion

What types of college preparation experiences (academic, social, and family) did minority college students experience in high school? With regards to the research being reviewed in this study, the experiences the scholars had academically, socially, and with family all varied. As the researcher analyzed the data, they concluded; Academically, as shown by the data, the researchers of the study interpreted the responses given by the scholars as inadequate preparation as a whole by the school systems to influence the students to further their education. Socially, the researchers interpreted the responses as students using resources other than those provided the schools (i.e., parents/guardians, relatives, friends/peers, etc.). And family played a significant role in the majority of the students' preparation and influence for future education.

What are minority college students' perceptions of their high school counselors' role in preparing them for college? The researchers concluded, from the responses of the survey, a majority of the college students' felt their high school counselor assisted them adequately with the college admissions process. However, respondents also felt their high school counselors were not providing assistance with particular aspects of college preparation courses, writing college essays, and financial aid options.

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