First-Generation College Students and the Role of Professional School Counselors

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Abstract

The focus of this literature review is on first-generation college students, most of whom come from low-income and minority backgrounds, and faces numerous barriers that make it more challenging to access education beyond high school. A review of research on first-generation college students and the factors that affect their college-going rates are examined. In tandem, a review of well-established components of author selected college access programs is inspected along with special depth given to the Advancement Via Self-Determination (AVID) program due to its longitudinal, research-based, and results-proven track record. The success of the AVID program on academic achievement and college going rates is examined through an Adlerian psychology lens. Recommendations are included on how professional school counselors can best help this population access and succeed in postsecondary education.
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First-Generation College Students and the Role of Professional School Counselors

Introduction

Background and Scope

Education beyond high school via institutions of higher education is a critical means for an individual to attain economic triumph in today’s society. According to the College Board (2004), higher levels of educational attainment are related to higher incomes and lower rates of unemployment, and the earnings gap between high school and college graduates only widens over time.

While college access programs have expanded significantly over the past twenty years and reach many students at risk of not pursuing education beyond high school, there are still alarming numbers of students in the United States who are not adequately prepared academically, psychologically, socially, and financially, to access and succeed in higher education. A disproportionate number of these students come from groups that are historically underrepresented: students of color, low-income students, students with limited English proficiency, and first-generation college students (neither parent has a college degree).

First-generation college students (FGC students), most of whom come from low-income and minority backgrounds (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008), face numerous barriers that make it more challenging for them to access education beyond high school. Compared to their peers, they typically take less rigorous high school courses are especially likely to lack specific types of college awareness. This is likely due to a lack of role models who have navigated the college system and who understand the process. These students and their families often do not understand the steps necessary to prepare for higher education (Vargas, 2004).
steps include knowing about how to finance a college education, to complete admission actions, and to make a correlation between career goals and necessary educational requirements, and the steps to attain those aspirations.

It is the belief of the author that preparing all students for success in higher education should be a priority for educators. Even though a federal commitment to this priority is reflected in the No Child Left Behind and Higher Education Acts, there still are alarming gaps in college going rates for certain populations of students—one of which is FGC students. FGC students represent 27% of all graduating high school students (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004).

The author will look at current trends and ways school counselors can help foster a school culture that ensures FGC students and other underrepresented students have the expectation, preparation, and information necessary to access and succeed in higher education.

While there are multiple issues that play a role in underrepresented student’s low post-secondary attendance, many of which are beyond the reach of school counseling programs, school counselors are in a unique position to significantly advocate for and create strengths-based academic preparation programs in their schools, impart college access information, and inform and coach families on post-secondary financial aid options.

The Advancement Via Self Determination (AVID) college access program will be explored as a gold standard program which targets underrepresented students, many of which are FGC students. Also, suggestions for counselors serving students who are “missed” or “rejected” by programs such as AVID will be discussed. Adlerian theory will be compared and aligned with the AVID program as a backdrop to why this program works in promoting academic success for students.
Definition of Key Terms

First-generation college students (FGC students). First-generation students are defined as those whose parents’ highest level of education is a high school diploma or less (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). FGC students typically come from low-income (family annual income below $25,000) and minority families. Some studies refer to FGC students as those whose parents may have some college, postsecondary certificates, or associate’s degrees, but not bachelor’s degrees. This is also the definition used by the federal TRIO programs. Regardless of how one defines FGC students, research across the board indicates significant differences for students whose parents have a bachelor’s degree or higher and students whose parents have some or no college (Lee, Sax, Kim, & Hagedorn, 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

College access programs. These programs are defined as student-centered programs operated by universities and colleges, federal or state agencies, or non-profit organizations. These programs typically supply academic assistance and/or enrichment activities to mostly middle and high school students (though there are promising new programs targeted to elementary students). Services include direct services to students and families that provide information and assistance in college admissions and financial aid; motivational activities that include mentoring, college visits, and advocacy; academic enrichment and support, including tutoring, study groups, instruction in college preparation subject matter and college entrance exam preparation; and counseling and advising.

Schools. For the purpose of this literature review, this term refers to public or private middle or secondary schools.
Higher education, post-secondary education and college. These terms are interchangeable for the purpose of this paper and include all education and training programs beyond graduation from high school unless otherwise noted.

Characteristics of First-generation Students

FGC students vary from their peers in ways that lessen the probability that they will pursue college. According to research conducted by Lohfink and Paulsen (2005), FGC students are disproportionately overrepresented in the most disadvantaged groups relative to participation in higher education.

Research

FGC students are the focus of a large body of research. Studies on FGC students have discovered many distinctive characteristics of this sub-group of students. Research on FGC students tends to focus on three areas: (a) comparing FGC students with their peers in terms of academic preparation, college expectations, and demographic comparisons; (b) the transition process for FGC students from high school to a post-secondary institution; and (c) FGC student persistence in college and degree attainment. The scope of this paper explores the first category.

The weight of evidence from the reviewed research indicates that FCG students in contrast to their peers, are at a disadvantage in several areas including: academic preparation, family income level/resources to pay for college, family expectations in regards to college, and knowledge about the college access process (i.e. admissions and financial aid).

A frequently cited longitudinal research study on FGC students was conducted by Horn, Nunez, and Bobbit (2000) for the National Center for Educational Statistics. Their research compared FGC students with their peers whose parent or parents attended college. They found
that overwhelmingly, FGC students were less likely than their peers to enroll in college within two years of graduating from high school.

A major challenge in educational policy and practice in the United States is the remarkable increase in the number of immigrant children. The successful integration of immigrant children from very diverse backgrounds into the academic system—children whose parents have varying levels of education, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, and reasons for migration, poses many difficulties for educators (Palacios, Guttmannova & Chase, 2008). According to Palacios, Guttmannova & Chase-Lansdale (2008) “[Immigrant children] constituted nearly 20% of the U.S. school-age population in 2000, and within the last 5 years, the mean age at entry into the United States has decreased from 9.8 years to approximately 5 years, and 16% of all children under age 10 are born to immigrant parents in the United States” (p. 1381). Most studies of school achievement among immigrant children have targeted adolescents as will be seen within this literature review, but research on younger children is growing as the elementary years are realized to be a key foundation in academic preparation for FGC students and a critical point to begin interventions aimed at increasing pursuit of higher education among this population of students.

**Academic Preparation**

In the reviewed research, there seems to be a strong correlation between FGC students who take rigorous coursework in high school and future college access and success. Based on this evidence, school counselors need to encourage and support rigorous course taking (AP, IB, honors, math beyond algebra 2, etc.) for their FGC students in order to help ensure the pursuit of college. Horn, Nunez and Bobbitt (2000) found that taking advanced math courses in high school (beyond Algebra 2) more than doubles the chances that FGC students will go onto college. Even though
the research demonstrates this correlation, FGC students are still shown to be less likely than their peers to take courses that are required for college admission (Horn, Nunez & Bobbitt, 2000).

Parents of FGC students may be unaware of the connection between course taking patterns and college requirements. “Parents of underrepresented students are less likely than other parents to know about the repercussions of current course choices on future class placements, to know about the differences between high school curricular tracks, or to feel entitled to request changes to higher-level courses for their children” (Vargas, 2004, p. 10). Therefore, school counselors need to ensure that outreach and information on the importance of course rigor and gateway courses before high school is understood by all students and parents. They also need to encourage FGC students to take challenging courses and promote the scaffolding within the school to support FGC students to succeed in these courses. Horn, Nunez and Bobbit (2000) conveyed through their research that increased levels of parental involvement increase the odds that students will take a rigorous high school curriculum and the chances they will ultimately enroll in college--this was even after they controlled for level of parental education.

Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) found that FGC students who did not take a rigorous high school curriculum were less likely than students whose parents completed college to be enrolled three years after entering a four-year institution (65 percent versus 85 percent). However, “among students who were more prepared, that is students whose high school curriculum was rigorous, no difference in persistence was found according to students parental level of education” (p.36). This is evidence that rigorous coursework is key to leveling the playing field for all students. Overall, the results of this study pointed toward the importance of providing FGC students with the opportunity to take rigorous coursework and that doing so will increase their chances of pursuing and succeeding in college.
Another encouraging piece of research conducted by Horn, Nunez, and Bobbit (2000) for the National Center for Educational Statistics found that FGC students, regardless of parent’s educational attainment history, who completed math beyond Algebra 2, significantly increased their enrollment in a four-year college. Attending a four-year college directly out of high-school for low-income and FCG students makes a significant difference in bachelor’s degree attainment rates. Engle and Tinto (2008) found that, “low income and FGC students were more than seven times as likely to earn bachelor’s degrees if they started in four-year institutions, but less than 25 percent of them did so. Furthermore, only about one in ten students from this population who entered postsecondary education through public two-year and for-profit institutions transferred to four year institutions within six years compared to half of their most advantages peers” (p. 20).

Demographic

Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that FGC students are more likely to be Black or Hispanic, have children, and come from low-income families compared with students whose parents have college degrees. These characteristics are associated with lower rates of college attendance and degree attainment and they are interconnected (Horn, Nunez & Bobbitt, 2000; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). The same researchers also discovered that FGC students are more likely to delay entry into postsecondary education, to begin college at two-year institutions, to commute to campus, to take classes part-time, work full-time, and need remedial coursework.

College Expectations

Families of FGC students sometimes discourage them from going to college and this can lead to distancing from family support. FGC students are also susceptible to doubts about their academic and motivational abilities; they may think they are not college material (Striplin, 1999). For FGC students going to college may mark a considerable disconnection from their family
tradition. Parents, siblings, or friends who don’t have this experience in their lives may not be supportive or realize the social and financial benefits of obtaining a college degree.

**Enrollment**

Less than half (47 percent) of students whose parents did not attend college enrolled in any post-secondary education the year following high school compared to 85 percent of students whose parents had a college degree (Engle, Bermeo & O’Brien, 2006). Among graduates that did go to college, 56 percent of FGC students attended two-year institutions or less compared to 23 percent of students who had a parent with a college degree (Engle, Bermeo & O’Brien, 2006). The College Board (2007), determined that high-achieving students from low-income families have about the same chance of enrolling in college as low-achieving students from wealthier families.

**Major Barriers**

Three major barriers facing FGC student are a lack of: college-going role models, knowledge of college-going benefits, and awareness of college access and financial aid resources. A huge challenge and barrier facing FGC students and their families is the intimidation by the prospect of applying for admission to college or being on campus (College Board, 2007). “Neither the students nor their families clearly understand the benefits of a college education, the college selection process and application process, or the availability of financial aid to help finance the cost” (College Board, 2007, p. 14). It is well known that admissions and financial aid applications can be difficult to navigate even for experienced parents. The processes, deadlines, and forms associated with the college admission and financial aid process can be bewildering for FGC students without experienced mentors to help guide them (College Board, 2007).

**Defining the Issue**

The author’s findings in the research on FGC students clearly point to the reasons why college preparatory, access initiatives, and early and ongoing guidance are critical for school
counselors to implement within their schools. It is not surprising, given all of the barriers faced by FGC students that their college going rates lack behind their peers.

The educational pipeline of students across the United States is changing and more and more of our students are first-generational and racial and ethnic minority students. “By the year 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau projects a 77 percent increase in the number of Hispanics, a 32 percent increase in African Americans, a 62 percent increase in Asians, a 26 percent increase in Native Americans, and less than a one percentage point increase in the Caucasian population. The majority of the growth will occur among the populations that are the least educated” (Kelly, 2005, p. 1).

The trends in our state, nation, and world economy point in the direction that education beyond high school is a necessity for the welfare and security of our nation. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that many of the fastest growing jobs in the United States will require some type of postsecondary education, while the actual number of students entering postsecondary education is much lower than the expected needs (Progress of Education Reform, 2008). The U.S. Department of Labor (2008), determined that 90 percent of new jobs with both high growth and high wages require at least some postsecondary training. Therefore, it is the responsibility of school counselors, teachers, administrators, parents, business leaders, and the community to team together to ensure FGC and other underrepresented students are academically, socially, and emotionally prepared to access the post-secondary education necessary to enter the work force.

**Minnesota-specific Data**

A study conducted by the Brookings Institute (2005) found that 33 percent of the Twin Cities area residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 19 percent of African Americans, 11 percent of Mexicans and 8 percent of Hmong. This points to a large percentage of
FGC students in the Twin Cities area. Minnesota, along with many other states, faces the challenges of low high school graduation rates among students of color and other underrepresented students (including FGS students), low college participation rates of these students, and inadequate preparation for college-level work (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU), 2008). “Nearly half of all public high school graduates who enroll in Minnesota’s two-year public colleges need at least one developmental course, usually in math” (MNSCU, 2008, pg. 1). The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities have spearheaded this issue head-on and have put into place best practices to recruit and retain underrepresented students through many programming initiatives and these efforts are supported by funding appropriated by the 2007 Legislature. MNSCU is the Minnesota college system that comprises 25 community and technical colleges and seven state universities. It is critical that Minnesota school counselors are aware of the programs offered by this state system to support FGC students and other underrepresented students that they serve.

Students of color and low-income students are increasing in the educational pipeline across Minnesota. As baby boomers begin to retire, the supply of new workers in our K-12 system need to be prepared for college level work—and this supply of new workers includes a large and growing population of students of color and students whose parents did not attend college.

Degree Gap with Other Nations

The United States must increase the educational attainment rates of its students to maintain our competitiveness in our global economy. “After leading the world in degree production for decades, overall degree attainment rates have stagnated in the U.S. while other countries have made rapid gains in recent years” (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 5). Engle and Tinto (2008) also reported that the U.S. ranks in the bottom half in terms of degree completion and ties
for last in baccalaureate degree completion in the world. The fastest growing segments of the U.S. population are low-income and minority youth. These populations of students have historically been the least likely to earn college degrees and the gaps in degree attainment for these groups has only increased over time (Kelly, 2005).

**Earnings Potential**

An immense benefit in attaining a college degree for all students is the benefit of higher income earnings over their lifetime. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2009), people with only a high school diploma in 2007, earned a median income of $27,000, compared to $47,000 for people with a bachelor’s degree. This is a 74 percent higher median earnings for people with a bachelor’s degree compared to those with just a high school diploma.

**High Counselor to Student Ratios**

Current student to counselor ratios and large caseloads leave thousands of students across our country underserved. Ratios can be in the thousands in some states and hover near 500 per counselor in Minnesota. According to Fitzgerald (2009):

> Minnesota school children's mental health and academic counseling needs have dramatically increased in the last two years; however, funding and hiring of school counselors has not kept up with this growing demand. Compounding the problem for children is that Minnesota has traditionally lagged behind the rest of the nation in student-to-counselor ratios, ranking 49th out of 50 since the beginning of this decade. As a result, student's academic, social and mental health problems are going unaddressed (p. 1).

This puts many students at a risk for very limited access to school counselors, who at many schools are the most knowledgeable resources for college access information. The American School Counselor Association (2005) recommends a school counselor to student ratio of 250 to 1.
College Access Interventions for First-Generational College Students

School counselors are in an exceptional position within the school structure to significantly influence college access for all students. Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca & Moeller (2008) conducted a longitudinal, qualitative research study for the Consortium on Chicago School Research on barriers to college access. They concluded that the two critical steps to improving college enrollment and success for all students, including FGC students were: (a) creating a college-going culture in the school, and (b) providing students with adequate support and guidance. School counselors are in a key position within schools to advocate for both.

The American School Counseling Association (2005) in its model for school counseling programs advocates that school counselors implement programs designed to enhance the academic, career, and personal/social domains of all students. The ASCA model (2005) also puts forward that the structure of the model in schools benefits all students by helping to promote a challenging course of study which as shown by many researchers helps students access post secondary educational opportunities.

The area of greatest impact area for school counselors to increase the number of FGC students who enroll in and graduate from college is to promote improved academic preparation for this population of students. King (1996) in her research concluded that, the foremost predictive variable regarding college attendance after high school for all students is the rigor of academics. Across the spectrum of author-reviewed research, the results regarding academic preparation are similar: the more extensive the student’s academic training in high school, the more probable the student will attend college—across all socioeconomic levels. The college access program, AVID, which is explored later in this literature review, promotes several of the ingredients presented by
the research of Engle and Tinto (2008) to help improve the academic preparation for FGC students. These recommendations are:

- More information and counseling about gateway courses well before high school especially since the math track to college starts with eighth grade algebra.
- Additional academic and study skill support to successfully complete challenging high school coursework, including integrating note-taking, higher-order thinking, time management and other academic self-advocating skills into the core curriculum.
- Greater access to college-preparatory courses.
- Teachers who are equipped with the training and skills they need to develop challenging course material and to teach rigorous college-preparatory courses, including Advanced Placement (AP).
- Counselors who have more comprehensive knowledge about the college access process and the support and time they need to work with students on their pathway to college.

**Identify Students at Risk Early**

Guthrie and Guthrie (2000) found that “enrollment in algebra in middle school was found to be the single most critical predictor of grade point average and college credit accumulation” (p. 2). These researchers also discovered that students who took algebra in middle school earned a significantly higher grade point average in high school and scored higher on standardized tests than those without middle school algebra. Horn, Nunez, and Bobbit (2000), determined through their research on FGS students, a strong link between taking algebra in 8th grade and subsequent college enrollment. It is a generally accepted view that grade point average in tandem with course rigor in high school is the most widely used college admissions criteria for acceptance. These
research results point to a key place for school counselors to intervene with interventions and strategies.

School counselors should utilize math course taking data in middle school as a catalyst for focused action to serve at risk students. School counselors may also want to disaggregate their math level data with socio-economic status (free and reduced lunch), ethnicity, and language spoken at home. Through this funnel, school counselors could identify students early that may be FGC students at risk of not pursuing post-secondary education and create interventions to encourage movement towards this end.

**Connect Interests and Skills**

One of the numerous responsibilities that school counselors execute is supporting the career development of their students. According to Gibbons and Shoffner (2004), “school counselors generally agree that all students need to understand the relationship between interests, abilities, and the world of work, and how to identify and act on information pertaining to furthering their education” (p. 91).

School counselors should utilize career and interest inventories with all students and strive to have individual or small group counseling meetings with FGS students to provide them with the knowledge that they may not be able to get from their parents. In tandem, it is important to provide FGC students role models and to establish networks of FGS who have graduated from college and have success in their chosen occupations (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004).

The school counselor can also make use of career and interest inventories to help FGC students find activities like job shadows and summer enrichment programs to help connect abilities to the world of work.
Involve Families

Parental involvement is a key factor in student’s aspirations to attend college and a critical component of college awareness programming. Early outreach to FGC students and their families (as early as middle school) with information on how to prepare, apply, and access financial aid, could greatly increase the of college enrollment for this population (Vargas, 2004). Horn, Nunez, and Bobbit (2000) for the National Center for Educational Statistics found that students who obtained help from their high school in the post-secondary application process and who had parents that were involved in the process too, substantially increased their enrollment in a 4-year college. It is also important to note that school counselors should tailor the communications about college planning and application processes for parents in their first language and to make available internet access and training for families (College Board, 2007). Another key programming goal should be to connect FGC families to other FGC families that are already enrolled in and are succeeding in college.

Access to Information

Ensuring that FGC students and their parents have information not only about the benefits of rigorous course taking, but also admissions and financial aid, are critical to college access. Vargas (2004), found that FGC students will take the steps to apply and enroll in a four-year institution at higher rates if they have received guidance on the admissions process and particularly if they received information about financial aid. As said by Camizzi, Clark and Goodman (2009),

The decision to attend, apply, and enroll in college is a long-term planning process that involves gathering information, enrolling in appropriate programs of study in high school, and accessing information about application processes and financial aid opportunities.

Much of this type of information and knowledge of the planning process is less accessible
or less understood by low-income and first-generation students as compared to middle-income students (p. 472).

Thus, these students tend to rely more on advice from school counselors (MacAllum et al., 2007).

Even though much of the college information that students seek is available via the internet, the research conducted by MacAllum, et al., (2007) suggests that fewer students from underserved populations (including FGC students) had internet access at home and the information they did receive on cost, financial aid, and scholarships was difficult to comprehend.

Interesting and noteworthy is a 2007 research study on a financial aid intervention targeted towards high school students with financial need, found that text messaging was an effective means of reaching students (Camizzi, Clark & Goodman, 2009). They found that 75% of their targeted students had access to text messages. Utilizing text messaging in communicating relevant college access information to FGC students may be worth attempting as a school counseling intervention.

**Enrollment in College Access Programs**

There are rising quantities of college access and success programs that span the United States that aim to serve first-generation, low-income and racial and ethnic minority students. According to Galassi and Akos (2007), “advocating programs that enhance the academic development of minority, English language learners, and other traditionally underserved groups of students requires school counselors to be knowledgeable about effective programs and to exercise a leadership role in this regard” (p. 183). It is of utmost importance that school counselors understand the evidence-based college access programs in their communities and advocate for their schools to include these programs as part of their interventions to raise academic achievement for all students.
Mentors

It is imperative for school counselors to understand available resources in their school and community for mentoring relationships for students. Gallossi and Akos (2007) recommend, “for students who lack sustained relationships with positive adult role models outside of school, counselors should consider establishing linkages with effective mentoring programs” (p. 182). Gallossi and Akos (2007) highlighted the Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs as an example of a community-based mentoring program that has been empirically demonstrated to enhance academic and other aspects of youth development, especially for poor and minority students—many of which are FGC students.

Mentors can take on a variety of roles for FGC students. School counselors can prepare mentors for their roles via training sessions. Some possible roles for mentors can include: (a) serve as a college-going role model and share experiences; (b) assist with the college entry process; (c) monitor academic progress; and (d) listen and advise as a caring adult (Tierney, Bailey, Constantine, Finkelstein & Hurd, 2009).

Utilizing Data

It is critical that school counselors maintain data on vital statistics with the underserved populations (including FGC students) that they serve. This would include, but is not limited to, the proportions of their low-income students in college-preparatory programs, enrollment in rigorous courses, and success in applying to two- and four-year institutions, and on-time diploma completion (College Board, 2007). Ideally, there would be a relationship between high schools and area colleges that would monitor student progress and share data with each other with the goal of improving degree completion beyond just access to college.
A comprehensive school counseling program should be data-driven (ASCA, 2005). The use of data to effect change within the school system is key to ensuring every student receives the benefits of the school counseling program. School counselors must show that each activity implemented as part of the program was developed from a careful analysis of students' needs, achievement and/or related data (ASCA, 2005). This philosophy should be carried out in college access initiatives aimed at FGC and other underserved students. In addition, ASCA (2005), encourages that results data should be shared with stakeholders (like area colleges) to be analyzed for effectiveness for immediate, intermediate, and long-ranges results and continuously analyzed for improvement. The main purpose of this data-driven approach would be to guide future action within college-access programs and to improve future results for all students (including FGC students).

**Special Help on Applications**

Low-income and FGC students often face challenges in completing the steps to college entry, such as taking college admissions tests, searching for colleges, submitting college applications, and selecting a college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Because FGC students may not be aware of the steps or lack information on how to complete college application materials and do not have parents who have navigated the college system before, it is critical that schools offer sufficient help with the college entry process. Hands-on assistance for each step of the process is ideal. By providing one-on-one assistance with college applications, schools can ensure that students submit applications that are on time and of sufficient quality (Tierney, Bailey, Constantine, Finkelstein & Hurd, 2009).

**College goal Sunday.** Applying for financial aid is not easy. “It [applying for financial aid] may be the most critical step for low-income students on the road to college. It [completing
financial aid forms] is the most confusing step and many students stumble at that point” (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008, p. 51). In Minnesota there is a big push to offer one-on-one, hands on help with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for low-income, racial and ethnic minority, and FGC students. The training for volunteers is conducted by financial aid professionals and there are several Sunday’s from January to May around Minnesota for families to get assistance filing for college financial aid.

**College Bound Culture**

A college bound culture within a school is one where pursuing post-secondary education is the expectation for all students. “Research on college choice often finds that one of the most important predictors on whether students go to college is whether they attend a high school where the majority of students tend to go to college” (Roderick, Nagaoka & Moeller, 2008, p. 48). This expectation is interwoven into all aspects of the school fabric. It is apparent in the curricula, through individualized college planning and goal setting with counselors and teachers, professional development for all staff on changing college issues, continuous communication with parents on college issues, and via implementing college access programs like AVID. The equation is simple: as more and more of students at a school go onto college, positive peer pressure encourages others follow too.

Many schools across the country have started implementing college bound cultures through the vehicle of school advisory programs--where the time spent in advisory is focused on college topics and academic development. An advisory program (also called advocacy programs, homebase, teacher-based guidance, advisor-advisee) are founded on the principle that every student should have at least one adult at school to act as the student's advocate. Advisory periods are scheduled in various increments. In some schools, advisory periods are scheduled daily and in
other schools they are scheduled one to three times weekly or monthly. An advisory program can be an important factor in supporting student learning.

This over-arching advisory program is a springboard for other college bound culture interventions. Galassi and Akos (2007) describe the School Transition Environment Project (STEP) as a proven strategy to improve adjustment outcomes, social emotional well-being, academic achievement, and behavioral outcomes. Having an advisory is a recommended action to the STEP program.

The goal of this intervention would be to increase students’ sense of belonging and accountability and to enhance access to important information about school expectations and college. School counselors are in a distinctive position within a school to facilitate and aid in creating this type of program. The College Board (2006) has a guide that includes interventions for schools to implement to encourage and grow a college bound culture.

**College Access Programs**

The purpose of this section is to examine literature on college access programs which aim to develop students academically, identify key practices, and describe a selected program that utilizes these practices. This program is the Advancement Via Self Determination (AVID). In general, the services provided by college access outreach programs aim to offset unhelpful school or community influences (lack of rigorous curriculum and lack of role models) by providing the absent ingredients that help FGC students aspire to, prepare for, and obtain college enrollment. In these ways, programs attempt to provide students with the social capital necessary to achieve college enrollment (Perna, 2002).

It appears that many college access programs lack significant empirical data and program study designs that would allow for a full evaluation of the connection between program services
and outcomes in the shape of college applications, admissions, and enrollment. While thousands of college access programs exist, AVID exemplifies a data-driven program with decades of research-based results.

**Success Strategy Themes**

Researchers for the most part agree that outreach efforts that increase student aspirations, expose them to the rigors of college at an early age, and provide interventions aimed at increasing their academic performance have been helpful for underrepresented students which include FGC students. These types of programs help students overcome barriers and make higher education more accessible (Fenske, Geranios & Moore, 1997; Perna, 2002; Gandara, 2001). The chosen college access program (AVID) exemplifies these identified characteristics.

The research of Jurich and Estes (2000); Gandara (2001); and Perna and Swail (2001) was examined to determine the common strategies identified in programs aimed at raising academic achievement. Included in these types of programs are many college access programs. The author aimed to find what characteristics of these programs contribute to their success. Success is defined by multiple measures of academic achievement: standardized test scores, grades, attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates, and college enrollment and retention (Gallassi & Akos, 2007).

Using qualitative analyses, Jurich and Estes (2000), identified 80 features that are believed to relevantly contribute to raising academic achievement for all students. These features were merged into five common strategies consistent in most of the programs. The study recommended twenty programs that they deemed as successful. AVID is one of the programs highlighted by this study. The five overarching features of these successful programs were the following:

1. High expectations for youth, program, and staff.
2. Personalized attention.

3. Innovative structure/organization

4. Experiential learning.

5. Long-term support.

Two studies conducted by Perna and Swail (2001) and Gandara and Bial (2001) had strong evidence of validity and reliability. The ten principles of practice identified by these researchers as key components of successful programs aimed at raising academic achievement are:

1. Set high standards for program students and staff.

2. Provide personalized attention for students.

3. Provide adult role models.

4. Facilitate peer support.

5. Integrate the program within K-12 schools.

6. Provide strategically timed interventions.

7. Make long-term investments in students.

8. Provide students with a bridge between school and society.


10. Design evaluations that contribute results to interventions.

**Advancement Via Self Determination: AVID**

What makes AVID stand out from the crowd in college access programs is its remarkable success rates. In addition to the AVID organization’s own extensive collection of data since its
beginning in 1980, there have been numerous third-party empirical studies proving their successful track record in improving student academic and college access rates amongst racial and ethnic minority, low-income, and first-generational students. Due to a strong research backing from decades of measurable results and its holistic approach, AVID was chosen to highlight in this literature review.

Overview

AVID is a fourth through twelfth grade college-readiness system that was started by two teachers in 1980. AVID serves nearly 300,000 students in over 4500 elementary and secondary schools in 45 US states and the District of Columbia, and across 16 countries (AVID Center, 2010). It is in large urban, small rural, struggling and affluent schools. The spirit of the program came out of these two teachers concern over the high quantity of average students from low-income families that didn’t pursue postsecondary education (Watt, Yanez & Cossio, 2003). Though the program serves all students regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity, it does center on low-income and minority students who are the first in their families to have the possibility of attending college.

Student Criteria

AVID aims at students in the academic middle (B,C, and sometimes D’s), who have the desire to go to college and the willingness to work hard. In one school where the author interviewed AVID staff, this desire and willingness was determined via individual interviews and teacher recommendations prior to acceptance into the program. A typical AVID student is deemed by school staff as capable of completing rigorous curriculum but noted to be falling short of their potential.
Program

AVID is scheduled as an elective class. The class is tailored to each grade level and is guided by a teacher who has been trained in AVID methodologies. For this one period a day, students learn organizational and study skills, work on critical thinking, get academic help from peers and tutors (many of which are college students), and participate in enrichment and motivational activities. These activities are aimed at making college seem possible and build college self-efficacy. “Tutors are an essential feature of the AVID program. In addition to providing academic help, tutors become role models for the students. Tutors who attend college can share their experiences with AVID students and stimulate their interest in attending college” (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002, p. 11).

Curriculum

The AVID curriculum is based on rigorous standards and was created by middle, high school, and college teachers. AVID utilizes a method called the WIC-R. This acronym stands for writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading. The students are trained in a special note taking methodology called Cornell notes and specific test-taking strategies and organization techniques (Hubbard & Mehan, 1999). Another key component of AVID is “social scaffolding” which provides a supportive developmental environment including cultivation of critical thinking skills (Oswald, 2002; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard & Lintz, 1996). AVID includes help in completing college, scholarship, and financial aid applications and visits to college campuses.

In high school, AVID students are required to take advanced placement (AP) or honors courses.

The hallmark feature of AVID’s untracking effort is the placement of students who had been on non-academic tracks into college-prep classes. The intention is to have students
take advantage of heterogeneous grouping. Previously underachieving students are expected to benefit academically by learning side-by-side with high achieving students (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002, p. 12).

The AVID curriculum is used in a variety of ways: (a) in a single AVID elective class, (b) in content-area classes in AVID schools, and (c) even in schools where the AVID elective is not offered.

**Tracking Versus Untracking**

There have been many research efforts and discussions over the past twenty years on the subject of tracking in schools. Tracking, as said by Wheelock (1992), “involves the categorizing of students according to particular measures of intelligence into distinct groups for purposes of teaching and learning” (p. 6). On the other hand, “untracking” as mentioned earlier, is a hallmark feature of AVID, and is the process of eliminating a track system in schools and reworking the education process to serve heterogeneous groups. Untracking schools create academic communities established on a vision of all students learning jointly at high levels with the awareness that they are embarking on the first stages of a process of life-long learning (Wheelock, 1992).

Tracking does not seem to offer similar educational opportunities for all students. Instead on one hand, “it allocates the most valuable school experiences—like challenging and meaningful curricula, top-quality instruction, and high teacher expectations to students who already have the greatest academic, economic, and social advantages” (Wheelock, 1992, p. 7). On the other hand, “those who face the biggest struggles in school—and in life in general—receive a more impoverished curriculum based on lower assessments of their learning capacity” (Wheelock, 1992, p. 6).
A study done by Luebchow (2009), found that teachers with the least experience and fewest credentials teach in our poorest schools, putting low-income students (many of which are FGC students) at a disadvantage. This is important to note because, “experienced teachers tend to have better classroom management skills and a stronger command of curricular materials. Many novice teachers struggle during their initial years in any classroom, let alone in classrooms in the neediest schools” (Luebchow, 2009, p. 3). Additionally, schools with many inexperienced teachers have shown higher rates of staff turnover, which may perpetuate the cycle of beginner teachers educating students with the most needs. AVID selects tops teachers with strong teaching experience to lead their classes.

**Selected AVID Results**

The bottom line of the reviewed empirical research is that students seem to flourish from the implementation of AVID programs in schools. Since its beginning in 1980, AVID has affected the performance profile of the schools studied by influencing success of subgroups of students, particularly African American and Latino students, as well as students from lower income families (Watt, Powell, Mendiola & Cossio, 2006). Many students from these groups tend to be FGC students.

The amount of ongoing research on AVID and the commitment to data collection by the AVID Center is impressive. According to AVID’s executive director, Jim Nelson, “as AVID has evolved into a school-wide college readiness system, the need for ongoing research has become even more paramount. With this in mind, the AVID Center works with a number of research groups to study the system and our ongoing initiatives” (Access, 2009, p. 3).

Researchers, Watt, Powell, Mendiola, and Cossio (2004), found that over a 4-year period when they evaluated ten high schools in four Texas school districts that had implemented AVID,
that there was a common accountability improvement in all schools. Accountability in schools was measured around improved student learning, enhanced student engagement and well being, and successful transitions and pathways. Additionally, AVID participants in those schools had reduced dropout rates and had higher college entrance rates when compared to non-AVID school programs.

Findings from Watt, Yanez and Cossio (2003), showed that AVID students, with higher minority concentrations than the general school population, showed greater improvement on standardized tests, grade point averages and had better than average attendance than their non-AVID peers.

Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, and Alkan (2008), studied the retention behaviors of FGC students who were high school seniors and in the AVID program at eight high schools in Texas and California. They found that the personal bonds and nurturing that students felt from the AVID teachers were the key to continuing in the program and that the family-like atmosphere of AVID was important to students’ morale, self-esteem, and academic determination.

The AVID program has their own researchers who compile program data. The AVID general data collection (2007-2008), compared AVID data to EdWatch state reports and found that 51% of AVID eighth grade students compared with 23% of eighth graders nationally take algebra (www.avidonline.org). Students who take algebra in eighth grade are prepared for more advanced coursework in math and science once they reach high school. They are also more likely to attend and graduate from college than eighth-graders who do not take algebra. AVID encourages its middle school students to pursue college-preparatory coursework such as algebra, and they complete it at an impressive rate.
Two researchers, Hooker and Brand (2009), completed a comparison analysis of ten AVID and ten non-AVID high schools, as well as student-level comparisons of matched AVID, GEAR UP (a federally funded college access program), and a control group of students at two schools. Overall, they found that AVID participants had higher scores on end-of-course exams and state assessment tests, and were more likely to be on-track to complete a college-preparatory curriculum than nonparticipants at the same schools. “AVID was associated with higher rates of enrollment in advanced courses, as well as higher levels of college knowledge. AVID schools improved their performance ratings at a greater rate than non-AVID schools, and more students in AVID schools took Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams than students in the comparison schools” (Hooker & Brand, 2009, p. 42).

Guthrie and Guthrie (2000), conducted a longitudinal study with two strands: (a) the effects of middle school AVID on high school performance; and (b) the post-secondary experiences of AVID high school graduates. The middle school AVID study was conducted on 1158 AVID students in California, and the post-secondary experience study was based on 100 AVID high school graduates from California.

This study identified that students with two years of middle school AVID had higher credit accumulation in high school compared with those AVID students who did not have two years of middle school AVID. They also showed that, “the power of algebra [in middle school] as a predictor of success in high school is undeniable” (p. 20).

They also found that more than twice the percentage of students with two years of middle school AVID took three or more AP classes than those with only one year or no AVID experience in middle school: “12.5% versus less than 5% of 1-year and no AVID students” (p. 12).
The study of AVID graduates found that the majority of the surveyed group enrolled in college. “More than three-fourths reported attending four-year colleges – a rate three times the state [California] average” (p. 21).

**How AVID Affects the Greater School Culture**

This section explores how a program like AVID can be a positive catalyst for school-wide reform and culture change through students and staff. The author concludes that implementing an AVID program in a school has potentially positive benefits for all students. Guthrie and Guthrie (2002) found positive effects of AVID at several levels within the eight schools that they researched. These included, “the adoption of AVID methodologies, such as student binders, Cornell Notes, and AVID-like tutoring; raised expectations and improved outcomes for students school-wide; school-wide reform and use of data; involvement in school-level decision-making; and a positive influence on the school and student culture for learning and college-going” (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002, p. 11).

**Student impact.** The author asserts that when people see someone accomplishing something, their self-efficacy will naturally increase. It is also believed that this process is more powerful when a person sees themselves as comparable or equal to the person they are witnessing—as in a peer perceived as having similar ability. According to Bandura (1995), “people’s beliefs in their efficacy play a paramount role in how well they organize, create, and manage the circumstances that affect their life course” (p. 35).

Research has shown that having AVID programs within schools had an overall positive impact on other students who were not even enrolled in the program but who just had contact with AVID students. Watt, Yanez and Cossio (2003), found that, “schools with large numbers of AVID students had a greater impact on non-AVID students, due to the numbers of different
classes AVID students were enrolled in, and consequently the numbers of non-AVID students they came in contact with” (p. 57). Through teacher interviews this group of researchers found that AVID students were becoming great peer role models via their eagerness to ask questions and use their AVID strategies (Cornell Notes/AVID binder) in their general classrooms.

In several of the schools researched by Guthrie and Guthrie (2002), “AVID has helped improve school-wide student outcomes and raise expectations for all students. Partly as a result of AVID students’ successful performance in Advanced Placement and honors classes, access to those courses has opened up for non-traditional students, and the number of courses and sections has increased” (p. 12).

**Teacher impact.** Research indicates that AVID may also influence teachers within AVID schools. Watt, Yanez and Cossio (2003) found that teacher impact was perhaps the most significant component of school-wide change found after implementing an AVID program.

“Many teachers of rigorous courses had AVID students in their classes. Several of these teachers who were interviewed had positive things to say about the AVID students and were interested in learning more about AVID” (Watt, Yanez & Cossio, 2003. p. 57). In the schools studied by Watt, Yanez, and Cossio (2003), AVID teachers conducted in-service seminars for other teachers in their buildings. From there, many non-AVID teachers adopted the strategies, like Cornell notes, Socratic seminars, and collaboration, for use in their own classes.

**Future AVID Research**

The advancement and progress of any initiative requires continuous examination and research. AVID has done an exceptional job in data collection and continuous improvement based on researched results and is therefore a proven educational solution. Over the next two years, as discussed in AVID’s Access educational journal (2009), research teams will be
examining the success of AVID graduates in college, including their rate of graduation; the leadership role played by AVID teachers; school-wide and district-wide AVID; the gender gap; support structures for African American male students; middle school AVID; AVID’s postsecondary initiative; and support structures for English-language learners. The AVID Center is a dedicated resource that is spearheading research-based solutions to one of the most pressing issues in education: closing the achievement gap.

AVID Conclusion

The reviewed research concerning AVID programs leads to the conclusion that AVID is a powerful catalyst for school-wide reform and culture change to improve school-wide student outcomes and raise expectations for all students. It is a useful tool for school counselors and other school leaders to implement to help improve graduation rates, enrollment in more rigorous high school courses, and entrance into post-secondary education. Schools and communities gain in many ways from implementing AVID due to: (a) the increase in students graduating from high school and pursuing higher education; and (b) AVID works! It increases the likelihood that minority, low-income, and FGC students, who participate in the program, will pursue post-secondary education. In fact according to the AVID Center (2010), Seventy-eight percent of 2008 AVID graduates were accepted to a four-year college.

The author cites many reasons why AVID is effective. These reasons will be explored through an Adlerian psychology lens in the next section. In addition to these reasons, the author would like to note that another key aspect is that the AVID program must be scheduled as an integrated part of the school day. Students do not need to stay after school or find transportation at off-school times to attend AVID. It is believed that this in tandem with its strong academic and social supports, and community feeling of belonging and contributing, make this program soar.
Recommendation

Based on the research that implementing AVID for two years of middle school has a dramatic effect on the success of students in high school, it is recommended that school counselors promote the implementation of AVID in middle schools as a vehicle to promote academic success. Success is defined by the author as higher grade point averages and credit accumulation, advanced course taking (AP/IB), and higher standardized test scores—all of which promote pursuit of and acceptance into college.

Why AVID Works: An Adlerian Analysis

Holistic Approach

It is the author’s overall judgment that the basis of the success of AVID on student achievement and college pursuit is its holistic approach. Adler proposed a holistic view of the personality (Oberst & Stewart, 2003). According to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956), “Adler saw that the whole individual must be understood within their larger whole which is formed by the groups to which he belongs, ranging from the face-to-face groups to the whole of mankind ultimately” (p. 126). Adlerian psychology strives to see people through a holistic lens: as wholes rather than as parts. AVID does this too. Not only does it focus on meaningful intellectual challenge and utilizes researched brain-based teaching principles like Cornell Notes, but it also has a strong focus on the caring atmosphere that is created in the classroom and the relationships within the group. The AVID program pays special attention to experiential learning through its tutorials, Socratic seminars, field trips, and special projects, and places significant value on relationships between tutors, teachers, and the other AVID students.
Goal Directedness, The Law of Movement, and Teleology

Adlerian psychology considers all behaviors as having a purpose and as being movement toward a goal. Adler purported that we are drawn towards our goals, our purposes, and ideals. He called this teleology. Adler saw motivation as a matter of moving towards the future. AVID gives academic effort meaning because it is considered movement toward the goal of college. AVID helps creates a guiding goal—where events, thoughts, and actions are in alignment with that goal. AVID’s clear and simple goal is to prepare their students for college readiness and success.

This expectation and goal are clearly communicated in the application and interview process and in all AVID communications to students and families. The AVID program provides students and their parents with a clear road map to college and all movement in the program is heading in the direction of this destination. Through the college-level academic experiences and adult and peer encouragement toward this goal, students have both the academic skills and knowledge, and social support needed to succeed at college. The tutors and teachers individually help each AVID student develop long-range academic and personal plans and have the scaffolding in place to support students in their movement toward this endeavor.

Parental involvement is also a key ingredient in solidifying the goal of college for AVID students. The parents sign a contract to support the AVID program requirements and to attend parent meetings. There is ongoing home contact and AVID provides parent training curriculum that helps families with the college access process. AVID expects parents to share in the task of preparing and motivating students to continue their education after high school.
Encouragement

Encouragement as described by Alfred Adler, is a crucial aspect of human growth and development. Adler (1956) wrote: “altogether, in every step of the treatment, we must not deviate from the path of encouragement” (p. 342). The author believes this to be true. In AVID the focus is not on the problems and limitations of students, it is on their strengths and resources for finding and acting out solutions in the present. This is done through encouraging students to repeat behaviors they have already done right in past tutorials and successes. This type of approach is well affirmed by Watts and Pietrzak (2000): “the assumptions, characteristics, and methods of encouragement help to create an optimistic, empowering, and growth-enhancing environment for clients; a place where they feel “en-abled” rather than “dis-abled” (p. 445).

The underlying spirit of AVID is encouragement of setting and reaching one’s goals and finding solutions. AVID, like Adlerian psychology, is built on a foundation of encouragement. AVID’s approach is extremely affirming and focuses on strengths as the vehicle of facilitating change. Like Dreikurs (1964) said so well, “one cannot build on weakness—only on strength” (p. 56). AVID creates a classroom environment where students are encouraged by the teachers, tutors, and their peers to see learning as vital to their future success and to see themselves as scholars who are able to think and solve problems at high levels of thinking. Adlerian thought, according to Dreikurs (1998) sees the process of encouragement as, “paramount in building a child’s learning ability and in developing his commitment to the learning process” (p. 101).

Solution-oriented encouragement. AVID tutors and teachers are encouraged through their training to aid students to shift their attitude from a problem focus to a spotlight on solutions and successes and to discover and develop assets, resources, and strengths. The students are in charge of defining what they want to solve in their AVID tutorials and discuss in their Socratic
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seminars. The focus is on using their competencies and resources as a group. The tutor is not positioned as the expert, they are. From this vantage point, the solution searching is embedded in their unique sociocultural context. Therefore, the tutor takes their lead. The students are held accountable for finding solutions and for offering their unique input. In the author-observed AVID classrooms, the grading rubric was even created by the AVID students. As a group they were encouraged to decide how much grading weight would be dedicated to each project category.

In the AVID research conducted by Guthrie and Guthrie (2002) an AVID tutor that was interviewed said, “I don’t give students the answers but guide them toward a solution” (p. 6). The American Psychological Association (APA Work Group, 1997) identified fourteen researched-based psychological principles that influence learning. Principle eight explains the intrinsic motivation to learn: “The learner’s creativity, higher order thinking, and natural curiosity all contribute to motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation is stimulated by tasks of optimal novelty and difficulty, relevant to person interests, and providing for personal choice and control” (p. 4). This principle is very apparent in the AVID classroom approach.

Encouragement is an action that expresses to a student that the teacher respects, trusts, and believes in them and recognition is given to real trying (Dreikurs, 1998). In the AVID tutorials that the author witnessed, encouragement was given when a student in the group gave effort in helping to solve the other student presented case studies. Encouragement was given for staying on task, offering solutions, and for collaborating. The positive aspects of the process were highlighted and reinforced by encouraging words and non-verbal communication via smiles and head-nods. The teacher encouraged the students to work through the process together with minimal input from the tutor. Common questions from the tutor were, “what would be another
way of looking at that?” and “can anyone think of another way to get to that answer?” These types of questions get students thinking about possibilities and solutions.

**Collaboration encouragement.** AVID students typically work in small groups, and tutors are trained to encourage collaboration (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002). The students in Guthrie and Guthrie’s (2002) study talked about how they learned to help and learn from each other, relying on themselves for answers. Teachers were found to also model this behavior and culture of collaboration in their interactions with each other.

In the author-witnessed AVID tutorials, there was a strong sense of contributing from all members (and if a student was not contributing that day, they were encouraged to do so), and belonging within the AVID classroom. Encouragement radiated from all angles of the classroom experience: from the tutors, the AVID teacher, and from peer to peer. It was consistent and had an overarching sense of positivity and focusing on student strengths.

**Social Embeddedness**

The Adlerian view of the human being is as a social being who cannot be understood outside the context of other people because we are socially embedded (Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Many of the AVID students come from a family setting where the influence of beliefs, actions, and attitudes may not be positive toward school or college attainment. This is especially true for FGC students where parents do not have experience in the college process. AVID not only emphasizes academic instruction but it seems to also recognize learning as a socially embedded activity and process. The founder of AVID, Mary Catherine, recognized from her own teaching that one cannot make great strides in learning unless they attend not only to rigorous skill development but also the social needs that students bring with them to school.
Students learn how to effectively and positively communicate with co-learners as well as interact and collaborate with their teachers and tutors. The American Psychological Association (APA Work Group, 1997) in principle eleven, explained the social nature of learning: “learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others” (p. 4). AVID seems to have recognized that student learning and achievement is enhanced through positive social relationships and it strives to create this positive atmosphere within its classrooms.

**Striving for Perfection**

Adler suggested that there is a single drive or motivating force behind behavior. He called that motivating force, striving for perfection. Though the word, “perfection” may hold a negative connotation for some because it’s impossible to be “perfect,” that is not the spirit of the concept. This striving is considered in Adlerian thought as the desire to fulfill our potential. This striving is towards the positive goals. In AVID, students become part of a new peer group that shares their positive academic goals. Together they strive toward the common goal of college. Through learning groups, students grasp the link between effort and learning, and once that association is launched they become self-determining learners. These skills will be something they can carry throughout their academic, work, and community lives.

**Social Interest/Feeling of Community**

The AVID program does an excellent job of creating a feeling of belonging and contributing to the group. They marvelously unify this feeling with trusting social relationships and meaningful intellectual challenge. One of the best examples of this was witnessed by the author in the AVID elective class tutorials and Socratic seminars. The spirit of collaboration, belonging, and camaraderie was evident throughout the day in the AVID classroom. Adler asserted that, “the satisfaction of all conceivable human needs depends on a sense of community
and collaboration to fulfill the tasks of work, love, and friendship (or community life)” (Oberst & Stewart, 2003, p. 18). The AVID program successfully hits on this Adlerian concept of community and collaboration and helps students fulfill their tasks of both work and contributing to community life.

Guthrie and Guthrie (2000) through their interviews with several interviews with AVID graduates found that many students described AVID like a family, “nearly half (AVID graduates) stayed in touch with their AVID teachers, and 74% were still in contact with other AVID students, three or four years after high school graduation” (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000, p. 16). The research conducted by Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola., and Alkan (2008) mirrored this result. They found that the family-like atmosphere of AVID was important to students’ morale, self-esteem and determination, and that students who felt nurtured stayed in AVID, and the personal bonds with the AVID teachers were key to continuing in the program for four years of high school.

The values of group discussion in creating a feeling of community within a classroom are significant. According to Dreikurs (1998), “group discussion is probably the most effective technique a teacher can use to unite the class for a common goal” (p. 160). In the AVID tutorials and Socratic seminars, students discuss the academic problems that each brings to class that day. Together they find solutions and it unifies the group for a common purpose and has great results in helping one another. This group discussion process appears to help the students feel accepted and that they belong and stimulates students to contribute to the academic welfare of others. The tutor is there to encourage supportive communication and an overall positive social feeling amongst the AVID group members.
AVID students typically receive academic and social support via regular tutoring from college tutors, who also serve as role models. Many of these tutors are past AVID students who come back to serve and give back, which is a wonderful example of the social interest fostered in AVID.

**Adlerian Analysis Summary**

The bottom line is that AVID works because the program sets high expectations coupled with challenging work and blends that with the support of caring relationships—it’s holistic. There is an atmosphere where students are surrounded by peers who are living up to those high expectations and they are too. It’s contagious, and as proven in many empirical research studies, students rise to the challenge regardless of their socioeconomic or college-going tradition in their family background. AVID students are encouraged to think on a higher, more abstract level, and to take collaborative initiative to find solutions to presented problems. The strong sense of contributing and belonging are the glue of this program. The Adlerian concepts executed in AVID provide a strong foundation for success.

**Implications for School Counselors**

The author asserts that the area of greatest impact for school counselors to increase the number of FGC students who enroll in and graduate from college is to promote improved academic preparation and rigor for this population of students. Completion of algebra in middle school, based on several author-reviewed studies, appears to be a significant factor in future college enrollment—and therefore, a critical point to intercede with interventions and strategies.

Across the spectrum of author-reviewed research, the results regarding academic preparation are similar: the more extensive the student’s academic training, the more probable the student will attend college—across all socioeconomic levels. Furthermore, the weight of the
reviewed literature indicates that FGC students in contrast with their peers, are at a disadvantage in academic preparation, family income level and resources to pay for college, family expectations in regards to college, and knowledge about the college access process.

   In addition to promoting academic rigor, two critical steps to improving college enrollment and success for all students, including FGC students were: (a) creating a college-bound culture in the school, and (b) providing students with adequate support and guidance. School counselors are in a unique position within the school setting to help foster a school culture that ensures FGC students and other underrepresented students have the expectation, preparation, and information necessary to access and succeed in college.

   Interventions aimed at identifying students at risk of not attending college early in their academic careers, connecting student interests and skills, involving families, providing ongoing information about the college access process in native languages, promoting enrollment in college access programs like AVID, establishing college mentors in the school and community, utilizing data on underserved populations in one’s school, and providing special help on college applications, positively influence college access for all students.

   The reviewed research concerning college access programs leads to the conclusion that the AVID program is a powerful catalyst for school-wide reform and culture change to improve student academic outcomes and raise expectations for all students. It is a useful tool for school counselors and other school leaders to implement to help improve graduation rates, enrollment in more rigorous high school courses, and entrance into post-secondary education. Schools and communities gain in many ways from implementing AVID due to the increase in students graduating from high school and pursuing higher education. It increases the likelihood that
minority, low-income, and FGC students, who participate in the program, will pursue post-secondary education.

Based on the research that implementing AVID for two years of middle school has a dramatic effect on the success of students in high school, it is recommended that school counselors promote the implementation of AVID in middle schools as a vehicle to promote academic success. Success is defined by the author as higher grade point averages and credit accumulation, advanced course taking (AP/IB), and higher standardized test scores—all of which promote pursuit of and acceptance into college.

College access programs like AVID represent only part of the story for FGC students. Getting into college does not equal college completion and many FGC students drop out of college before completing a degree or certificate. Many colleges are aware of these phenomena and have transition and support services available for FGC students. School counselors need to bridge this gap by communicating these services to FGC students and help make them aware of the resources on the college campuses.

**Conclusion**

FGC students face a complicated set of challenges and barriers in their homes, communities, and schools that can potentially limit their opportunity to pursue post-secondary education. It is vital that FGC students and their parents acquire early information about preparing for college and enroll in courses that prepare them to succeed in college. Early intervention that begins before high school is increasingly recognized as raising predisposition for college (Perna, 2002).

Even though there has been an exciting increase in college access programs targeting FGC students and gains in post-secondary attendance, this population of students still lag behind their
peers in college attendance and graduation rates. This review of the literature has detected several barriers along the K-12 school journey that place FGC students in jeopardy of not pursuing education beyond high school.

There is a plethora of information that point to several key steps in helping FGC students make the transition to post-secondary schooling. School counselors are in a key position to advocate for and implement these steps within their school districts. Researchers and practitioners for the most part agree that outreach efforts that boost student aspirations, expose them to the rigors of college at an early age, and provide interventions aimed at increasing their academic accomplishments have been helpful for underrepresented students, including FGC students. These types of programs (like AVID) help students triumph over barriers and make higher education more reachable. Though a number of these strategies are already being implemented in schools and via college access programs like AVID, a gap remains.

Preparing more FGC students to enroll in and succeed in higher education is a momentous challenge that is being triumphed over by many community programs, individual schools and districts across our nation. The AVID program was chosen as an outstanding model based on quantitative analysis and its researched-based design. AVID’s alignment with Adlerian psychology is impressive and the holistic approach of its design creates a strong foundation for its success.
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