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GEAR UP College Preparedness Curriculum

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Abstract

This capstone project was implemented for the Gear Up and college preparedness program located at the local Seaside High School. Gear Up serves 10th grade students at seaside high school. Most of the students served come from low-income families, from minority groups and are considered first generation college students. The problem addressed by the capstone is that too many Seaside High students are not applying for Community College, CSUs and UC's. The project consisted of collaborating with Seaside High staff including teachers, administration and counselors to include college preparedness instruction as part of the existing curriculum to increase the number of Seaside High students attending higher education after graduating High School. Recommendations for Gear Up program include conducting formal training for Seaside Staff on College readiness material. Host Monthly or Bi-monthly meetings between Gear Up and Seaside Staff on Progress. Organize Pre and Post Surveys with students involved to see if progress is being made.

Keywords: Preparedness, Readiness, Collaboration, First Generation, Education

Agency and their Partnerships

G.E.A.R Up is a federally funded program located at Seaside High School. Gear Up “is a competitive grant program under the U.S. Department of Education that aims to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education by providing States and local community-educational partnerships via six-to-seven year grants to offer support services to high-poverty, middle and high schools.”(GEAR UP CSUMB, n.d). G.E.A.R Up stands for, Gaining early awareness & Readiness for undergraduate programs. Seaside High GEAR UP’s website mission statement states the following “CSUMB GEAR UP provides critical early college awareness and support activities like tutoring, mentoring, academic preparation, financial education and college scholarships to improve access to higher education for low income, minority and disadvantaged first-generation students and their families in the Seaside, Salinas, and South County areas.”(GEAR UP CSUMB,n.d). In Summary GEAR UP is a college preparedness program that follows a cohort of high school students preparing them for graduation and then for college. Types of services the program provides are Guidance from the college counselors. Assisting students with filling out financial Aid or D.A.C.A, applying for college and scholarships, writing personal statements. With funding GEAR UP receives the program hosts College field trips to Local schools like UC Santa Cruz, MPC, Hartnell and CSUMB, the program has also hosted schools a bit farther from the peninsula including CSU San Francisco, San Jose State, Stanford University, Humboldt State. GEAR UP also hosts conferences for parents of students who are interested in attending College

by explaining what is required of the students and from the parents to help them succeed. Seaside High also partners with local colleges such as California State University Monterey Bay, Hartnell College and Monterey Peninsula College. There is also a partnership with other college preparedness programs at Seaside High such as EAOP (Early Academic Outreach Program, ETS (Educational Talent Search) and Santa Cruz GEAR UP.

Communities Served by the Agency

The GEAR UP program is located at Seaside High School, located in the city of Seaside. Most of the students at Seaside high are minorities. According to the Education Data Partnership it is recorded that in the year 2017-2018 the High Schools population was combined of 37 students who identified as Asian. 83 students were Black or African American. 64 students identified as Filipino and 831 students at the school were Hispanic or Latino. Also the recognized languages identified students speak at the High school were the following Arabic, Tagalog, Hindi, Spanish and Vietnamese. From the total number of students at seaside high Most of the students at Seaside High that participate in the GEAR UP program are students who identify into specific population categories. Seaside High has a population of 1,200 students (About SHS, 2018). GEAR UP is designed to help students who are low income, minorities, ELL students and first generation students. According to the State's Education Data, Seaside has 73.5% of its students enrolled in free or reduced lunch. This program is for students who are close or under the poverty line. In 2018, there were 126 students who are English learners and are working to be proficient in English. The students involved with the GEAR UP program are from low income backgrounds, some first generation living in the United States and even

migrant students from a different country. Because most of these students will be the first to attend college or even be the first to graduate high school GEAR UP provides the guidance and support to help them succeed in High School first and then encourage them to seek higher education opportunities.

Social Problem Description

The social problem addressed in this capstone is that too many high school students from Seaside High do not apply to higher education opportunities. One of the methods Gear Up attempts to meet their mission is “engages students early, accelerates their readiness through supplemental programs, and expands the capacity of schools to create college going cultures.”(About Gear Up, n.d). The main focus for GEAR UP programs 10th grade students is to help students successfully meet all the requirements for graduating high school and continue to higher education, but many students don’t think about their options for higher education, community colleges or in four-year institutions in the CSU or UC systems. Students who attend these four-year universities typically obtain Bachelors of Arts or Bachelors of Science degrees in a field they studied for a couple of years. The other option for students who graduate high school are Community colleges. This option is more popular for higher education because it is easier to apply and be accepted. This option is also more financially affordable and flexible for students which is important to those who are working, parents or have other time consuming responsibilities. Students who attend a community college for two years and complete their A-G requirements then qualify to transfer to a CSU or UC that has a field they are interested in receiving their bachelor’s degree.

The average percentage of high School Graduates in the state of California is 84%, (Kerr & Boyington, 2019). According to California's Department of Education Data, the recorded percentages of Seaside High school students performance and quotas on meeting the schools set goals. The most recent percentages of students graduating from seaside high school in 2018 was 90.7% this was lower than the year 2017 with a percentage of 92.1%. The percentages of Seaside High students meeting UC/CSU course requirements for 2018 was 62.7% this was an increase from 2017 which was a total percentage of 49.6%. The students are increasing in graduating and being eligible for completing higher education. Even though the number of students being college ready is increasing, not many students are seeking higher education, "Only 32% of those from Seaside have some college and only 23% in total of those from Seaside obtain a bachelor's degree" (Seaside CA education data, 2018).

Problem Contributing Factors

The causes and risk factors for students graduating from Seaside High School not attending higher education are multiple. One possible cause students aren't even graduating high school in the time frame that they should is because they are not doing well in classes. If students aren't passing the classes required for graduation, they will have to retake them until they have all their classes. Another cause is that students aren't receiving the appropriate help they require to graduate, like tutoring for the classes they are struggling in.

Another contributing factor keeping students from obtaining higher education degrees is that students lack resources and orientation on how to apply and succeed in higher education institutions, "Racial underrepresentation, low academic self-esteem, and difficulty adjusting to college can manifest while enrolled, contributing to a lower rate of college completion than that

for students who have at least one parent with a four-year degree”(Stephans, N, et al., 2014). Many of the students attending Seaside highschool have parents that did not attend , as a result they lack the guidance to decide to attend higher education.

In addition, parents that did not attend college are less likely to provide support for these students “parents without college experience may not understand the amount of time and academic focus required. This can lead to insufficient levels of emotional support or limited understanding of the commitment necessary for a student to thrive in college”(Sparkman,L. et al, 2012). Another influential factor is that most of the students have low expectations, meaning they're only set goal is to attend high school and graduate. Unaware of the other opportunities available to them after high school they do not set them as a goal for themselves.

The GEAR UP program attempts to support first generation students with little to no knowledge of colleges by providing workshops and taking home material that educates them about requirements, FAFSA and other information. However, without active support at home the knowledge imparted by GEAR UP is less likely to stick. Gear Up recognizes the difficulties Seaside High students are facing and finding solutions, “with a combination of college readiness, college culture assimilation, family support, and personal characteristics. Through interventions initiated by colleges and high schools, FGCS can find resources to develop these attributes and overcome their challenges”(Falcon, L. 2015)

Problem Consequences

The main consequence if the students are not meeting graduation requirements is that, obviously, they will not receive their high school diploma. If students do not complete their high school diploma they will not have the chance to even apply for higher education institutions.

CSU's, UC's and community colleges all require a high school diploma to even apply. These students will be at a disadvantage without their high school diploma in the working world, college world and in general. Without a college education it will be difficult to obtain a job, "it can be particularly arduous for first-generation college students (FGCS). Historically, postsecondary education opportunities have been limited for certain ethnic and racial populations and for those of lower socioeconomic status"(Pitre & Pitre, 2009). In today's economy most places of employment are not only requiring high school diplomas but also Bachelor's degrees. Thus, a limited skill set makes it more difficult to escape poverty and unemployment. Figure 1 presents the problem model in graphical form.

Figure 1: Problem Model

Causes/Contributing Factors	Problem statement	Consequences
Inability to graduate	Too many high school students do not obtain higher education degrees.	Lower Salary
Difficulty learning		Limited Skillset
No parental support		Unemployment

Project Connection with the Problem:

The project implemented in this capstone was Development of College Curriculum for Seaside High School. The project consisted in a proposal to integrate college readiness material in the existing curriculum that will be delivered by teachers that students already have a relationship with. If implemented, it is expected that students will feel more empowered to apply for higher

education opportunities and translate into more students graduating high school and also applying to colleges.

Capstone Project

Project Description and Justification

This capstone project consisted of developing a curriculum of college preparedness to be implemented in collaboration between GEAR UP and Seaside Highschool teachers. This would be effective since it is believed that students “Unfamiliar with the rigor and expectations of the college curriculum, parents of FGCS may be unable, and at times unwilling, to help their child to adequately prepare for college. The FGCS must, therefore, rely on high school personnel and peers for guidance and information” (Hudley et al., 2009). The implementation of this curriculum will begin with Seaside High School teachers and faculty willingness to educate their high school students about college readiness. GEAR UP at Seaside High School is serving students who identify as a minority, low income and first generation students. GEAR UP’s mission is to help these students not only pass their high school classes, but to also guide them and educate them about higher education after high school. So far teachers and GEAR UP have worked in a somewhat separate manner. So, this capstone project is a curriculum proposal developed by GEAR UP that would be implemented with the assistance of Seaside High teachers and faculty to have a higher impact on students. Currently, GEAR UP and other college preparedness programs located at seaside high are the main source for high school students to

obtain information about meeting Cal state or UC requirements, FAFSA, housing etc. This capstone project consisted of proposing a curriculum that would integrate teachers as partners in college preparedness.

The first component in the implementation would be to assess Seaside High students knowledge on college preparedness and Staff will teach accordingly to promote college readiness in the classrooms. Teachers and Faculty will be trained in college readiness material to become another source of college information students can rely on to get their information from.

The second component will involve GEAR UPs expertise on preparing higher education material and the methods they use to spread this information to their student members. GEAR UP will decide what specific information is relevant and will be more effective on their GEAR UP student members currently as they focus with 10th graders. GEAR UP will organize a template of college readiness material that will be taught daily for a week as a trial for Teachers and other staff to see how students are absorbing the information in the classroom. The draft of a curriculum will begin with teachers' feedback on how students can efficiently absorb the lessons of college. GEAR UP will focus on creating this curriculum with the help of teachers expertise on teaching in a classroom setting.

The third component of the program will consist in a coordinated delivery of the curriculum by specific teachers at key times during the academic year. And the fourth component of the project will be the assessment of whether the curriculum is being implemented as expected and whether it is having an impact on studenty's knowledge and college applications.

Project Implementation

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Seaside High closed in Mid March 2020 and teachers were required to find alternative (on-line) methods of delivery for their courses. In addition CSU Monterey Bay closed all field course requirements so this project was not fully implemented. What follows are guidelines on how other incoming CHHS students could implement the GEAR UP curriculum with teachers at Seaside High in the future.

Guidelines for the needs assessment:

The first step for GEAR UP will be to create a needs assessment survey for students and teachers. The teacher's survey should include detailed closed and open ended questions to give teachers and staff members regarding their knowledge of college resources and preparedness as well as their willingness to include this material in their own teaching schedules and curriculum. The faculty will have their students participate in another survey designed to assess student's knowledge about college readiness, preparedness and attitudes. This is an opportunity to gain more understanding on where students lack information and what topics should be covered with emphasis. These surveys will not only help design the curriculum and facilitate collaboration with teachers, but will also serve as a baseline of knowledge that will be compared with post surveys when the program is evaluated.

Guidelines for Curriculum Development:

The Curriculum development will focus on five major topics important for students to know to be able to apply and attend college. The topics that the curriculum will focus on are related to A-G requirements for graduating high school. Students need to satisfy A-G

requirements to be eligible for applications to 4-year institutions like the CSU and UC. The curriculum will also focus on the importance of taking SAT, ACTs and preparing for the exams. Another important topic that should be involved in the curriculum would be Financial Aid, this is a huge factor of students when deciding to apply for higher education for fear they can not afford it.

Gear up will create powerpoint slides for all these topics based on Powerpoints Gear Up already used for workshops that teach information to students directly. A great example of easy to teach presentations can come from Minnesota's website of Higher Education. Their websites list powerpoints that can be shared when requested for access, "These presentations help connect educators, parents, students and organizations with helpful postsecondary resources. Free publications on career awareness and how to prepare and pay for college as well as other college preparation"(College Planning Presentation, 2017). For A-G requirements for graduating High School it will have a slide for each requirement, how many years you must take the requirement, grade level acceptable, classes to take at seaside high school that will satisfy the requirement. For A-G requirements for higher education again the same thing schools require, grade levels to receive, what classes Seaside High offers to satisfy and if they can take these courses at local colleges. For College Entry Exams like SAT and ACTS slides will explain the importance of the exams, how the levels of the exam determine college entry classes, how to prepare for the exams and where you can take these exams. For financial aid there will be slides about FAFSA, the importance of FAFSA, what documents are required for applying, the differences between grants

and loans subsidized and unsubsidized. Also special slides will be included in the FAFSA slides for students who are undocumented and what grants they can apply for.

Gear Up will introduce these powerpoints to the Staff that will be providing teaching on College Preparedness in their classrooms. They will first be taught the slides through Gear Up staff to understand what the students will be learning. Gear Up will also have a section for members providing the material in classrooms to ask questions. It is important teachers know well all the material they will be providing to students so they can provide accurate information and be able to answer questions.

Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation:

As described above, teachers and staff members from Seaside High School will be the main participants in the actual delivery of the curriculum “teachers play a very active role in student learning and are engaged in inspiring learning from every student—they are not only a content-delivery mechanism. The teacher has a vital role in connecting students with authentic, real-world learning experiences.”(Vodicka, 2018) For this reason teachers are a critical help to helping boost the possibility of more students graduating high school applying to college and in the end attending. They will need to be trained in the curriculum by GEAR UP. Another important aspect in the implementation is that not all teachers will have the same willingness and space in their curriculums to add a college preparedness curriculum, especially with all the state testing requirements that they have to comply with already. For these two reasons it will be important to identify carefully which teachers have a combination of space and willingness to participate to partner with.

Guidelines for the curriculum Assessment:

The expected outcome is that by involving Seaside Faculty in their students' discovery about higher education, Seaside High school will have more sources of college readiness information. To measure if students benefited from these added resources, the success of this trial with Seaside Faculty and GEAR UP's curriculum would be measured by the improvement in knowledge of Seaside High 10th graders as measured by a simple post test that could be compared with the needs assessment baseline. It is expected that higher knowledge will produce an increase of the rate of those who graduate high school attending a CSU, UC or community college. Ultimately the best indicator of success would be a higher number of students actually attending and graduating CSUs or UC institutions.

Potential Challenges

An expected potential challenge of this project will be Seaside Students willingness to fill out the survey with their honest accurate judgment. Small number of students only reply to pre and post surveys. However the main potential problem is that teachers and other faculty may not teach the curriculum in their classrooms either for lack of willingness or lack of space in their own course curriculums. For this reason, GEAR UP might have to offer some type of incentives that help persuade teachers to participate that are also in compliance with the GEAR UP grant guidelines.

**Reflection of COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact
on Agency and Population Served**

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Agency:

The public high school Seaside High was closed down due to the COVID-19. Gear Up no longer had the ability to meet with students face to face either. Operations have now changed to completely online and Gear Up is doing their best to stay connected with their members through social media. These services are less than what they would offer on a daily basis but the effort is doubled to stay connected through technology. Gear Up uploads reminders for seniors graduating on how to stay on track. Recognizing students achievements on social media, students are also encouraged to email counselors with any questions or difficulties they may be having currently.

Impact of COVID-19 on agency clients:

Gear up members are students who are currently 10th graders. They have limited connection with Gear Up counselors to discuss grades and their pathway progress to being eligible to apply for higher education. Students are receiving less services due to the limited contact. They lose the connection and access to one-on-one counseling, but they can receive alternative assistance by emailing the Gear Up counselor or following their social media. The services offered currently may not be as personal or effective, but Gear Up is doing their best to provide assistance as best as possible.

Impact of COVID-19 on social problem:

It is early to predict the extent to which COVID-19 is worsening the social problem. Students were aware of their graduation and college acceptance status prior to the shelter in place coming into effect. The covid-19 could be lessening the chances of students being eligible to apply for

colleges, since they are required to take their remaining classes online. Students may have difficulty learning online, they may not even have a functioning computer or internet to be able to complete their work. For students already struggling in their courses no longer have the resources of the library or homework center to be able to complete their homework. If students are struggling to do well in their courses they are most likely to fail. If they fail their necessary a-g courses it requires them to retake these courses to be eligible.

Impact of COVID-19 on the agency's future:

Gear Up utilizing their social media more to stay in contact with their students during this difficult time is effective, also a good strategy to get more information and support. Gear Up should utilize more of their social media to stay connected with students even if they can meet in person. Hosting zoom sessions while workshops take place in the High School so even if they can't attend the workshops physically they still have access to the information through zoom. Gear Up has learned through the crisis that the internet can help them meet their mission and is a great method to be even more connected with their Gear Up members.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the agency

The benefits of this project will be that students will have more access to college preparedness. The Gear Up counselors work with hundreds of students attempting to counsel, mentor and organize student activities, workshops and field trips. With the collaboration of Seaside High Staff willing to be responsible for teaching more College Preparedness material students will have an extra source of knowledge to help prepare. The agency will also benefit by teaching staff members accurate information eliminating possible confusion between Seaside administration and students. The collaboration between Seaside High staff and Gear Up is something that should continue. Students would benefit from multiple College preparedness resources, more encouragement and higher chances of success. With all these resources it is important that the members are trained well and understand completely the information they are teaching. It is important to eliminate confusion and miscommunication to prevent students receiving wrong information. Gear Up with all the sources of College Preparedness resources Gear Up has the ability to continue to meet their mission statement.

Broader social significance

The project focuses on the issue of a small number of high school students attending college. One way to help boost encouragement of students to apply for higher education is by providing more resources, more information and overall more support to the student. Student factors for not attending college have been grades, first-generation so little to no knowledge of what to expect and low expectations where students feel like attending college isn't

possible for them. Gear Up provides mentoring to students to give them an entry to the possibility of considering college. By making college normalized to all students regardless of income status, being the first and because it's not what it is expected of them. With being more educated on the process to attend, what will be required of them and the opportunities that will be available to them it will generate more consideration to apply and attend.

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