Promise Lost:
College-Qualified Students Who Don't Enroll in College

BY RYAN D. HAHN AND DEREK PRICE, PH.D.

November 2008

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This report was made possible through the generous support of TERI. The opinions and conclusions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the sponsor.

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Executive Summary

Despite the increasing importance of higher education, students who are academically qualified for college still face numerous barriers to college enrollment. These barriers range from insufficient financial aid to mixed messages about academic preparation, poor understanding of admission and financial aid application processes, and limited community encouragement. Improving access to college for these students requires policies informed by the perspectives that counselors and college-qualified students have on each of these barriers. To contribute to a better understanding of these perspectives, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) carried out two national surveys, one of college-qualified high school graduates and another of high school counselors. Results from the two surveys pointed to the need for policy intervention or further research in the following five categories: college cost and the availability of aid, the steps to enroll in college, opportunity cost, economic mobility, and transparency about the amount and types of financial aid available.

National Survey of College-Qualified Students

Over 1,800 college-qualified students responded to the national student survey on a range of issues related to college enrollment. Of the 1,800 respondents, approximately 1,000 had not enrolled in a postsecondary institution, while the remaining 800 had enrolled in a two- or four-year college. All respondents met a minimum standard of college qualification—these students had earned at least a **2.5 grade point average (GPA), taken a college preparatory curriculum, and completed Algebra I or II, Pre-calculus, Calculus and/or Trigonometry.** Respondents to the survey answered questions on a range of topics, including high school background, demographic information, reasons for enrollment or nonenrollment, and attitudes to issues such as loans, family obligations, and the value of a college education.

National Survey of High School Counselors

The national counselor survey received responses from over 600 counselors. Counselors responded from urban and rural schools, schools with high and low minority populations, and from all the regions of the United States. Counselors were asked to describe the importance of a number of criteria they use in judging whether one of their students is college-qualified: **rigor of coursework, study habits, highest coursework, GPA, test scores, self confidence, class rank, and honors awarded.** Counselors were also asked a range of questions about the reasons that college-qualified students from their school did not enroll in college. Topics covered included finances, family and friends, college knowledge, and work.

College Cost and the Availability of Aid

Overwhelmingly, counselors and college-qualified students who did not enroll in college—non-college-goers—pointed to college cost and the availability of aid as primary obstacles to college enrollment. When asked about a range of factors, over 70 percent of counselors responded that not having enough aid or tuition being too high was “almost always” or “frequently” important in non-college-goers’ decision to not enroll. Likewise, over 80 percent of non-college-goers said that the availability of grant aid was “extremely” or “very” important, and 63 percent said that the price of college was “extremely” or “very” important. This overwhelming concern on the part of both counselors and non-college-goers indicates that multiple areas associated with cost and aid need to be addressed, including increasing the amount of aid available for some students, and improving knowledge about the amounts and types of aid available.

The Steps to Enroll in College

The survey of students pointed to another significant issue for almost all non-college-goers: not taking the steps necessary to enroll in college. Only 15 percent of non-college-goers applied to any college, 12 percent applied for financial aid, and a mere 10 percent took the SAT and 7 percent the ACT. These very low percentages suggest that the decision not to enroll in college may have been made long before high school graduation. While the student survey did not determine definitively the reasons that students did not take these steps, this finding points to an overarching policy implication—any attempt to substantially increase the number of college-qualified students enrolling in college will have to target students early in their high school career, if not before high school.

Opportunity Cost

Enrolling in college involves a number of substantial direct and indirect costs, including tuition, fees, books, transportation, and living expenses. In addition to these costs, students face an opportunity cost—when an individual is going to class or studying, she forgoes the wages she could have earned or the time that could have gone to help with family obligations. Results from the student survey suggest that opportunity cost is a particular barrier to college enrollment for certain groups of non-college-goers. Black and low-income non-college-goers were particularly likely to state that the need to work was important in their decision not to enroll in college. This finding suggests the need for action in two broad policy realms: (1) increasing the amount of aid available to students who face a substantial opportunity cost to reduce the need to work, and (2) facilitating opportunities for students to take on reasonable work commitments while attending college.

Economic Mobility

Overall, respondents to the student survey believed that college is a vehicle for economic mobility. Non-college-goers were asked whether they agreed with the following statement: "A college education is necessary for me to have the things that I want, like a car and a comfortable home." Over two-thirds strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. However, there was one group of students—high academic achievers—who were more skeptical of this statement than the non-college-going population as a whole. Fewer than half of high academic achievers strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. These students may believe that they have viable career choices that do not require a college degree. However, the student survey did not contain questions that could provide greater context for high achievers' decision not to enroll in college. This gap in understanding points to a number of questions to be addressed by future research; in particular, what career paths do high achieving non-college-goers follow, how often do these students return to education, and would targeted efforts to attract these students into postsecondary education increase their college-going?

Transparency about the Amount and Types of Financial Aid Available

The issue of transparency arose as a key issue in the two surveys, particularly in relation to the amount and types of financial aid available. Two pieces of data point to a problem of transparency: (1) very few non-college-goers (12 percent) applied for financial aid, and (2) only one-fifth of counselors thought that completing the financial aid application was almost always or frequently important in non-college-goers' not enrolling in college. While the complexity of the financial aid application process itself may be problematic, these data together suggest that the central issue is not merely the complexity of the application. Rather, something else—potentially a perception that aid will be insufficient—may be inhibiting students from filling out a financial aid application. Students may also be wary about taking out loans to finance their education; about one-third of non-college-goers indicated an aversion to borrowing, and 45 percent of counselors stated that an unwillingness to borrow was almost always or frequently important. Taken together, this information suggests that while efforts to streamline the financial aid application process are laudable, more effort needs to be made to create greater transparency overall about the amount and types of financial aid available.

Introduction

Despite the increasing importance of higher education, students who are academically qualified for college still face numerous barriers to college enrollment. These barriers range from insufficient financial aid to mixed messages about academic preparation, poor understanding of admission and financial aid processes, and limited community encouragement. A report by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (ACSFA) estimated that in the current decade between 1.4 million and 2.4 million college-qualified high school graduates would be unable to earn a bachelor's degree (ACSFA 2006). While improving bachelor's degree attainment depends on many factors—including the quality of K–12 academic preparation and rates of persistence in higher education—access to college is clearly a key component in this equation. Improving access to college requires a better understanding of the many college-qualified students who do not enroll in college.

To contribute to a better understanding of this group of students, this study explores the reasons why some college-qualified students do not enroll. Given the complexity of college-going behavior, the study employs a three-part design that captures varying perspectives on the issue:

1. *National Survey of College-Qualified Students*: A national survey collected demographic and attitudinal data from 1,830 college-qualified students.

2. *National Survey of Counselors*: A national survey of high school counselors gathered over 600 responses on counselors' beliefs about the college-going behavior of their college-qualified students.

3. *Roundtable Discussion*: In September 2007, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) convened a roundtable discussion of experts on higher education to catalyze a broad dialogue on college access.

Together, these surveys and discussions provide a portrait of an overlooked group of students that deserves the attention of state and federal policymakers as well as institutions of higher education. Given the opportunity to attend college, these qualified

students will be better able to contribute to the civic, economic, and political welfare of their communities and the nation.

Who Is "College-Qualified"?

Definitions of the "college-qualified" student abound (Berkner and Chavez 1997; Mcpherson and Schapiro 1999; Baum and Payea 2005; Greene and Winters 2005; Winston and Hill 2005). Not all students who graduate from high school are college-qualified. High school graduation requirements vary widely, and only a handful of states have requirements stringent enough to ensure that every high school graduate is college-qualified. Researchers on this topic must, therefore, apply additional criteria to identify college-qualified students.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) established one of the first sets of criteria for the purposes of analyzing college-qualified students. The NCES created an index of college qualification using the following five criteria: **grade point average (GPA), class rank, National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) aptitude test score, academic coursework, and college entrance examination scores** (Berkner and Chavez 1997). Students were ranked according to their highest score on any of these criteria. Relying on these criteria, the authors found that qualified low-income students attend college at rates similar to qualified middle-income students. However, the NCES authors themselves admitted to a bias in their study—students who had not taken a college entrance exam were more likely to be improperly classified downward on their index (Berkner and Chavez 1997). Furthermore, research suggests that college-qualified students who believe that college is unaffordable, such as low-income and minority students, are less likely to take the steps necessary to enroll in college, such as taking a college entrance exam (St. John 2002).

Other studies have relied on a single criterion to identify a group of college-qualified students. For example, a study of stratification in higher education identified college-qualified students on the basis of the results of the **standardized test** that was administered as part of NELS (McPherson and Schapiro 1999). This study found a striking difference in enrollment rates between low- and high-income college-qualified students, or what the study calls "high-ability students." Only 75 percent of high-ability students from low-income families enrolled, compared with 95 percent of high-ability students from high-income families. Later studies have corroborated this finding. One recent example is a report by the College Board that also identified high-achieving eighth graders on the NELS standardized test (Baum and Payea 2005). The authors of this study say that eight years after high school graduation, 99 percent of high-achieving, high-income students had enrolled in college, while only 75 percent of high-achieving, low-income students had enrolled. Both analyses suggest that nonacademic barriers prevent a substantial number of qualified students from attending college.

The present study used two separate sets of criteria for the student and counselor surveys. For the student survey, a set of four baseline cutoff criteria were chosen. All students had **graduated from high school; earned a GPA of at least 2.5; taken a college-preparatory curriculum; and taken Algebra I or II, Pre-calculus, Calculus, and/or Trigonometry**.[1] For the counselor survey, respondents were asked to identify college-qualified students based on eight criteria: **GPA, class rank, test scores, highest level of coursework, rigor of coursework, honors awarded, self-confidence, and good study habits.** These two sets of criteria produced groups of students that fall along a continuum of academic qualification.

Overview of the Report

The importance of promoting college access for all college-qualified students will continue to grow as the United States grapples with the challenges and opportunities of a global economy. This report provides an overview of the key factors in college access. The following chapter reports the results of the national survey of non-college-goers. It provides additional details on the definition of "college-qualified" and the methodology used in the student survey. College-qualified students who enrolled in college are compared with those who did not enroll. The chapter also contains a discussion of differences among groups of non-college-goers. The third chapter presents the results of the national survey of counselors and discusses counselors' perceptions of the barriers to college enrollment. The chapter further analyzes factors in college-going based on the demographic characteristics of the schools where the counselors worked. The final chapter concludes with a discussion of the results of both surveys, policy implications, and suggestions for further research. Perspectives from focus groups and the roundtable discussion are interwoven throughout the text.

[1] Math courses completed in high school have been demonstrated to be highly correlated to bachelor's degree attainment. In a study of bachelor's degree attainment for the high school class of 1992, 39.3 percent of those who had completed Algebra II and 60 percent of those who had completed Trigonometry earned a bachelor's degree (Adelman 2006).

National Survey of College-Qualified Students

This chapter presents an exploratory analysis of a national survey of college-qualified high school graduates, both those who enrolled in two- and four-year institutions, and those who did not enroll at all. Directly asking college-qualified students why they did not enroll in college led to insights into the respective roles of finances, academic preparation, personal motivation, and other factors in college-going behavior. The results suggest that finances are a major factor in the decision of college-qualified students not to attend college, although this varies somewhat by the characteristics of the students. Improving college-going will require general policies that target all college-qualified non-college-goers as well as more narrowly targeted policies that address the concerns of particular groups of non-college-goers within the college-qualified population.

Two approaches are taken to analyze the results from the student survey. First, non-college-goers are compared with college-goers to identify major differences in these two populations. Second, differences between groups within the population of non-college-goers are analyzed to address particular challenges faced by these groups, including financial, academic, and motivational issues.

Methodology

IHEP purchased a national list of 50,000 students who graduated from high school in 2006 and contracted a third-party firm to survey a random sample of students from the list one year later. The random sample was stratified to collect information from approximately 1,000 students who are not currently attending college and about 800 students who are currently enrolled in a two- or four-year college. The survey was stratified to ensure enough statistical power for comparisons between the two groups of high school students: non-college-goers and college-goers.[2] The survey began on May 7, 2007, and was completed on July 13, 2007.

For this survey, several measures were used to determine whether a potential respondent was college-qualified. First, the list of students included only those who said they would like to attend some type of college. The question was theoretical—it did

[2] Because of the stratification, the entire group of respondents is not representative of all college-qualified students from the student list population; however, the respondents within each stratum are representative of that stratum (Appendix I). For the purposes of this study, it was most important to focus on the non-college-goers as a group with additional comparisons to college-goers for context.

not specify the timing of enrollment, tuition, fees, or any other considerations. Based on data from the purchased list, almost 75 percent of respondents with valid answers indicated that they wanted to attend a four-year college or university; 10 percent mentioned a community or technical college; and 7 percent mentioned an information technology college.[3]

Second, the student list was filtered by high school GPA (2.5 or higher), and a question on the survey asked about their high school GPA. Third, respondents were asked to describe their high school curriculum; options included honors, advanced placement (AP), international baccalaureate (IB), and college preparatory. Respondents who replied vocational or general education were excluded from the survey. Finally, the survey asked about math courses taken in high school. To be included in the survey, respondents must have selected at least one of the following: Algebra I or II, Pre-calculus, Calculus, or Trigonometry.[4]

In short, for the purposes of this component of the study, college-qualified students are defined as high school graduates who:

- Had a **GPA of at least 2.5;**
- Took **college-preparatory classes,** including but not limited to **honors, AP, or IB;** and
- Took **Algebra I or II, Pre-Calculus, Calculus,** or **Trigonometry.**

The survey focused on questions pertaining to the decision to attend or not to attend college. Some questions asked respondents about applying to college, applying for financial aid, whether or not they took a college entrance exam such as the ACT or SAT, and if they visited a college during high school. Other questions required students to rate the importance of factors that affected their decision to attend or not to attend college. A third set of questions focused on a few policy-related issues about affording college, such as aversion to loans, whether or not a college education is needed for a comfortable lifestyle, and the extent to which family or work obligations interfered with college-going. The complete survey is included in Appendix I.

Characteristics of College-Qualified Students Who Did Not Enroll in College

Telephone interviews were conducted with 1,003 college-qualified students who graduated from high school in 2006 but had not enrolled in a two- or four-year institution one year later. Basic demographic information for this group is summarized in **TABLE 1.**

Three demographic characteristics distinguish this group of non-college-goers from the general population. First, minorities were

[3] Unfortunately, 35 percent of students sampled from the purchased list had missing data for this question. For all respondents, almost half indicated that they wanted to attend a four-year college or university.

[4] For a very small group of respondents (3 percent), data were missing for math courses taken.

disproportionately represented among this group: 52 percent were White, non-Hispanic, and 48 percent were Hispanic, Black, Asian, or American Indian/Native Alaskan.[5] Second, many in this group grew up in low-income families. More than one-third (38 percent) received free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL)—a proxy for low income. However, many non-college-goers had parents with high educational attainment. Half of these students' parents held a bachelor's degree or higher. In the general population of adults aged 25–65 years, only 30 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher (Census Bureau 2006). Thus, the non-college-going survey respondents were more frequently from low-income backgrounds but with high parental educational attainment, and many belonged to a minority group.[6]

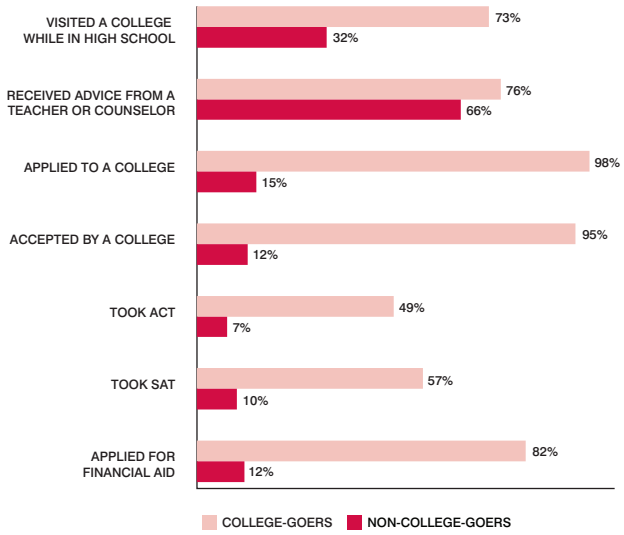
Although this group of students did not enroll in college, many were academically well prepared to enroll, and all met the minimum academic criteria created for the survey. All respondents described their curriculum as more rigorous than vocational or general education: 40 percent described their high

[5] According to the Census Bureau, in 2000 Whites comprised 70 percent of the American population aged 15–19 years (Census Bureau 2002).

[6] The above average parental educational attainment of the respondents is likely a reflection of response bias. See Appendix I for more information.

FIGURE 1

Steps Taken to Enroll in College



SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF COLLEGE-QUALIFIED STUDENTS

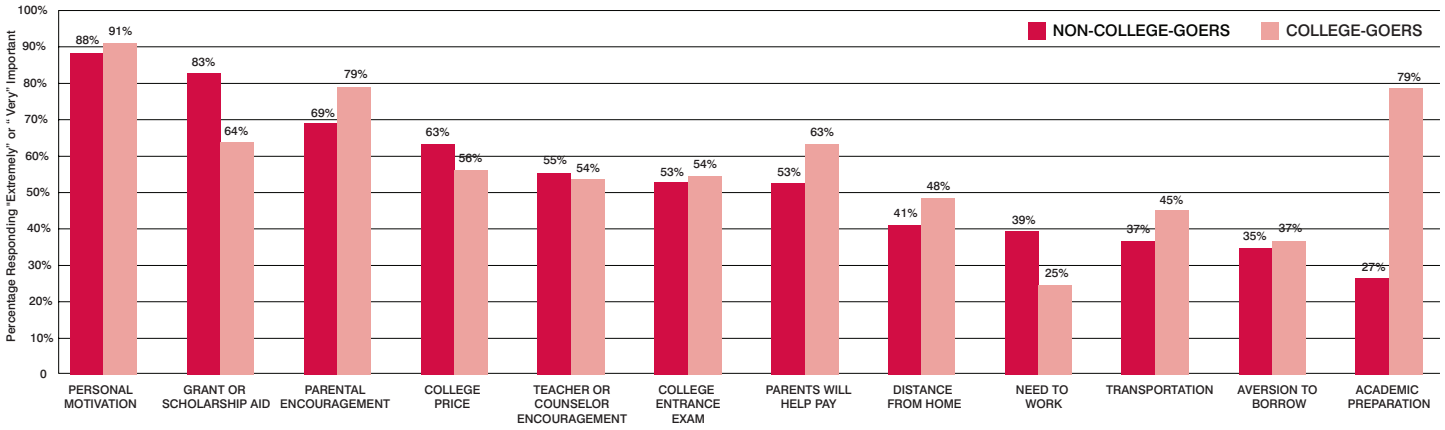
TABLE 1: Demographic Characteristics of College-Qualified Non-College-Goers

Race/Ethnicity (N=774)	American Indian/Native Alaskan	2.2%
	Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander	3.5%
	Black/African American/Non-Hispanic	29.3%
	Hispanic/Latin American/South or Central American/Mexican	13.3%
	White, Non-Hispanic	51.7%
Gender (N=958)	Female	52.8%
	Male	47.2%
Born in United States, Guam, or Puerto Rico (N=1,003)	No	12.8%
	Yes	87.2%
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch in High School (N=942)	No	62.3%
	Yes	37.7%
Parental Educational Attainment (N=797)	High School (HS)	37.1%
	Certificate	3.3%
	Associate's Degree (AA)	9.4%
	Bachelor's Degree (BA)	34.4%
	Master's Degree	11.5%
	Professional or Doctoral Degree	4.3%

NOTE: THE CATEGORIES FOR RACE AND ETHNICITY AND PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT CONTAINED LARGE AMOUNTS OF MISSING DATA. TWENTY-THREE PERCENT OF RESPONSES WERE MISSING OR REFUSED FOR RACE/ETHNICITY, AND 21 PERCENT OF RESPONSES WERE MISSING/DON'T KNOW FOR PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT. THE RACE/ETHNICITY CATEGORY IN THE STUDENT SURVEY DID NOT ALLOW FOR MULTIPLE RESPONSES.
SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF COLLEGE-QUALIFIED STUDENTS

FIGURE 2

Factors Influencing the Decision to Attend College



NOTE: ALL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COLLEGE-GOERS AND NON-COLLEGE-GOERS IN FIGURE 2 ARE STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT EXCEPT FOR "PERSONAL MOTIVATION," "TEACHER/COUNSELOR ENCOURAGEMENT," AND "AVERSION TO BORROW." THE MEASURES FOR "PARENTS WILL HELP PAY" AND "COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAM" CONTAIN LARGE AMOUNTS OF MISSING DATA; THEREFORE, THESE MEASURES SHOULD BE INTERPRETED WITH CAUTION.
SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF COLLEGE-QUALIFIED STUDENTS

school curriculum as college preparatory, 35 percent as an honors curriculum, and 26 percent as AP or IB. Over half of non-college-goers reported a GPA of 3.0 or higher, and none reported a GPA lower than 2.5. Nearly 80 percent reported being somewhat or very much prepared for college. In addition, almost 60 percent of non-college-goers took a mathematics class more advanced than Algebra, that is, Pre-calculus, Calculus, or Trigonometry, and all respondents took at least Algebra I or II.

In addition to being academically prepared, most non-college-goers believe college is important. Over two-thirds "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement that "a college education is necessary to have the things I want, like a car and a comfortable home." However, a large gap emerged between academic preparation and motivation, on the one hand, and concrete action, on the other. Very few of these students took the necessary steps to go to college, such as applying to college (15 percent), applying for financial aid (12 percent), or taking the SAT (10 percent) or ACT (7 percent) (**FIGURE 1)**. These low percentages suggest that studies of college-qualified students that use criteria based on the steps to go to college such as an SAT score may exclude many students who were otherwise qualified. The present study seeks to examine the factors that influence the college-going behavior of a wider group of college-qualified students.

What Are the Differences between College-Goers and Non-College-Goers?

Two demographic differences emerged in the comparison of college-goers and non-college-goers.[7] First, non-college-goers were more likely to be Black (29 percent) than college-goers (21 percent); in contrast, non-college-goers were less likely to be Hispanic (13 percent) or White (52 percent) than college-goers (15 percent and 57 percent, respectively).[8] Second, non-college-goers' parents had somewhat lower educational attainment—that is, the parents of non-college-goers were more likely to hold only a high school degree or less (37 percent) than the parents of college-goers (31 percent). These differences in race and parental educational attainment may have contributed to differences in college-going behavior.

Levels of academic preparation also distinguished college-goers from non-college-goers. Although all respondents were qualified according to the criteria of the survey, non-college-goers appeared to be less prepared. Non-college-goers reported lower high school GPAs than college-goers, with 48 percent reporting a GPA between 2.5 and 2.9, compared with only 12 percent of college-goers. Non-college-goers also felt less prepared for college: 21 percent reported being "not very well prepared," compared with only 6 percent of college-goers. Along a different measure, though, no difference was found—both college-goers and non-college goers had taken similar levels of mathematics in high school. The student survey did not account for differences in the rigor of the math coursework offered at different schools, making it difficult to compare the academic preparation of the two groups. The substantial differences in GPAs suggest, though, that differences in academic preparation may have contributed to the decision not to enroll in college.

[7] All differences discussed in the text were found to be statistically significant at the .05 level or less, unless otherwise noted.

[8] Non-college-goers were more likely than college-goers to refuse to answer the question about race/ethnicity. In fact, respondents who refused to answer this question were more likely to not enroll in college.

TABLE 2 : FINANCES
Percentage Responding "Extremely" or "Very" Important or "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

	Price of College	Grant or Scholarship Aid	Aversion to Borrowing	Loans Only as a Last Resort	Family Obligations	Need to Work
OVERALL	63%	83%	35%	50%	24%	38%
RACE/ETHNICITY						
Hispanic	63%	87%	41%	64%	29%	40%
Black, Non-Hispanic	65%	83%	33%	53%	22%	49%
White, Non-Hispanic	58%	83%	33%	45%	27%	37%
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS						
FRPL–No	59%	82%	33%	50%	24%	34%
FRPL–Yes	70%	84%	38%	49%	26%	49%
Parent–BA or Higher	58%	83%	31%	51%	25%	38%
Parent–AA/Certificate	58%	80%	41%	49%	26%	32%
Parent–High School or Less	66%	82%	33%	48%	25%	40%
COLLEGE READINESS						
HS GPA 3.5 or Higher	62%	89%	37%	48%	22%	45%
HS GPA 3.0–3.4	66%	86%	31%	47%	23%	48%
HS GPA 2.5–2.9	63%	78%	35%	52%	26%	31%

NOTE: THE CATEGORIES FOR RACE AND ETHNICITY AND PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT CONTAINED LARGE AMOUNTS OF MISSING DATA. TWENTY-THREE PERCENT OF RESPONSES WERE MISSING OR REFUSED FOR RACE/ETHNICITY, AND 21 PERCENT OF RESPONSES WERE MISSING/DON'T KNOW FOR PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT. THE RACE/ETHNICITY CATEGORY IN THE STUDENT SURVEY DID NOT ALLOW FOR MULTIPLE RESPONSES.
SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF COLLEGE-QUALIFIED STUDENTS

An additional set of factors might also account for the difference in college-going behavior. Students were asked about the importance they place on a range of factors, including college price, encouragement, and the need to work (**FIGURE 2**).[9] When asked about personal motivation, a large majority of both college-goers and non-college-goers stated that this was "extremely" or "very" important. The key differences lay elsewhere. For non-college-goers, financial factors such as college price, the availability of grant or scholarship aid, and the need to work after high school were more important to the college-going decision than they were for college-goers. College-goers indicated that academic preparation and the two related categories of distance from home and transportation were more important factors in the decision to enroll in college than for non-college-goers.

These responses suggest that college-goers and non-college-goers had different attitudes in two key areas—financial factors and academic preparation. First, non-college-goers were more concerned about the cost of higher education, particularly the availability of grant aid and the opportunity cost represented by the need to work. Second, college-goers placed much more emphasis on their academic preparation than did non-college-goers. Two other factors addressed in the survey may have contributed to the difference concerning academic preparation: (1) non-college-goers reported lower GPAs (although not lower math achievement) than college-goers; and (2) non-college-goers placed less importance on parental encouragement. While these results are open to a number of interpretations, non-college-goers themselves indicated the primacy of cost considerations over that of every other consideration except personal motivation.

Differences Among Non-College-Goers: Race/Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, and College Readiness

Not all groups within the non-college-going population felt the same about the issues of finances, academic preparation, or motivation. Minority students, low-income students, and students

[9] Recent research into financial decision-making suggests that age is highly associated with the ability of individuals to make complex financial decisions such as taking out a loan. In a study of mortgages, credit cards, and other types of credits, the young and the old were substantially more likely to borrow at higher interest rates and pay higher fees than the middle-aged, even after controlling for borrowers' risk characteristics (Agarwal et al. 2007).

"There is a very subtle notion that education is nice but not necessary; so, if you don't know what you want to do, don't waste your money."

A GUIDANCE COUNSELOR AT A PRIVATE, RURAL, K–12 SCHOOL, DISCUSSING WHY SOME COLLEGE-QUALIFIED STUDENTS DO NOT ENROLL IN COLLEGE

with lower levels of academic preparation had attitudes different from the overall group that may point to reasons for differences in college-going behavior. Given that minority students, low-income students, and students with lower levels of academic preparation fall disproportionately in the population of non-college-goers, identifying the factors important to them is a step toward improving college access.

Finances

Without a doubt, financial considerations loom large for non-college-goers (**TABLE 2**). Over 80 percent of respondents said that the availability of grant or scholarship aid was "extremely" or "very" important, and almost two-thirds said that college price was "extremely" or "very" important. There are a number of components to students' financial considerations: college cost, borrowing, and opportunity cost. The groups of non-college-goers analyzed here each placed different weight on these three financial issues, pointing to differences in the challenges they face.

College Cost and the Availability of Aid

For many college-qualified students, the cost of going to college is too high. Almost two-thirds of non-college-goers stated that the price of college was "extremely" or "very" important. These responses were corroborated in the open-ended question, where typical responses were "I'm broke" or "I can't afford [college]." Among non-college-goers, only White students and students whose parents held a BA or higher expressed less concern about the price of college (58 percent).

Concerns about cost are compounded by extreme concern about the insufficiency of scholarship and grant aid. More than four-fifths of non-college-goers stated that the availability of grant or scholarship aid was "extremely" or "very" important. Neither race nor socioeconomic status appeared to make any difference in concerns about the insufficiency of aid, as no statistically significant differences were found in these categories. Only non-college-goers with a GPA of 3.5 or above—high achievers—expressed more concern than average, with 9 out of 10 saying that grant aid was "extremely" or "very" important in their decision. High achievers were also less likely than other non-college-goers to take a college entrance exam or apply to college. While few non-college-goers took these steps, it appears that high achievers may have been particularly likely to have decided before their senior year that they would not go to college, at least not immediately following graduation.

Borrowing

While many students believe the cost of college is too high, there may be some students who are averse to borrowing to cover the cost of going to college. In other words, these students may believe that college is a worthwhile investment given the cost, but for cultural, personal, or other reasons they are unwilling to assume the risk of borrowing. This aversion to borrow may result from a combination of risk aversion and uncertainty about the degree of risk—high or low—involved in borrowing.[10] Overall, about a third of non-college-goers indicated that aversion to borrowing was "extremely" or "very" important, making this factor much less important than college cost.

Aversion to borrowing was potentially more problematic for Hispanic non-college-goers than for other non-college-goers. Almost two-thirds of Hispanic non-college-goers "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the following statement: "Loans are only good as a last resort or in an emergency." This was corroborated by Hispanics' responses to the open-ended question about

[10] About one-quarter of Hispanic non-college-goers who responded to the survey did not answer this open-ended question.

TABLE 3: ACADEMIC PREPARATION Percentage Responding "Very Much Prepared" or "Extremely" or "Very" Important		
	When you graduated from high school, did you feel prepared to take college-level courses?	How important was academic preparation in your decision not to enroll in college?
OVERALL	34%	27%
RACE/ETHNICITY		
Hispanic	33%	39%
Black, Non-Hispanic	40%	26%
White, Non-Hispanic	35%	27%
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS		
FRPL–No	33%	24%
FRPL–Yes	37%	32%
Parent–BA or Higher	32%	19%
Parent–AA/Certificate	42%	25%
Parent–High School or Less	32%	26%
COLLEGE READINESS		
HS GPA 3.5 or Higher	34%	33%
HS GPA 3.0–3.4	39%	31%
HS GPA 2.5–2.9	32%	21%

NOTE: THE CATEGORIES FOR RACE AND ETHNICITY AND PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT CONTAINED LARGE AMOUNTS OF MISSING DATA. TWENTY-THREE PERCENT OF RESPONSES WERE MISSING OR REFUSED FOR RACE/ETHNICITY, AND 21 PERCENT OF RESPONSES WERE MISSING/DON'T KNOW FOR PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT. THE RACE/ETHNICITY CATEGORY IN THE STUDENT SURVEY DID NOT ALLOW FOR MULTIPLE RESPONSES.

SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF COLLEGE-QUALIFIED STUDENTS

why they did not enroll in college.[11] Common responses were "I don't want loans" and "I can't afford it." However, even aversion to borrowing is not clear-cut for Hispanics. No statistically significant difference was found for the importance Hispanic non-college-goers placed on aversion to borrowing in their decision not to go to college.

Work and Opportunity Cost

In addition to the direct and indirect costs of going to college—such as tuition, fees, books, and living expenses—students must also consider the opportunity cost. When students are in the classroom or studying, they forgo income from working that could cover living expenses or help with family obligations. For students who are attending an expensive college, the opportunity cost may be small compared with tuition and fees. However, for students attending community colleges or less expensive state universities, the opportunity cost may be as much as, if not more than, tuition and fees. Therefore, opportunity cost can diminish the incentives for college-qualified students to enroll in college or make it financially impossible to enroll.

Two questions dealt directly with the issue of opportunity cost: (1) need to work, and (2) family obligations. The need to work was important for a moderate number of non-college-goers (38 percent), while fewer were concerned about family obligations (24 percent). Opportunity costs were also cited in response to the open-ended question. Some respondents said they needed to work because of family obligations, such as a parent or grandparent illness. For example, "grandpa is sick" or "my brother has medical complications" or "my mother needs care." One respondent was very specific: "I was enrolled in University of Missouri—Rolla but took six months off to help my mother. I'm going to attend college [closer to home] when I go back." Some non-college-goers also cited parental duties, such as "taking care of my kid."

A few additional questions provide context for the question of opportunity cost. First, almost all non-college-goers still lived with their parents (95 percent). Since only one-fourth stated that family obligations were important, it appears that a large percentage of non-college-goers stayed at home for another reason. There are a number of possibilities; for example, non-college-goers entered the family business or they could not find a job to support a life away from their family. Although the data

[11] The majority of respondents (68 percent of non-college-goers) refused to answer the question about parents' willingness to help pay, making it difficult to judge the validity of these responses. However, a study by the College Board found that low-income students who had taken the SAT were somewhat more likely to attend a four-year college if their parents were willing to help pay for college expenses (King 1996).

TABLE 4: MOTIVATION Percentage Responding "Strongly Agree or Agree" or "Extremely" or "Very" Important			
	Material Benefits	Parental Encouragement	Counselor Encouragement
OVERALL	67%	69%	55%
RACE/ETHNICITY			
Hispanic	79%	71%	52%
Black, Non-Hispanic	66%	70%	56%
White, Non-Hispanic	66%	67%	52%
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS			
FRPL–No	65%	69%	55%
FRPL–Yes	74%	70%	57%
Parent–BA or Higher	69%	69%	52%
Parent–AA/Certificate	75%	71%	50%
Parent–High School or Less	68%	67%	54%
COLLEGE READINESS			
HS GPA 3.5 or Higher	48%	78%	62%
HS GPA 3.0–3.4	77%	67%	60%
HS GPA 2.5–2.9	73%	66%	49%

NOTE: THE CATEGORIES FOR RACE AND ETHNICITY AND PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT CONTAINED LARGE AMOUNTS OF MISSING DATA. TWENTY-THREE PERCENT OF RESPONSES WERE MISSING OR REFUSED FOR RACE/ETHNICITY, AND 21 PERCENT OF RESPONSES WERE MISSING/DON'T KNOW FOR PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT. THE RACE/ETHNICITY CATEGORY IN THE STUDENT SURVEY DID NOT ALLOW FOR MULTIPLE RESPONSES.
SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF COLLEGE-QUALIFIED STUDENTS

do not permit a complete explanation, one-fourth of non-college-goers reported not working at all, while 30 percent reported working more than 35 hours a week. However, one possibility clearly does not explain the high number of non-college-goers living with a parent or parents—only 3 percent of non-college-goers said they were financially responsible for a child.

While only a moderate number of non-college-goers overall expressed concern about opportunity cost, certain groups of non-college-goers expressed greater concern. Within the non-college-going population, almost half of Black and FRPL students and 40 percent of Hispanic students stated that the need to work was "extremely" or "very" important, compared with an average of 38 percent for all non-college-goers. This greater need to work did not appear to be the result of greater family obligations for minority and low-income students. However, non-college-going Hispanic students much more often stated that the willingness of parents to help pay was "extremely" or "very" important (36 percent) than the average (17 percent), suggesting that Hispanics may receive less parental financial support than other students to help cover opportunity cost. Regardless, both minority and low-income students who are concerned about opportunity cost may need sources of financial aid that can help cover costs beyond tuition, fees, books, and other direct and indirect costs to promote college-going.

Academic Preparation

College-goers and non-college-goers disagreed most about the role of academic preparation in their decision to go to college. More than three-quarters (76 percent) of college-goers considered academic preparation to be very important in their decision to go to college (76 percent), while less than a third (27 percent) of non-college-goers considered it important. Although most non-college-goers did not consider academic preparation to be important, only a third felt "very much prepared" for college-level courses (**TABLE 3**). Over half (51 percent) of non-college-goers stated both that academic preparation was less than "extremely" or "very" important and that they felt only "somewhat" or "not very well" prepared for college. In other words, the responses suggest that a majority of non-college-goers who responded to the survey saw themselves as somewhat or not very well prepared for college-level material but believed that the primary obstacles to college enrollment lay elsewhere.

Motivation

Of all the factors included on the survey, personal motivation was most frequently seen as "extremely" or "very" important by both college-goers (91 percent) and non-college-goers (88 percent). Students who go to college may be motivated for many reasons; likewise, those who do not enroll may have various motivations

"There are community factors here, and we need to understand them."

JOHN BURKHARDT, CLINICAL PROFESSOR AT THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, TALKING ABOUT THE ROLE THAT COMMUNITIES CAN PLAY IN FORMING EXPECTATIONS ABOUT COLLEGE INDEPENDENTLY OF RACE AND INCOME

for not enrolling. A few questions on the survey helped address this question (**TABLE 4**). One focused on the material benefits of going to college. About two-thirds of non-college-goers "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the following statement: "A college education is necessary for me to have the things that I want, like a car and a comfortable home." While many non-college-goers believe that college is important for material reasons, few took the steps necessary to go to college, such as filling out a financial aid application. This contrast suggests that many non-college-goers value college but nonetheless decide that going to college is not feasible.

Low-income and Hispanic non-college-goers were particularly likely to agree that college is necessary for the things they want (74 percent and 79 percent, respectively), while high achievers (48 percent) were less likely to agree. These data suggest that most low-income and Hispanic non-college-goers see college as a path to economic mobility, but high achievers have mixed opinions about college as a path to economic mobility. The reasons for these different responses are not clear from the survey data. One possible interpretation is that high achievers believe they have career options that do not require college. However, the one question that specifically addressed this issue—that of enlistment in the military services—showed no statistically significant difference between high achievers and all other non-college-goers. Further research is required to explain while so many college-qualified students believe that college is necessary but do not enroll or take the steps to enroll.

Personal motivation is likely connected to the encouragement students receive from parents, teachers, and counselors. More than two-thirds of non-college-goers stated that parental encouragement was "extremely" or "very" important, while over half said the same of teacher and counselor encouragement. However, students were not asked whether or not they received encouragement but simply if encouragement was important, so the reasons students placed importance on this factor are difficult to pinpoint. The one group that said parental encouragement (66 percent) and teacher/counselor encouragement (49 percent) were less important than average were academic strivers-students with a GPA between 2.5 and 2.9. Academic strivers were also less likely (62 percent) than the average (69 percent) to say they received advice from a teacher or counselor concerning the classes they needed to take to be ready for college. Some academic strivers may not be receiving encouragement to go to college, leading these students to view themselves as not being college material.

Conclusion

The national student survey of college-qualified students identified a range of issues that may contribute to differences in college-going behavior. First, non-college-goers differed from college-goers both in their demographic characteristics and in their degree of academic preparation. These two groups also differed in the importance they placed on a number of factors, particularly academic preparation and college cost. Second, groups that make up a disproportionate number of non-college-goers also reported differences in the importance placed on a number of factors. Most important, while all non-college-goers were equally concerned about the insufficiency of grant aid, some groups, such as minority and low-income students, indicated that opportunity cost was a particular barrier to college-going. Also, while most non-college-goers viewed college as necessary for economic mobility, some non-college-goers, particularly academic strivers, may not have been encouraged by parents, teachers, or counselors to enroll in college.

Themes from the Roundtable Discussion

The Centrality of Opportunity Cost: The notion of opportunity cost—the forgone income and time required to attend college—loomed large during the discussion. A survey by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC 2003) found that some college-qualified students in Illinois did not attend college even when all their tuition and fees were covered by a scholarship. This behavior was corroborated by both the counselor and student surveys and reiterated by some roundtable participants. Nearly two-fifths of non-college-goers said that the need to work was "extremely" or "very" important, and a similar percentage of counselors stated that work was "almost always" or "frequently" important in the decision of college-qualified students not to enroll.

Aid is Necessary, But Not Sufficient: While participants stressed that aid for low-income and other disadvantaged groups is a necessary component of college access, it is not sufficient by itself. Participants emphasized additional issues revolving around the concept of college knowledge—namely, the availability and timeliness of accurate information, communities and culture, perceptions of justice, and the complexity of the application process and financial aid system. Over half of counselors at high FRPL schools stated that having parents who never attended college was "almost always" or "frequently" important, corroborating the roundtable participants' concern about issues related to college knowledge.

The Need for Noneconomic Perspectives: Building on the notion that aid is necessary but not sufficient by itself, a number of participants emphasized the need for noneconomic perspectives on the question of college access. One participant suggested that more sociologists and anthropologists need to add their perspectives to the extensive economic literature on college going. One example of an area that requires this additional perspective is debt aversion—while this issue usually falls in the economist's domain, aversion to debt may be in large part a function of community values. While about half of all non-college-goers said that "loans are only good as a last resort," almost two-thirds of Hispanic non-college goers agreed with this statement. Understanding the role that culture may play in attitudes toward debt will require the expertise not only of economists but also sociologists.

The Role of Effective Communication: Participants brought up the importance of effective and timely communication in multiple contexts. Communication was understood both in terms of conveying accurate information to students and in terms of developing parent, teacher, and community expectations about who should attend college. According to one participant, "Poor people get the least quality information, they get it latest, they get it in the most distorted forms, and oftentimes from sources they're not comfortable with." Addressing these issues will require the engagement of counselors, federal policymakers, and others; more research is required in this area.

National Survey of High School Counselors

To add a complementary perspective on barriers to college access, IHEP conducted a national survey of high school counselors. Counselors play an important role in college access by helping students navigate the complex process of college admissions and financial aid. The counselor survey had two goals: (1) to ask counselors why they believe that some college-qualified students do not go to college, cross-validating responses from the student survey; and (2) to estimate the extent of college access at schools with various demographic characteristics, to provide context for counselor responses. The perspective of counselors adds another angle to the portrait of college-qualified students presented in the student survey.

This chapter first provides an overview of the survey methodology and the characteristics of various types of high schools. Counselors' understanding of the term "college-qualified" is explored. Finally, the chapter presents a detailed analysis of counselors' perceptions of the reasons that some college-qualified high school graduates do not enroll in a four-year institution.

A note of caution is warranted regarding the underlying data analyzed here. Previous research has identified potential sources of bias in the perceptions of counselors. Much of this research has focused on differences in social and ethnic background between counselors and students. One study found differences in the perception of college affordability "between middle-income counselors and low-income families" (McDonough and Calderone 2006). Another study found systematic differences in the recommendations counselors made to students based on students' race and social class after controlling for academic performance (Linnehan, Weer, and Stonely 2007). These potential biases should be kept in mind through the course of the analysis.

Methodology

In March 2007, a paper survey on the topic of college-qualified students was mailed to high school counselors at 5,364 schools in the United States. To promote participation in the survey, counselors were offered the chance to be entered in a drawing for $25 Target gift cards. Nonrespondents were later mailed a reminder postcard. Counselors who did not respond to either the original mailing or the postcard were contacted a third time in April with a postcard requesting that they complete an electronic version of the survey available online. Of the 5,364 counselors initially contacted, 604 eventually returned a completed survey, resulting in a response rate of 11.3 percent.

TABLE 5: Characteristics of Schools Where Counselors Worked, by Percentage Distribution				
	High FRPL Schools	Other Public Schools	Private Schools	All Schools
LOCALE				
Urban	30%	14%	37%	22% (N=132)
Suburban/Large Town	8%	26%	40%	27% (N=163)
Rural/Small Town	62%	60%	24%	51% (N=309)
REGION[12]				
West	28%	14%	16%	17% (N=100)
Midwest	20%	45%	20%	35% (N=214)
South	45%	23%	43%	31% (N=188)
Northeast	8%	18%	20%	17% (N=103)
MINORITY[13]				
Low Minority	32%	83%	87%	77% (N=442)
High Minority	68%	17%	13%	23% (N=134)
SIZE[14]				
Small	42%	27%	43%	33% (N=200)
Medium	21%	36%	41%	34% (N=202)
Large	37%	39%	16%	33% (N=200)

SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

The 5,364 schools were drawn from a list of all schools in the United States obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). These 5,364 schools were not selected by a simple random draw. Instead, schools were divided into three groups: (1) public schools with a high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (high FRPL schools); (2) all other public schools; and (3) private schools. An independent random sample was drawn from each group. For more information on methodology and the counselor survey itself, see Appendix II.

Characteristics of School Groups

The counselors who responded to the survey worked in a wide range of schools (**TABLE 5**). The responses of counselors working at these different types of schools provide information about the level of college access at these types of schools. Counselors' perceptions of barriers to college access also indicate what counselors who work with specific student populations believe is most important in terms of college access. The following characteristics of the three school groups stand out:

- High FRPL schools are almost exclusively located in urban (30 percent) or rural/small town (62 percent) settings. Nearly half are located in the South (45 percent), and very few are located in the Northeast (8 percent). They are typically high-minority schools (68 percent) and are either small (42 percent) or large (37 percent) as opposed to medium-sized.
- Most other public schools are either rural/small town (60 percent) or suburban/large town (26 percent). They appear more often than average in the Midwest (45 percent) and less in the South (23 percent). Nearly one in five has a high number of minority students, but this ratio is lower than the average for all schools.
- Private schools are most often located in suburban/large town settings (40 percent). Many are located in the South (43 percent)—similarly to high FRPL schools (45 percent)—but they infrequently contain a high percentage of minority students, unlike high FRPL schools. Relatively few (16 percent) are classified as large.

What Does "College-Qualified" Mean?

The survey asked counselors to define "college-qualified" within certain parameters. Counselors were told that the term applies to "those seniors who are capable of completing the minimum academic requirements of a four-year college or university." They were asked to assign a level of importance to each of eight

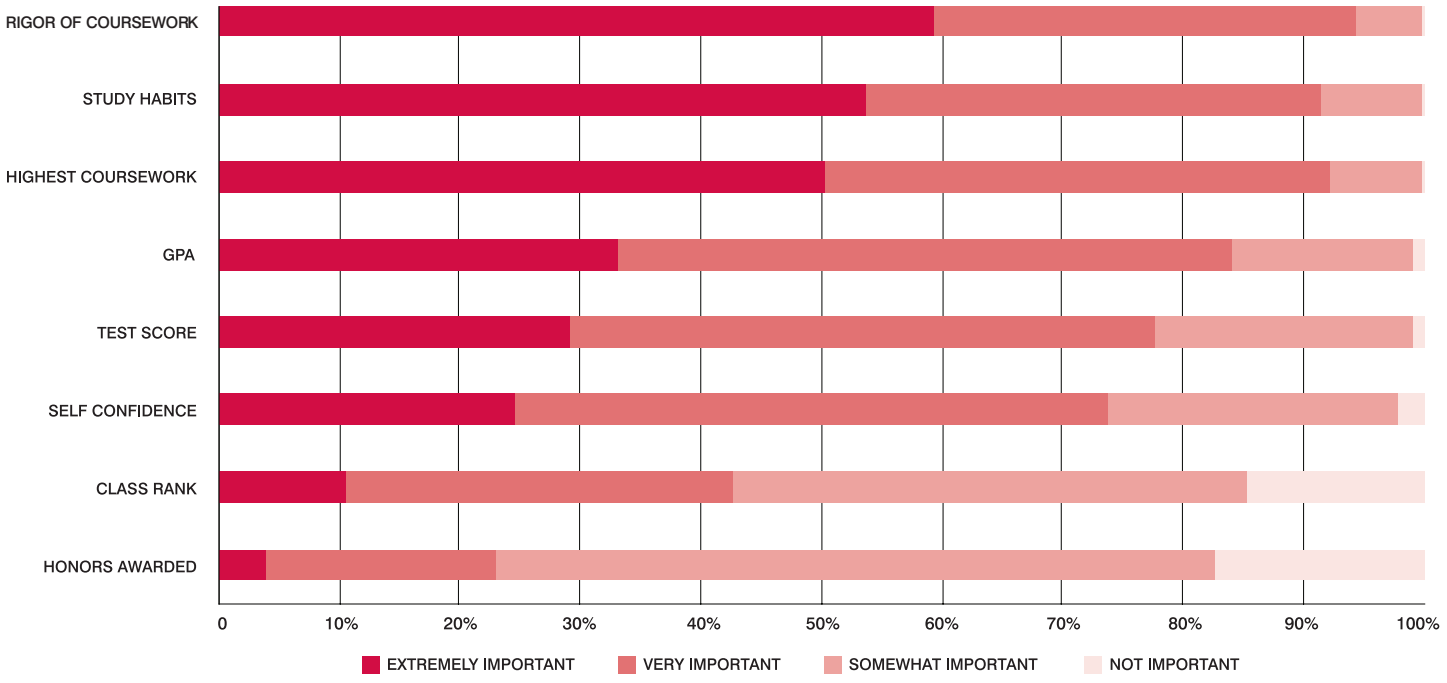
[12] Schools in this survey were divided into Northeast, Midwest, South, and West according to the classification scheme of the Census Bureau. For more information, see www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf.

[13] High-minority schools were defined as those in which more than 40 percent of the school population identifies as a member of a minority group.

[14] Schools were divided into terciles, allowing them to be classified as small, medium, or large. Small schools had fewer than 314 students, medium schools between 315 and 765 students, and large schools more than 769 students. This classification does not take into account the fact that some schools span different grades.

FIGURE 3

Definition of College-Qualified



NOTE: FOR EACH CRITERION, COUNSELORS WERE ASKED TO INDICATE WHETHER IT WAS EXTREMELY, VERY, SOMEWHAT, OR NOT IMPORTANT. COUNSELORS WERE NOT ASKED TO RANK CRITERIA; THEY COULD GIVE THE SAME RESPONSE AS OFTEN AS THEY WANTED. CATEGORIES ARE RANKED IN THE FIGURE ACCORDING TO THE PERCENTAGE OF COUNSELORS THAT MARKED EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.
SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

possible criteria in determining whether a student is college-qualified according to this definition. **FIGURE 3** shows the results of this question for all counselors who responded to the survey. Counselors most often marked "rigor of coursework" as either "extremely" or "very" important; "highest level of coursework" and "study habits" were also seen as important. "Honors awarded" and "class rank" were at the bottom of the list in terms of importance. The results suggest that most counselors are acutely aware that although students must meet certain minimum academic requirements to enroll in college, the quality of coursework can vary greatly between schools and this must also be taken into account.

Differences in the responses of counselors at different schools also yielded some interesting information:

- Counselors at private schools believed more frequently than all counselors that GPA is extremely important and less frequently that the rigor of coursework is extremely important.
- Counselors at high FRPL schools believed more frequently than all counselors that test scores are extremely important.
- Counselors at high FRPL schools also believed more frequently than all counselors that self-confidence and study habits are extremely important.

These results have some bearing on two issues related to college admissions: (1) college entrance exams and (2) noncognitive admissions criteria such as self-confidence and study habits. Counselors at private schools placed greater importance on GPA, suggesting that private school counselors believe GPAs are relatively reliable. In contrast, counselors at high FRPL schools may be suggesting that colleges do not believe the coursework offered at high FRPL schools is as rigorous as coursework at other schools. These counselors may believe that students at their schools need to corroborate their coursework with acceptable scores on standardized tests.

Schools with Low, Medium, and High Access to Higher Education

What are the characteristics of schools with low, medium, and high access to higher education? Answering this question requires drawing dividing lines. One of the questions on the survey provides a basis for this—college counselors were asked "What percentage [of college-qualified graduates] directly

TABLE 6: Characteristics of Low, Medium, and High Access Schools, by Percentage Distribution				
	Low Access	Medium Access	High Access	All Schools
GROUPS				
High FRPL Schools	28%	9%	8%	14%
Other Public Schools	66%	72%	42%	60%
Private Schools	6%	20%	50%	26%
LOCALE				
Urban	18%	19%	30%	22%
Suburban/Large Town	16%	29%	32%	27%
Rural/Small Town	66%	52%	39%	51%
REGION				
West	18%	17%	15%	16%
Midwest	32%	34%	36%	35%
South	40%	27%	30%	31%
Northeast	10%	21%	19%	17%
MINORITY				
Low Minority	65%	79%	85%	77%
High Minority	35%	21%	16%	23%
SIZE				
Small	39%	30%	35%	33%
Medium	28%	36%	36%	34%
Large	34%	35%	29%	33%

SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

entered a four-year college or university?" Given the distribution of responses, schools at which counselors said that 39 percent or fewer of their college-qualified graduates attended a four-year institution were classified as "low access," schools at which between 40 and 79 percent attended were classified as "medium access," and schools at which more than 79 percent attended were classified as "high access." Of all schools, 28 percent were low access, 34 percent were medium access, 33 percent were high access, and 5 percent were not sure. Using this division of the schools, we can compare their respective characteristics (**TABLE 6**).

Low-access schools are much more likely (35 percent) to have a high-minority population than medium access (21 percent) or high access (16 percent) schools. They are more frequently located in rural/small town settings (66 percent), and less likely to be in urban (18 percent) or suburban/large town settings (16 percent). Many are located in the South (40 percent) and few in the Northeast (10 percent). Low-access schools also often have a high percentage of minority students (35 percent). It should be noted, however, that low-access schools do not necessarily contain the largest absolute numbers of college-qualified non-college-goers since low-access schools tend to be smaller than other schools.

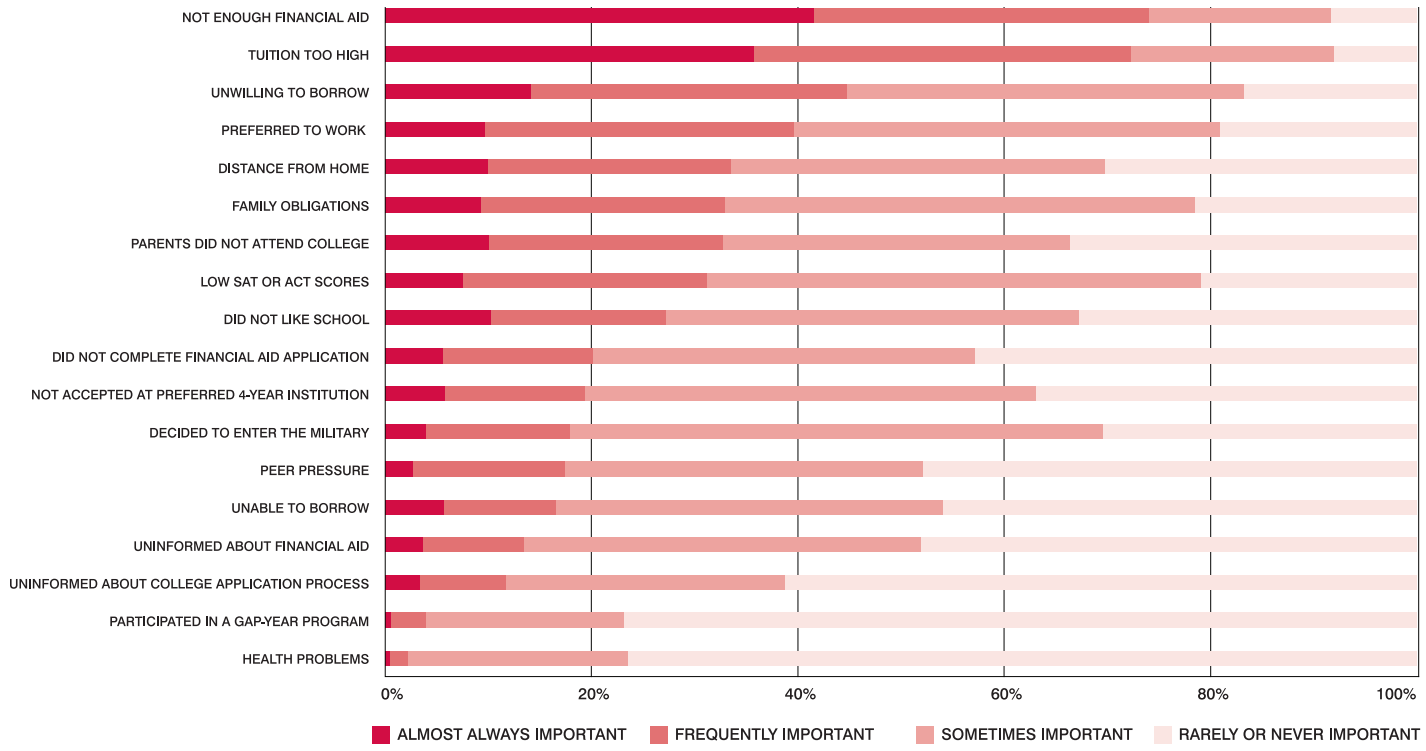
Why Do College-Qualified Students Not Enroll in a Four-Year Institution?

The primary goal of the survey was to determine what counselors believe are the reasons that college-qualified students do not enroll in a four-year institution. To that end, counselors were asked to assign a level of importance to 18 different reasons why a college-qualified high school student might not directly enter a four-year college or university. The reasons covered a wide range of possibilities, including finances, work, family and friends, and college knowledge.

The counselors' responses indicate clearly that they perceive finances as the primary reason college-qualified students did not enroll directly into a four-year institution (**FIGURE 4**). They marked both "not enough financial aid" and "tuition too high" as "almost always" or "frequently" important over 70 percent of the time. The third most important response was "unwilling to borrow," which was marked as "almost always" or "frequently" important over 40 percent of the time. The three least important reasons were "health problems," "participated in a gap-year program," and "uninformed about the college application process." These responses confirm what has been reported elsewhere about the access barrier created by the rising costs of higher education, in

FIGURE 4

Reasons College-Qualified Students Did Not Enroll in a Four-Year Institution (All Counselors)



NOTE: FOR EACH REASON, COUNSELORS WERE ASKED TO INDICATE WHETHER IT WAS "ALMOST ALWAYS IMPORTANT," "FREQUENTLY IMPORTANT," "SOMETIMES IMPORTANT," OR "RARELY OR NEVER IMPORTANT." COUNSELORS WERE NOT ASKED TO RANK REASONS; THEY COULD GIVE THE SAME RESPONSE AS OFTEN AS THEY WANTED. REASONS ARE RANKED IN THE FIGURE ACCORDING TO THE PERCENTAGE OF COUNSELORS THAT MARKED ALMOST ALWAYS OR FREQUENTLY IMPORTANT.
SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

particular, the 2006 report of the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance titled *Mortgaging Our Future: How Financial Barriers to College Undercut America's Global Competitiveness* (ACSFA 2006). These results also corroborate the findings of the national student survey, in which students stressed financial considerations such as cost and the availability of aid in their college-going choices.

The results also suggest that counselors at some schools believe loans can only go so far in promoting access. Less than one-fifth of counselors believed the inability to borrow was almost always or frequently important, while 45 percent believed that the unwillingness to borrow was almost always or frequently important. Students at schools where these counselors worked may be more sensitive to increases in the cost of higher education or more risk averse, or a combination of the two.

Counselors gave the least credence to explanations associated with college knowledge. Counselors were asked to rate the importance of "uninformed about financial aid" and "uninformed about the college application process." These were marked as "almost always" or "frequently" important only 13 and 12 percent of the time, respectively. However, it is difficult to interpret these results in the context of a counselor survey. Counselors are one of the principal sources of information about both financial aid and the college application process, so they are unlikely to be objective informants on this topic.

While the responses in **FIGURE 4** are illustrative, they represent the average of all counselors who responded. Many of the counselors' responses varied according to the characteristics of the schools where they worked. Furthermore, some counselors reported only small percentages of non-college-going college-qualified students, which gives undue weight to these counselors' responses. Taking these issues into account requires a more detailed analysis of the responses counselors gave for each reason listed in **FIGURE 4**.

TABLE 7: FINANCES
Percentage of Counselors That Marked "Almost Always" or "Frequently" Important

	Not Enough Financial Aid	Tuition Too High	Unwilling to Borrow	Did Not Complete Financial Aid Application	Unable to Borrow
ALL COUNSELORS	74%	72%	45%	20%	17%
GROUPS					
High FRPL Schools	82%	79%	57%	36%	24%
Other Public Schools	77%	76%	47%	21%	19%
Private Schools	62%	59%	32%	9%	6%
ACCESS					
Low Access	81%	82%	61%	35%	28%
Medium/High Access	70%	68%	39%	14%	12%
LOCALE					
Urban	70%	66%	45%	17%	17%
Suburban/Large Town	72%	72%	39%	18%	13%
Rural/Small Town	77%	75%	48%	23%	19%
REGION					
West	75%	76%	45%	21%	14%
Midwest	75%	73%	39%	15%	14%
South	71%	69%	52%	25%	18%
Northeast	77%	75%	46%	21%	22%
MINORITY					
Low Minority	73%	72%	41%	18%	14%
High Minority	83%	80%	59%	31%	26%

SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Reasons Why College-Qualified Students Did Not Enroll at a Four-Year Institution: Variations by Characteristics of Schools Where Counselors Worked

Finances

While counselors at all types of schools saw finances as the most important issue bearing on higher education access, responses on this issue varied somewhat by the characteristics of the schools where counselors worked (**TABLE 7**). For example, 74 percent of all counselors said that "not enough financial aid" was almost always or frequently important, compared with 81 percent of counselors at low-access schools, 82 percent of counselors at high FRPL schools, and 83 percent of counselors at high-minority schools.[15]

A comparison of results across school characteristics is suggestive:

- *College Cost and the Availability of Aid*: Of all responses, counselors most frequently stated "not enough financial aid" and "tuition too high" were almost always or frequently important in the decision of college-qualified students not to enroll in college. Counselors at many types of schools—notably at high-minority and high FRPL schools—appear to believe that the cost of higher education is the primary obstacle to access for college-qualified students. These results are similar to those of the student survey, in which non-college-goers of almost all backgrounds indicated that the availability of aid was very important in their decision not to attend college.

- *Borrowing*: Some students may be less willing than others to borrow to cover the cost of tuition and living expenses. Possible explanations include an aversion to debt, an inability to borrow, a belief that the higher education cost is simply too high, or a combination of these. Results from the counselor

[15] Counselors were free to mark "almost always" or "frequently" important as many times as they wanted, thus limiting comparability between counselors at different types of schools. Overall, counselors marked almost always or frequently important 24 percent of the time. Counselors at high-minority schools marked almost always or frequently important 30 percent of the time, and counselors at high FRPL schools marked almost always or frequently important 33 percent of the time.

TABLE 8: OPPORTUNITY COST Percentage of Counselors That Marked "Almost Always" or "Frequently" Important		
	Preferred to Work	Decided to Enter the Military
ALL COUNSELORS	40%	18%
GROUPS		
High FRPL Schools	57%	23%
Other Public Schools	43%	19%
Private Schools	21%	12%
ACCESS		
Low Access	55%	21%
Medium/High Access	33%	17%
LOCALE		
Urban	27%	12%
Suburban	32%	15%
Rural/Small Town	49%	22%
REGION		
West	39%	15%
Midwest	42%	22%
South	39%	17%
Northeast	37%	13%
MINORITY		
Low Minority	39%	18%
High Minority	40%	18%

SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

survey suggest that counselors believe debt aversion has some explanatory power. However, both counselors and students were rather less likely to attribute importance to borrowing than to college cost and the availability of aid. Counselors at high-minority schools were more likely to see borrowing as important—nearly three-fifths of counselors at high-minority schools marked unwillingness to borrow as "almost always" or "frequently" important, compared with 45 percent of all counselors. The 14 percentage point difference is the largest in **TABLE 7** for counselors at high-minority schools.[16]

- *Financial Aid Application*: While counselors cited this as almost always or frequently important about one-fifth of the time, it still fell well below the perceived importance of cost and willingness to borrow. Nevertheless, the response of counselors at high FRPL schools (36 percent) stands out compared with all counselors (20 percent)—a 16 percentage point difference. The responses of students also provide context for counselors' perception of this issue. Very few non-college-goers (12 percent) actually applied for financial aid, while only one-fifth of counselors consider the financial aid application an important issue. Together, these two pieces of data suggest that for many students it is not the complexity of the financial aid application itself that is of primary importance but something else—potentially a perception that aid will be insufficient—that inhibits students from even considering filling out the application at all.

Work and Opportunity Cost

Work represents the opportunity cost of college attendance. In other words, students must forgo the income they could have earned during the hours they spend attending college. In some cases, a college-qualified student may choose to work because the sum of tuition, fees, and other expenses—the opportunity cost—appears too high. In other cases, a student may believe the direct cost is reasonable but cannot temporarily forgo the income lost during enrollment—the opportunity cost—because of family obligations, rent, health care, or other pressing obligations, even though a bachelor's degree would pay off in the long run. The counselor responses suggest that both these explanations are at play, but at varying degrees for different groups. In particular,

[16] A survey of counselors carried out by the National Association for College Admission Counseling found that more than one-third of counselors believed that low-income students should avoid loans (Clinedinst and de la Rosa 2007).

TABLE 9: FAMILY AND FRIENDS Percentage of Counselors That Marked "Almost Always" or "Frequently" Important				
	Distance from Home	Family Obligations	Parents Did Not Attend College	Peer Pressure
ALL COUNSELORS	34%	33%	33%	18%
GROUPS				
High FRPL Schools	49%	53%	53%	30%
Other Public Schools	36%	33%	37%	19%
Private Schools	20%	20%	10%	6%
ACCESS				
Low Access	47%	46%	45%	30%
Medium/High Access	29%	29%	27%	13%
LOCALE				
Urban	30%	37%	30%	18%
Suburban	26%	31%	24%	11%
Rural/Small Town	39%	32%	38%	21%
REGION				
West	31%	36%	31%	17%
Midwest	29%	31%	32%	19%
South	35%	31%	31%	19%
Northeast	43%	38%	39%	13%
MINORITY				
Low Minority	32%	29%	30%	16%
High Minority	41%	50%	45%	23%

SOURCE: IHEP NATIONAL SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

the responses of counselors at high FRPL schools differed from those of counselors at high-minority schools in suggestive ways that are discussed below (**TABLE 8**).

Overall, counselors attached very different levels of importance to the two categories of "preferred to work" and "decided to enter the military." The preference to work was seen as slightly less important than cost, while the military was important in almost one-fifth of schools.

Preferred to Work

More than half of the counselors at high FRPL schools (57 percent) marked "preference to work" as important, a 17 percentage point difference from the responses of all counselors (40 percent). Likewise, nearly half of the non-college-goers from the student survey who received FRPL said that the need to work was "extremely" or "very" important. There may be a number of reasons for these findings; for example, students at high FRPL schools may be telling counselors they want to work instead of attend college. Students at high FRPL school may have not liked school that much—one-third of counselors at high FRPL schools said that "did not like school" was almost always or frequently important, compared to 27 percent of all counselors. According to counselors, students at high FRPL schools were also more likely to face family obligations that made enrollment difficult.

Decided to Enter the Military

Overall, counselors saw the military as almost always or frequently important 18 percent of the time. Counselors at high FRPL (23 percent), rural/small town (22 percent), and Midwestern schools (22 percent) attached greater importance to entering the military. Counselors at low- and high-minority schools did not appear to attribute a different level of importance to the military. The responses to "decided to enter the military" were corroborated by an additional question on the number of visits made by military recruiters during the 2005–06 school year. Counselors reported that military recruiters were more likely to make many visits (defined as more than two visits during the year) at rural/small town and Midwestern schools and fewer visits (defined as two or fewer visits during the year) at private and urban schools.

"I hate cities, I would stay here."

A COLLEGE-QUALIFIED GRADUATE OF A PRIVATE, RURAL, K–12 SCHOOL, RESPONDING TO A QUESTION ABOUT WHETHER SHE WOULD ATTEND A TOP URBAN UNIVERSITY LOCATED FAR FROM HOME IF OFFERED A FULL SCHOLARSHIP

Family and Friends

In addition to questions about finances and work, counselors were asked about the topic of family and friends. This topic, sometimes referred to as social capital, can be understood in this context as the joint influence of community expectations and access to college knowledge. These two influences are intertwined in a student's relationship with family, peers, teachers, counselors, community leaders, and others. First-generation students—that is, students whose parents never attended college—may suffer from poor access to information, low expectations, or both. The counselors' responses suggest that counselors believe both issues are at play.

Counselors rated the three categories of "family obligations," "distance from home," and "parents did not attend college" as having nearly equal importance. "Peer pressure" was seen as rather less important (**TABLE 9**).

Family Obligations

Counselors at both high-minority schools (50 percent) and high FRPL schools (53 percent) indicated that family obligations are more important than the average (33 percent). For counselors at high FRPL schools, "family obligations" demonstrated the second largest percentage point difference of any of the 18 response categories. Counselors at both high-minority and high FRPL schools believe the opportunity cost for their students to enroll in college is significant and that it is borne not just by the students but also by their families.

Distance from Home

As one might expect, counselors in rural/small town schools saw "distance from home" as more important (39 percent) than counselors in suburban/large town (26 percent) or urban schools (30 percent). However, in comparison with other responses by counselors at rural/small town schools, this 5 percentage point difference from the average is relatively small. For example, there was a 9 percentage point difference for "preferred to work."

Parents Did Not Attend College

Counselors at both high FRPL schools (53 percent) and high-minority schools (45 percent) attached greater than average importance to this category. The reverse was true of counselors at private schools, where only 10 percent said this category was almost always or frequently important. Since very few counselors at private schools reported low access (6 percent), this survey reflects the strong association between parental educational attainment and college-going behavior.

College Knowledge and Other Topics

College Knowledge

College-qualified students face a daunting task in applying for college admission and financial aid. Students have to rely on parents, counselors, fellow students, teachers, and a host of other sources for reliable information. Yet very few counselors who responded to the survey rated "uninformed about financial aid" or "uninformed about college application process" as important; at 13 percent and 12 percent, respectively, these were the lowest ratings for almost all response categories.

However, previous research suggests both that the availability of college knowledge plays an important role in promoting college-going and that counselors may be important sources of college knowledge, particularly for first-generation and other disadvantaged groups (McDonough 2005). Since the counselors' responses to these two response categories are tantamount

"To be honest, we were all confused and didn't know what they were talking about...I didn't know what was going on, really, with financial aid. I still don't really know."

A COLLEGE-QUALIFIED GRADUATE OF A PUBLIC, 9–12TH GRADE HIGH SCHOOL, DESCRIBING HER EXPERIENCE WITH COUNSELORS DISCUSSING FINANCIAL AID POLICIES

"Even though schools think that they're providing information…students don't really know how to process that information."

JENNY NAGAOKA, PROJECT DIRECTOR, THE CONSORTIUM ON CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH, ARGUING DURING THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION THAT PROVIDING INFORMATION TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITHOUT THE TOOLS TO MANAGE THAT INFORMATION IS NOT ENOUGH

to a self-assessment, it is difficult to judge their validity. The counselors' responses to a different category suggests the importance of college knowledge, broadly understood. A third of all counselors and over half of counselors at high FRPL schools believed that "parents did not attend college" was "almost always" or "frequently" important. Counselors at high FRPL schools may be pointing in part to the challenge facing first-generation students who have limited access to college knowledge through their parents.

Low SAT or ACT Scores

Counselors at high FRPL schools more often believed this was important (57 percent) than counselors overall (31 percent). In fact, "low SAT or ACT scores" resulted in the highest percentage point difference (26 percentage points) of any response category for counselors at high FRPL schools. Counselors at high FRPL schools may believe that a large number of students are college-qualified but do not perform very well on standardized tests. This result is even more interesting when combined with the earlier finding that counselors at high FRPL schools place greater emphasis on test scores in their definition of college-qualified. Students at high FRPL schools may be at a disadvantage in terms of the resources available to prepare for college entrance exams.

Did Not Like School

As mentioned previously, counselors at high FRPL schools were more likely (34 percent) to attach importance to this than the average (27 percent). This difference may be tied to the greater preference for work reported by counselors at high FRPL schools.

What Did Counselors Say about Changes in Access to Higher Education?

Counselors were asked the following question: "In your opinion, have four-year colleges and universities become more accessible, about the same, or less accessible to graduates of your school in the last five years?" Almost half of the respondents answered that access is about the same, while 22 percent responded that higher education is more accessible and 27 percent responded that it is less accessible. Only 3 percent of counselors were not sure whether accessibility had changed. Interestingly, counselors at high FRPL schools (29 percent), low-access schools (29 percent), and high-minority schools (28 percent) were all more likely than the average (22 percent) to say that higher education is more accessible than it was five years ago.

Conclusion

According to counselors, finances play the primary role in keeping college-qualified students from enrolling in a four-year institution immediately after graduation. However, counselors at different types of schools stressed different aspects of the role that finances play. In particular, counselors at high-minority schools hinted at the existence of debt aversion, while counselors at low-income schools stressed the opportunity cost of college. Nonfinancial factors also came into play. Almost one-fifth of counselors considered the military to be an important factor, suggesting that a substantial group of non-college-goers may at the very least delay going to college for this reason. One-fifth of counselors also indicated that filling out a financial aid application was an issue. Promoting college-going among qualified students will require addressing this complex set of financial and nonfinancial factors.

Conclusion

The results from the student and counselor surveys of college-qualified students—the first such surveys ever undertaken by our account—suggest that the college-going decision is a complex undertaking, even for students who complete high school and are ready for college. While not painting a definitive picture of why college-qualified students did not enroll in college, these survey data do raise several significant issues for policymakers and educators to consider.

Key Findings

Most Non-College-Goers Believed the Cost of College Was Too High

Both counselors and non-college-goers considered the price of college and the availability of aid to be central factors in the decision not to attend college. These concerns appeared to be universal among non-college-goers, as more than four-fifths of non-college-goers stated that the availability of grant or scholarship aid was "extremely" or "very" important. Very few non-college-goers even applied to college or for financial aid, suggesting that students had decided well before high school graduation that college was financially out of reach because of a combination of high price and insufficient aid.

Many Non-College-Goers Felt That They Needed To Work

Non-college-goers said that work is an important issue, and counselors agreed. Furthermore, both low-income students (49 percent) and counselors who worked at schools with many low-income students (57 percent) attributed considerably greater importance to this issue than the overall population of non-college-goers and counselors. However, a divergence of opinion arose between minority students and counselors who work at schools with many minority students. Counselors at high-minority schools did not consider work important more frequently than all counselors, while Hispanic and particularly Black students placed greater emphasis on the need to work.

Some Non-College-Goers Are Unwilling to Borrow to Cover the Cost of College

Both counselors and students considered this issue to be of moderate importance. Also, both surveys hinted that race and ethnicity status may be associated with greater levels of debt aversion. However, counselors seemed to place slightly greater importance on debt aversion than students, with 45 percent of counselors saying that students' unwillingness to borrow was "almost always" or "frequently" important, and only 35 percent of students saying this was "extremely" or "very" important.

Some Non-College-Goers Expressed Uncertainty About Their Academic Preparation

While counselors stressed the "rigor of coursework" in their definition of a college-qualified student, some non-college-goers expressed uncertainty about their academic preparation. Less than a third of non-college-goers (27 percent) considered academic preparation to be "extremely" or "very" important in their decision to go to college. At the same time, only a third of non-college-goers felt "very much prepared" for college-level courses. These responses suggest that a majority of non-college-goers saw themselves as somewhat or not very well prepared for college-level material but believed that the primary obstacles to college enrollment lay elsewhere. Academic strivers were particularly likely to express these views.

Very Few Non-College-Goers Took Any of the Necessary Steps to Enroll in College

Most college-qualified students who did not enroll in college neglected to take the "necessary steps"—applying to college, applying for financial aid, or taking a standardized entrance exam such as the ACT or SAT. As a group, 85 percent of non-college-goers did not apply to any colleges, and more than 80 percent did not take any college entrance exams. Not surprisingly, only 12 percent applied for financial aid. These numbers suggest that the decision not to enroll in college may have been made long before high school graduation, despite the large number of respondents who expressed the belief that college is necessary for economic mobility.

Policy Options

Financial Aid: *Given the extreme concern students expressed about aid and the finding that very few students took any of the steps to enroll in college, federal, state, and local governments may want to consider introducing aid programs that provide early commitments or guarantees to high school students who graduate ready for college.*

Making an early commitment to cover college tuition and fees may help address a number of the issues identified in this study, including non-college-goers' concerns about the sufficiency of aid, aversion to borrowing, and the transparency of the financial aid process. Such a program might also address the concerns that academic strivers have about whether they have reached a minimum level of academic preparation. While early commitment programs may be adapted to particular circumstances, they generally contain three core features: (1) aid is guaranteed, contingent on meeting certain standards of college readiness; (2) economically disadvantaged students are targeted, for example students who receive FRPL in middle school or early high school; and (3) the commitment is made early—no later than the beginning of high school (Blanco 2005).

Two notable but quite different examples of this type of commitment are the Washington State Achievers Program and Indiana's Twenty-first Century Scholars Program. While these two programs vary considerably, both contain the three core features of an early commitment program. The Washington State Achievers Program, privately funded by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, guarantees up to $5,000 per year for four years to low-income students in 16 participating high schools in Washington state (College Success Foundation 2008). In contrast, Indiana's Twenty-first Century Scholars Program is publicly funded and is open to all low-income students in the state. This program requires that recipients are eligible for FRPL and maintain a minimum cumulative 2.0 GPA in high school. Recipients of the award are guaranteed tuition for four years at a public college or university in Indiana (State Student Assistance Commission of Indiana 2008). The federal government may want to create incentives for states or private foundations to replicate programs of this type.

Opportunity Cost: *Given the high opportunity cost that many non-college-goers face, particularly low-income and Black students, postsecondary institutions, state governments, and the federal government may want to consider implementing a range of policies related to work and aid that would help non-college-goers enroll in and succeed in college*

Students at similar income levels often face very different opportunity costs, and current institutional, federal, and state aid policies fail to take this into account. The College Board has issued the CollegeKeys Compact, which includes a number of poli-

cies that may help address this issue (College Board 2007). In particular, the Compact calls for limiting work to a reasonable number of hours, making federal aid more predictable for low-income students, who tend to be particularly sensitive to unexpected changes in the amount of aid awarded, and realistic student expense budgets that reflect the costs of full participation in college (College Board 2007). In addition to the measures outlined in the Compact, policymakers may want to consider two more possibilities, one at the federal level and a second at the state and institutional level.

The federal government may want to consider addressing the issue of opportunity cost by modifying the income protection allowance in the formula used to determine the expected family contribution (EFC). The income protection allowance requires that a certain amount of a student's income be excluded from consideration as a source to help pay for college expenses. Following the passage of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, dependent students—that is, most students between the ages of 18-24—will see annual rises in the income protection allowance up to $6,000 in the 2012-13 academic year (College Cost Reduction and Access Act 2007). While this increase in the income protection allowance is helpful, it is not targeted in a manner that will be most beneficial for students who face a burdensome opportunity cost. To address this, the federal government may want to create an additional income protection allowance for dependent students whose family income falls below a certain threshold.

At the institutional and state level, policymakers may want to consider the possibility of creating cooperative education programs that could help address students' concerns about opportunity cost. Cooperative education provides a structured educational experience that integrates knowledge from the classroom and work (Haddara and Skanes 2007). Such a program could alleviate the concerns of low-income students about having a source of income while enrolled, while also providing a tangible longer-term goal. One notable example of a cooperative education program is the Cooperative Education Program at LaGuardia Community College, which enrolls high proportions of minority and low-income students (Gau et al. 2007). Students in the Cooperative Education Program earn academic credit for performing internships related to their major; internships are complemented by seminars and regular academic coursework. While much research has focused on the benefits that accrue to students enrolled in cooperative education programs, very little has been focused on the effect that programs such as the one at LaGuardia have on college enrollment (Martin 1997; Haddara and Skanes 2007). Given the concerns expressed by low-income and Black students, however, cooperative programs may help boost enrollment by overcoming concerns about opportunity cost.

Expectations: *Many non-college-goers, particularly academic strivers, expressed uncertainty both about their readiness to attend college and about the sufficiency of aid. Establishing clear expectations about academic requirements at an early stage and providing tools to plan for college will help reduce uncertainty and promote college going among academic strivers.*

Many policies are available that may help address the uncertainty that many non-college-goers feel both about their academic preparation and their ability to pay for college. Examples include making a college preparatory curriculum the default for all students, increasing the availability of college counselors, or expanding programs such as GEAR UP. However, the most successful interventions must meet certain criteria. First, any intervention must target students early, preferably in middle school, given the finding that many students made up their mind at an early stage not to enroll in college. Second, access to resources must be made equitable. Currently, low-income students tend to have little or no access to college counseling (McDonough 2005). One policy in particular that meets both these criteria deserves attention—incorporating college planning into the high school curriculum.

Establishing a required course on college planning as part of the regular curriculum as early as the seventh grade carries a number of benefits. First, the intervention occurs early, and it can create clear expectations about what academic requirements must be met to enroll in college. Second, access to this type of course can be equitable if it is a requirement for all students. Third, for schools that are under-resourced, incorporating this type of requirement into the curriculum does not necessarily entail the additional expense associated with hiring more counselors. One example of this type of program deserves particular attention—Roads to Success. The Roads to Success is a nonprofit organization that currently provides college readi-

ness programs to students in New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Students attend weekly workshops that focus on topics such as planning for college, studying for the SAT, and career planning (Roads to Success 2008). Since Roads to Success has only been in operation since 2004, it is too early to judge its effectiveness. However, the program initiated an external evaluation process beginning in the 2007–08 academic year. This evaluation should provide an indication of the potential that early intervention programs of this type, including IHEP's Partners4Education program, have to increase college enrollment.

Directions for Future Research

While the student and counselor surveys add to our understanding of the complex nature of the decision to go to college, many avenues of research remain open. Some avenues concern questions raised by the surveys that remain unanswered; a separate set of questions were not addressed by the survey at all. The following summarize the most significant questions that the survey raised but left unanswered:

- *The Steps to Enroll in College:* While the data from the student survey suggest that many non-college-goers decided well before graduation that they would not enroll in college, the reasons for this are not entirely clear from the survey. Students may have believed that aid would simply be insufficient to cover tuition and fees, but the data do not permit a definite answer to this question. Why do so many college-qualified non-college-goers fail to take the steps necessary to enroll in college?

- *High Achievers and Economic Mobility:* Many high achievers expressed skepticism about the economic benefits of attending college. The surveys did not provide a clear answer why this was the case—perhaps these students had career paths that did not require a college degree, such as joining the family business. Why is this group of high achievers more likely to be skeptical of the benefits of college?

- *Difference of Opinion Between Students and Counselors:* Although the student and counselor surveys are not fully comparable, the results suggest that counselors and students had differences of opinion on some of the reasons college-qualified students do not enroll in college. In particular, non-college-goers may have placed more importance on opportunity cost than counselors. What is the origin of these differences of opinion, and what impact do they have on the advice that counselors provide to students on college enrollment?

The following are a few of the most significant questions that the surveys did not address related to the issue of college-qualified non-college-goers:

- *School-Level Effects:* The surveys did not contain questions that addressed issues such as curricular offerings, class size, or school resources. Connecting these issues to college enrollment could point to policies that would most help schools boost enrollment of college-qualified students.

- *Immigrant Status:* Some counselors indicated in handwritten responses that many of their college-qualified students were the children of immigrants. These students may have been very concerned about their eligibility for student aid, in addition to facing the many challenges of first-generation students; however, the surveys did not address these issues. How likely are college-qualified students who are the children of immigrants to not enroll in college, and for what reasons?

- *Traditional-Aged Independent Students:* While most college-qualified students who have just graduated from high school will be considered dependent, some will qualify as independent students. Federal methodology for determining the allocation of financial age typically consider students between the ages of 18–24 to be dependent students; however, students who are married, are wards of the court, are veterans, or have children they support are considered independent. The student survey included very few of these individuals. What barriers to college enrollment are most significant for traditional-aged independent college-qualified students?

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Appendix I

IHEP National Survey of College-Qualified Students

The final sample consisted of 1,830 students from 47 states and the District of Columbia—the sample is not representative of the national population because of the stratified design. The distribution of non-college-goers and college-goers—1,003 were not currently enrolled in college, 619 were enrolled at a four-year college, and 208 were enrolled at a two-year college—is intentional, as we were primarily examining the characteristics and motivations of the non-college-going population. However, we included a sample of college-going students to provide some context for the findings. On the basis of school Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) codes, about 62 percent of the sample comes from 28 counties in 15 states, and more than two-thirds of the sample (71 percent) comes from 9 states: California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Texas. Even so, within the college-going and non-college-going segments of the sample, the respondents should be representative of the 50,000 "college-bound" students identified from the purchased student list. That is, the sample is representative of each group within the overall population: non-college-goers and college-goers.

All respondents to the survey are college-qualified according to our definition: 40 percent of the sample reported high school GPAs of 3.5 or higher; 28 percent reported GPAs between 3.0 and 3.4; and 32 percent reported GPAs between 2.5 and 2.9. Survey respondents were also asked to describe their high school curriculum: 37 percent said college preparatory; 29 percent said AP or IB; and 34 percent said honors. Finally, respondents were asked about the math courses they took in high school. Respondents were asked to identify all the math classes they took from a list (the options are not mutually exclusive)—almost half took Algebra I or II; more than one-third took Calculus; 13 percent took Trigonometry; and 14 percent took Pre-calculus. To be included in the sample, respondents had to meet the minimum of all of these criteria.

The stratification of the sample allowed us to collect data on a diverse cross-section of college-bound high school graduates. Fifty-one percent are women, and 45 percent are men. Less than half (45 percent) are White, 21 percent are Black, and 12 percent are Hispanic (about 17 percent of respondents refused to answer this question). About 45 percent of students' parents had a bachelor's degree or higher; 29 percent had a high school diploma. A little more than one-third received FRPL in high school, which is a proxy for low-income status. Eighty-five percent of the sample was born in the United States, Guam, or Puerto Rico, and, thus, are presumably U.S. citizens.

There were at least two sources of non-response bias identified in the sample. First, only 3 percent of the respondents indicated that they were enlisted in the military service; however, military enlistees were likely underrepresented since these individuals were harder to contact than other potential respondents in the sample. Second, the stratum of non-college-goers contained individuals with parents who were more educated than the general population. Half of the non-college-goers' parents held a bachelor's degree or higher. In the general population of adults aged 25–65 years, only 30 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher (Census Bureau 2006). Students with more educated parents may have been more likely to respond to the survey than other potential respondents.

IHEP is especially grateful to Douglas Klayman, president of Social Dynamics, LLC, who administered the national student survey.

STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did you attend ALL of high school in the United States (9th through 12th grade)?
a. Yes
b. No

END SURVEY IF ANSWER IS NO

2. How would you describe your high school curriculum (courses)?
a. Vocational
b. General Education
c. Honors
d. Advanced Placement (AP)
e. International Baccalaureate (IB)
f. College Preparatory

END SURVEY IF ANSWER IS A or B

3. Which of the following math courses did you take in high school? [Mark ALL that apply]
a. Trigonometry
b. Calculus
c. Pre-calculus
d. Algebra (I or II)
e. Unified Math
f. Pre-algebra
g. Other or Not sure
h. I did not take any math in high school

*END SURVEY IF ANSWERS ARE **ONLY** F, G, and/or H*

4. Are you currently enrolled in college?
a. Yes
b. No

IF YES, ASK THESE QUESTIONS

Are you enrolled in a two- or four-year college?
a. Four-year
b. Two-year

Are you enrolled part or full time?
a. Full time
b. Part time

With whom do you currently live (clarify when NOT at college)?
a. My parents or guardian
b. By myself
c. With friends

IF NO, ASK THESE QUESTIONS

In your own words, can you tell us why you decided to not enroll in college?

With whom do you currently live?
a. My parents or guardian
b. By myself
c. With friends

5. Are you enlisted in the military services?
a. Yes
b. No

6. To how many four-year colleges did you send applications?
a. None – *SKIP TO QUESTION 8*
b. Only one
c. Between two and four
d. More than four

7. At how many four-year colleges were you accepted?
a. None
b. One
c. Two
d. Three
e. Four
f. More than four

8. On a scale of 1 to 4 (with 4 being extremely important, 3 very important, 2 somewhat important, and 1 not important at all), how important was each of the following on your decision to enroll/not enroll in college?
a. The price of college (tuition, fees, room and board)
b. Your academic preparation
c. Your score on a college entrance or placement exam
d. Encouragement from high school counselors or teachers
e. Encouragement from parents
f. Your motivation or desire to attend college
g. The availability of grant or scholarship financial aid
h. Your need to work after high school
i. The willingness of parents to help pay for college
j. The availability of affordable, quality child care
k. The college is close to home
l. The availability of transportation to/from college
m. The aversion to borrow for college (student loans)
n. Your friends also enrolled in college

9. Which of the following college entrance exams did you take in high school (9th–12th grade)? [Mark ALL that apply]
a. ACT PLAN
b. PSAT
c. ACT
d. SAT I
e. SAT II
f. Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB)

10. When you graduated from high school, did you feel prepared to take college-level courses?
a. Very well prepared
b. Somewhat prepared
c. Not very well prepared at all

11. Did you visit any colleges during high school to find the right fit for you?
a. Yes
b. No

12. Did any of your friends enroll in college?
a. Yes
b. No

13. Did a teacher or counselor advise you about the classes you needed to take in high school to be ready for college?
a. Yes
b. No

14. Were you eligible for free or reduced lunch in high school?
a. Yes
b. No
c. Don't know
d. Refuse to answer

15. Do you personally support other people in your household financially?
a. Yes
b. No

16. Do you have any children that you financially support?
a. Yes, one
b. Yes, two
c. Yes, three or more
d. No

17. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A college education is necessary for me to have the things that I want, like a car and a comfortable home."
a. Strongly agree
b. Agree
c. Neither agree or disagree
d. Disagree
e. Strongly disagree

18. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Loans are only good as a last resort or in an emergency."
a. Strongly agree
b. Agree
c. Neither agree or disagree
d. Disagree
e. Strongly disagree

19. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Taking care of my family makes it difficult for me to attend college."
a. Strongly agree
b. Agree
c. Neither agree or disagree
d. Disagree
e. Strongly disagree

20. On a scale of 1 to 4 (with 4 being extremely difficult, 3 very difficult, 2 somewhat difficult, and 1 not difficult at all), how would you describe the difficulty you personally have paying the following expenses? *[INCLUDE "I do not pay this expense" AS OPTION]*
a. Mortgage or rent
b. Car
c. Credit card
d. College tuition
e. Child care
f. Other debt

21. About how many hours a week do you work?
a. Less than 15
b. More than 15 but less than 25
c. More than 25 but less than 35
d. More than 35
e. I am not currently working

22. What was the zip code where you lived when you went to high school?

23. What was the highest level of education (degree) obtained by either of your parents?
a. Doctorate/Professional
b. Masters
c. Bachelor's
d. Associate's
e. Certificate
f. High School
g. Don't know

24. What was your high school GPA?
a. All A's
b. Mostly A's, some B's
c. Mostly B's, some A's
d. Mostly B's and C's
e. Mostly C's, some D's and F's
f. Mostly D's and F's
g. Don't know
h. Refused to answer

25. What is your gender?
a. Woman
b. Man

26. How would you describe your race or ethnicity?
a. White, non-Hispanic
b. Black, non-Hispanic
c. Hispanic
d. Asian or Pacific Islander
e. American Indian or Alaskan Native
f. Other
g. Refused to answer

27. Were you born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or Guam?
a. Yes
b. No

Appendix II

IHEP National Survey of High School Counselors

A frame of schools in the United States was constructed by combining two data sources: the Common Core of Data (CCD) and the Private School Universe Survey (PSS). The CCD is an annual survey of all public schools and public school districts, covering approximately 94,000 schools.[17] Data are provided by state education agencies and cover the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Department of Defense schools, and outlying areas. The 2004–05 Version 1a CCD was used to create the frame for the college-qualified survey. The PSS is a biennial survey of all private schools; it contains descriptive data on 29,710 private schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.[18] The 2003–04 PSS was used to create the frame for the college-qualified survey. By combining the CCD and the PSS, a comprehensive list of all schools in the United States was created.

Before drawing a sample from this list, certain categories of schools had to be excluded to arrive at an appropriate population for a survey of counselors on the topic of college-qualified high school graduates. Schools in the following categories were excluded:

- Schools classified as type 2, 3, or 4 in the CCD were removed. These correspond to special education schools, vocational schools, and other/alternative schools, respectively.
- Schools classified as type 2, 4, 5, 6, or 7 in the PSS were removed. These correspond to Montessori, special education, vocational/technical, alternative, and early childhood program/day care center, respectively.
- All schools that offered a highest grade lower than 12 were removed. In addition, schools in the CCD for which the field "School high grade offered" was coded as UG (ungraded) or N (data are not applicable) were removed. Schools in the PSS for which the field "Highest grade taught" was left blank were removed.
- Schools in the CCD for which the field "Total students" was coded UG, N, or 0 were removed.
- All schools located outside the 50 states and the District of Columbia were removed from the CCD to match the coverage of the PSS.

A stratified sample of 5,364 schools was drawn from this frame, which totaled 23,562 schools. Independent samples without replacement were taken in three strata: (1) public schools with a high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (FRPL); (2) all other public schools; and (3)[19] private schools. Strata two and three were sampled at a rate of 0.2, and stratum one was sampled at a rate of 0.4. A total of 605 surveys were received from the total sample of 5,364 schools, resulting in a response rate of 11.3 percent. All data reported in this paper have been weighted to adjust for the different sampling and response rates of the three strata. Response rates by stratum are summarized in **TABLE 1**.

Nonresponse Bias Analysis

Although consistent with past experience with mail-in surveys, the response rate to the survey of high school counselors was low.[20] This low response rate introduces the possibility of nonresponse bias in the results reported here. The demographic data collected in the CCD and the PSS allowed an analysis of the demographics of schools that responded to see if the response rate was associated with any school characteristics:

- *Locale*: There were no statistically significant differences found in terms of the locale of the school responding.
- *Region*: Schools in the Midwest were more likely to respond, while schools in the South were less likely to respond.
- *Minority*: Low-minority schools were more likely to respond to the survey, and high-minority schools were less likely to respond.
- *Size*: Small schools were less likely to respond, while medium schools were more likely to respond.

TABLE 2 summarizes the comparison of the characteristics of the original sample and the survey responses.

[17] For more information on the CCD, see http://nces.ed.gov/ccd.

[18] For more information on the PSS, see http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss.

[19] To arrive at a list of schools with a high percentage of FRPL-eligible students, all public schools were ranked according to the percentage of FRPL-eligible students in the total school population. Eight percent of public schools had no data on the percentage of FRPL-eligible students, and they were excluded from the ranking. Those schools in the top quintile of this ranking (i.e., with 55.5 percent of students eligible) were placed in the first stratum. The rest of the public schools, including those that were not ranked, were placed in the second stratum.

[20] Previous examples of national counselor surveys carried out by mail include Linnehan, Weer, and Stonely 2007 and Hawkins and Clinedinst 2006, with response rates of 12 and 16 percent, respectively.

TABLE 1: SURVEY RESPONSE RATES				
	Total	Stratum 1: High FRPL Schools	Stratum 2: Other Public Schools	Stratum 3: Private Schools
Total in Frame	23,562	3,258	14,513	5,791
Sample Rate	.23	.40	.20	.20
Sample Size	5,364	1,303	2,903	1,158
Completed Surveys	604	92	360	152
Response Rate	11.3%	7.1%	12.4%	13.1%
Weight Applied (Rounded)	N/A	.91	1.02	1.02

TABLE 2: Comparison of Characteristics in Original Sample and Survey Responses		
	Original Sample	Survey Responses
TOTAL	N=5,364	N=604
LOCALE		
Urban	24%	22%
Suburban/Large Town	28%	27%
Rural/Small Town	49%	51%
REGION		
West	22%	17%
Midwest	26%	35%
South	37%	31%
Northeast	15%	17%
MINORITY		
Low Minority	67%	77%
High Minority	33%	23%
SIZE		
Small	41%	33%
Medium	27%	34%
Large	32%	33%

COUNSELOR SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The following is a survey seeking information about your 2005–06 graduating class. Unless otherwise noted, please give answers that refer to seniors who graduated from your school in the 2005–06 academic year. Please use a pencil or blue/black ink and fill in each bubble completely.

1. What is the full name and zip code of your school?

2. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class applied to a four-year college or university?

O < 10 % O 60–69 %
O 10–19 % O 70–79 %
O 20–29 % O 80–89 %
O 30–39 % O 90–100 %
O 40–49 % O Not sure
O 50–59 %

3. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class directly entered a four-year college or university?

O < 10 % O 60–69 %
O 10–19 % O 70–79 %
O 20–29 % O 80–89 %
O 30–39 % O 90–100 %
O 40–49 % O Not sure
O 50–59 %

4. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class directly entered a community college or other two-year institution?

O < 10 % O 60–69 %
O 10–19 % O 70–79 %
O 20–29 % O 80–89 %
O 30–39 % O 90–100 %
O 40–49 % O Not sure
O 50–59 %

5. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class took a college-preparatory curriculum?

O < 10 % O 60–69 %
O 10–19 % O 70–79 %
O 20–29 % O 80–89 %
O 30–39 % O 90–100 %
O 40–49 % O Not sure
O 50–59 %

6. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class took a college entrance exam, e.g. ACT or SAT?

O < 10 % O 60–69 %
O 10–19 % O 70–79 %
O 20–29 % O 80–89 %
O 30–39 % O 90–100 %
O 40–49 % O Not sure
O 50–59 %

7. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class received a passing grade in at least one AP class?

O < 10 % O 60–69 %
O 10–19 % O 70–79 %
O 20–29 % O 80–89 %
O 30–39 % O 90–100 %
O 40–49 % O Not sure
O 50–59 %

8. The following question concerns college-qualified seniors who graduated from your school in 2005–06. Those seniors who were capable at graduation of completing the academic requirements of a four-year college or university may be considered college- qualified. In your opinion, how important are the following in determining that a high school graduate is qualified to meet these academic requirements?

HOW IMPORTANT:	*Extremely*	*Very*	*Somewhat*	*Not*
Grade point average	O	O	O	O
Class rank	O	O	O	O
Test scores on SAT, ACT, etc.	O	O	O	O
Highest level of coursework	O	O	O	O
Rigor of coursework	O	O	O	O
Honors awarded	O	O	O	O
Self-confidence	O	O	O	O
Good study habits	O	O	O	O

9. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class was college-qualified according to the answers you gave in question eight?

O < 10 % O 60–69 %
O 10–19 % O 70–79 %
O 20–29 % O 80–89 %
O 30–39 % O 90–100 %
O 40–49 % O Not sure
O 50–59 %

10. Of these college-qualified graduates, what percentage directly entered a four-year college or university?

O < 10 % O 60–69 %
O 10–19 % O 70–79 %
O 20–29 % O 80–89 %
O 30–39 % O 90–100 %
O 40–49 % O Not sure
O 50–59 %

11. Of these college-qualified graduates, what percentage directly entered a community college or other two-year institution?

O < 10 %
O 10–19 %
O 20–29 %
O 30–39 %
O 40–49 %
O 50–59 %
O 60–69 %
O 70–79 %
O 80–89 %
O 90–100 %
O Not sure

12. In your opinion, have four-year colleges and universities become more accessible, about the same, or less accessible to graduates of your school in the last five years?

O More accessible
O About the same
O Less accessible
O Not sure

13. The following is a list of reasons why a college-qualified high school graduate might not directly enter a four-year college or university. In your opinion, how often was each of the following an important reason that college-qualified graduates of your school did not directly enter a four-year college or university?

HOW IMPORTANT:	*Almost Always*	*Frequently*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*
Finances				
Not enough financial aid	O	O	O	O
Tuition too high	O	O	O	O
Unwilling to borrow	O	O	O	O
Unable to borrow	O	O	O	O
Family and Friends				
Family obligations	O	O	O	O
Distance from home	O	O	O	O
Parents did not attend college	O	O	O	O
Distance from home	O	O	O	O
Peer pressure	O	O	O	O
Knowledge				
Uninformed about financial aid	O	O	O	O
Uninformed about college application process	O	O	O	O
Work				
Preferred to work	O	O	O	O
Decided to enter the military	O	O	O	O
Participated in a gap-year program	O	O	O	O
Other				
Health problems	O	O	O	O
Did not like school	O	O	O	O
Low ACT or SAT scores	O	O	O	O
Not accepted at preferred IHEP institution	O	O	O	O

14. How many part- and full-time counselors are employed at your school?

Full-time counselors _____
Part-time counselors _____

15. Please indicate your job title:

O Principal
O College counselor
O Director of guidance department
O General guidance counselor
O Director of college counseling
O Other

16. How many years have you been working at this school?

O less than 1
O 1
O 2
O 3
O 4
O 5
O 6
O 7
O 9
O More than 9

17. Students researching post-graduation plans have access to the following at my school:

	Yes	No
Internet	O	O
E-mail	O	O
Guides to financial aid	O	O
Guides to college application process	O	O
SAT/ACT study guides	O	O
College guides	O	O
Career guides	O	O
Military promotional material	O	O

18. How many times in the 2005–06 school year did each of the following take place?

Visits by college representatives:
O None O 1 O 2 O 3 O 4 O 5
O 6 O 7 O 8 O 9 O More than 9

Visits by military recruiters:
O None O 1 O 2 O 3 O 4 O 5
O 6 O 7 O 8 O 9 O More than 9

Group sessions for parents on college:
O None O 1 O 2 O 3 O 4 O 5
O 6 O 7 O 8 O 9 O More than 9

19. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class received some form of one-on-one college counseling?

O < 10 %
O 10–19 %
O 20–29 %
O 30–39 %
O 40–49 %
O 50–59 %
O 60–69 %
O 70–79 %
O 80–89 %
O 90–100 %
O Not sure

20. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class regularly used the Internet to research colleges or universities?

O < 10 %
O 10–19 %
O 20–29 %
O 30–39 %
O 40–49 %
O 50–59 %
O 60–69 %
O 70–79 %
O 80–89 %
O 90–100 %
O Not sure

21. What percentage of the 2005–06 graduating class applied to at least one college or university on the Internet?

O < 10 %
O 10–19 %
O 20–29 %
O 30–39 %
O 40–49 %
O 50–59 %
O 60–69 %
O 70–79 %
O 80–89 %
O 90–100 %
O Not sure

22. Is your school:

O Public
O Private/non-parochial
O Private/parochial

23. Would you like to be entered in the drawing for $25 Target gift cards?

O Yes
O No

24. Are you willing to be contacted with follow-up questions?

O Yes
O No

If yes to 23 and/or 24, please provide your name and contact information in the area below:

Appendix III

Roundtable Discussion Participants

Hotel Palomar, Washington, D.C.
September 25, 2007

Adam Briddell, Professional Staff Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY)

John Burkhardt, Clinical Professor, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, University of Michigan

Ann Coles, Senior Advisor, College Access, TERI

Michelle Asha Cooper, Director of Policy Research, Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance

Alisa F. Cunningham, Vice President for Research and Programs, Institute for Higher Education Policy

Wendy Erisman, Director of Research and Evaluation, Institute for Higher Education Policy

Danette Gerald, Assistant Director for Higher Education Policy, Education Trust

Ryan D. Hahn, Research Analyst, Institute for Higher Education Policy

Willis Hulings, President and Chief Executive Officer, TERI

Richard Kahlenberg, Senior Fellow, Century Foundation

Jacqueline King, Director, Center for Policy Analysis, American Council on Education

Frank Linnehan, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies, Drexel University

Chris Mazzeo, Associate Director, Policy and Research Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago

Jamie P. Merisotis, President and CEO, Lumina Foundation for Education and Founder, Institute for Higher Education Policy

Jenny Nagaoka, Project Director, The Consortium on Chicago School Research

Derek Price, Director, DVP-Praxis

Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Senior Associate, Young Adults and Postsecondary Education Policy Area, MDRC

Viji Sathy, Associate Research Scientist, Research and Analysis, College Board

Lorraine Solaegui, Director, Scholarship Selection and Evaluation, College Success Foundation

Janis Sommerville, Senior Associate, National Association of System Heads

Marvin Titus, Assistant Professor, Department of Education Leadership, Higher Education and International Education, University of Maryland

William Trent, Professor, College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Kristan Venegas, Assistant Professor of Clinical Education and Director, Masters Program, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California

Thomas Wolanin, Senior Associate, Institute for Higher Education Policy

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