

Testimony before the US House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training, April 24, 2013

Chairwoman Foxx, Representative Hinojosa, and Members, thank you for the honor of providing this testimony to your committee.

As the Founder and CEO of the National College Advising Corps, I represent 335 recent college graduates who are serving as college advisers to nearly 117,000 students in 389 high schools across 14 states. Our program places these college graduates from 18 partner universities into low income and underserved high schools to help students navigate the path to college and earn meaningful credentials.

Our partner universities, some from your states, schools such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Georgia, the University of Michigan and Michigan State University, New York University, the University of Virginia, Franklin & Marshall College, Texas A&M, and Cal, Berkeley, are so committed to ensuring all of our students are college and career ready and have a meaningful postsecondary plan that they join us- with their dollars and talents- in placing their recent graduates in high schools. My testimony is from the vantage of these near peer advisers who spend every day, alongside guidance counselors, teachers, and principals, making sure our students take advantage of educational opportunities and are ready to compete in the global economy.

There are real barriers for our high school students today. There is a gap between what students think they know and what they need to know. If you ask an 8<sup>th</sup> grade class how many of them want to go to college, 100% of the hands will go up—and yet as the years go by—we lose these students. They do not understand financial aid or what classes they need to take. They are unaware of fee waivers, Pell grants, and net price calculators. They do not know to look for graduation rates and how to make wise choices, so in North Carolina, and many of the other states represented here—100 students will enroll in our public colleges and universities, only 13 will graduate with a 2 year degree within 4 years and only 29 will graduate from a 4 year institution within 8 years ([http://www.completecollege.org/docs/North\\_Carolina\\_Feb28.pdf](http://www.completecollege.org/docs/North_Carolina_Feb28.pdf)).

There are structural barriers that prevent our student for achieving their full potential through education—our high school counselor to student ratio is too high. The America School Counselors' Association recommends a ratio of 250:1, but recent Department of Education data shows the national average is 459:1—in California it is 810:1, in Texas it is 711:1, and in Michigan it is 660:1. The vast majority of our Education Schools which train our counselors, teachers, and school leadership do not include college and financial aid counseling in the curriculum. There is not enough human capital to serve our students well.

The National College Advising Corps is helping to address this human capital issue by placing near peer advisers in our partner high school to work alongside our counselors and teachers and help make college and career dreams become reality.

And yet there are simple barriers- information barriers- that are also preventing our students from enrolling and completing higher education. They are certain activities that all high school students need in their schools.

### College Visits

Students think they know what college is, but many have never been to a campus. They do not understand how higher education works and may not see how they could be successful in college until they see it with their own eyes—research shows if they actually visit a college campus, their chances of matriculating increase.

### Financial Literacy

They think they know how much college costs, but we have not educated many of them or their families on financial literacy. They do not know the difference between a grant and a loan. They do not know the difference between the college cost and the net price. My most heartbreaking example is a family, who did not want to take out a loan due to pride—refused their government backed aid—and instead put the tuition on a credit card with a 15% interest rate—not realizing a credit card is a loan.

### Lack of a Timeline and College Information throughout the School

One of the most effective things we have seen is enhancing a school's college-going culture. In one low-performing school in North Carolina, our adviser changed the signs on the all the classroom doors—instead of reading “Mrs. Smith, History or Mr. Jones, Math”, they read “Mrs. Smith, History, the UT Austin or Mr. Jones Math, the University of Georgia.” The principal called me to say he had never seen the aspirations and the conversation in a school change so quickly. These students thought they did not know anyone who went to college or anyone to ask for advice when the reality is they were surrounded by college graduates every day. We now do this across the country and refer to it as our “Diploma Doors” campaign.

Timelines for all students-- from 9-12<sup>th</sup> grades--need to be posted in every classroom, not just the in the guidance office. Students need to know when to register and take the SAT or ACT exams, when to start scholarship searches, when to fill out to the FAFSA, and priority deadlines for applications. These seem like small steps, but I cannot tell you how many students we advise who did not take the SAT/ACT in their junior year, did not see a list of courses needed for college until 12<sup>th</sup> grade and then had the shock to learn that they are not college ready, did not realize that when you file your financial aid forms is of the utmost importance.

And there are real barriers that can be knocked down by the work this Committee is doing:

Universal adoption of the Financial Aid Shopping Sheet- This document is a game changer for our students. There are many key areas- graduation rate, loan default rate, median borrowing, grants and scholarships, net costs, options to pay net costs that this document provides in a clear and concise format. As you may know, reading financial aid award letters from many of our colleges and

universities requires an advanced degree. They are full of jargon, hard to read, and do not allow consumers to make wise choices. We are excited that 600 college and universities have adopted the Sheet. Every institution should use this form—for the first time a student can compare apples to apples—they can look at their options and see real graduation rates, real net costs, and what the investment in their education will cost. Our college and universities need to honor this investment by providing clear information in this accessible form.

Net price calculators- While we have made great advances in helping students and families understand net price vs. college costs, the sticker shock of the price of education is still discouraging too many of our students, especially our low-income students from pursuing higher education. A Century Foundation study found that at the most selective 146 colleges and universities, 74% of students come from the wealthiest socioeconomic quarter of the population, but just 3% from the poorest quarter. Yet the graduation rates at the most selective institutions are higher and these schools provide substantial aid. Our low income students do not realize they can afford to go to these institutions. And while it is great that net price calculators are now required on college websites, many of buried them deep within the content. The calculator needs to be where prospective students and families can find it.

College information- in addition to College Navigator, there are many websites from credible sources that are assisting students and families with making wise choices. The College Board's Big Future site, <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>, the Chronicle of Higher Education's College Reality Check, launched this week, <http://collegerealitycheck.com/>, and the Administration's launch of the College Scorecard have made comparing college and accessing important data points a reality. Wage data is becoming another way to help empower students to make wise choices with sites such as College Measures that shows earnings by college and major in four states: Arkansas, Colorado, Tennessee, and Virginia. <http://www.collegemeasures.org/> Our concern is the level of misinformation still available on the web. Students and families need to have credible information and fall prey to sites that charge them for access to information and forms that are in the public domain.

My final comment goes back to the human capital. As I mentioned in the opening, I represent 335 recent college graduates who are working daily to ensure our students have the information they need to access and persist in higher education. We do this work with great partners—high schools, non-profits, the National College Access Network, and other support networks. What makes our model unique is that higher education institutions help select, train, place, and pay for our advisers who serve in high schools. And they are not recruiting for the partner university, but rather for all forms of post-secondary education. I would encourage the committee to look at this engagement as a way to have higher education assist with our nation's college access and information barriers. Each university has admissions professionals, financial aid professionals, recent graduates and others who can assist our high schools in helping students navigate the path to college and careers. In a global economy, where more of citizens will need a college education to compete, we must create a seamless and collaborative education pipeline that includes higher education working with K-12, and

that empowers our students. I am grateful for the leadership of this committee for their work to help our students navigate their post high schools plans and to fulfill their potential through education.

Attached:

National College Advising Corps Overview and Data