



Simple Supports Can Significantly Improve College Success for Low-Income Students

Executive Summary

In November 2018, VSAC completed its first review of performance data from the GUIDE program, a targeted counseling initiative that expands upon the middle-school GEAR UP program and provides support and mentoring to low-income students as they transition to college. The results were very promising.

We looked at GUIDE students who graduated high school in 2013 and 2014, and who received 1-on-1 outreach during their college application process and their first undergraduate year. Services included text-message reminders of upcoming application deadlines, personal assistance completing financial aid forms, and advice on how to access campus resources.

The study found that those students had notably higher rates of college enrollment, persistence, and four-year degree completion than did low-income Vermont students as a whole. **In fact, 64% of GUIDE students enrolled in college within a year of high school graduation, compared with only 36% of low-income students generally. Furthermore, 44% of the GUIDE students attained their degree within four years, compared with just 29% of low-income Vermont students statewide.**

The study also included qualitative interviews with GUIDE students. Every student who was interviewed mentioned their GUIDE counselor by name and gave specific examples of ways that counselor helped them decide to go to college, complete their application, and connect to financial aid resources. Students also mentioned ways that GUIDE supports gave them a sense of belonging on campus and empowered them to succeed academically. According to a 2006 study of first-generation college students published in the *Journal of Higher Education*, all of these are predictors of college persistence.

This study indicates that a handful of relatively simple but deliberate interventions can make a significant difference in terms of increasing the odds of college success for low-income students. A few well-timed reminders, a healthy dose of encouragement, and some helpful prompts when challenges pop up: this appears to be a successful recipe for leveling the post-secondary educational playing field.