School Counselor Preparation: A Regional Case Study Analysis of the Formal and Informal College Counseling Curriculum

Nathan Daun-Barnett
Cory Bezek
University at Buffalo
How are Guidance Counselors Prepared for their Role as College Advisors?

“By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world”
- President Barack Obama, February 24, 2009

• One critical barrier to postsecondary enrollment is the lack of specific knowledge on the college going process
• Guidance/School counselors play a critical role
• McDonough (2005) counselors are limited through:
  • High national student to counselor ratio
  • Debates over college advising role as counseling or marketing function of colleges and universities
  • Increased administrative responsibilities
  • College counseling has not been part of the formal curriculum
Research Framework

“(T)raining in college counseling is often not part of a school counselor’s formal education, as college counseling has traditionally been viewed as inconsistent with a counselor’s focus on students’ mental health”

-McDonough (2005, p. 134)

• Signaling Theory
  • Misalignment of educational systems results in erratic and inconsistent signals being sent to student along the educational pipeline (Kirst & Venezia, 2004)

• Role of School Counselors
  • Exist in the critical intersection between secondary and postsecondary opportunity
Methodology

- Instrumental Case Study Design
  - Designed to place a situation within its context
- Western New York Consortium of High Education (WNYCHE)
  - 22 Colleges and Universities within a 8 county region in one state
    - Graduating roughly 16,000 students per year
- Five School Counseling Programs within the region
- Professional Development Opportunities within Region
Context and Results

Is it Reasonable to Expect School Counselors to Provide College Advising?

- National Standards
- State Expectations and certification
- Counselors reported use of time
Formal Curriculum

- None of the programs required a course in college advising
- Two out of Five offered Elective in College advising
- All Graduate Curriculums included a course in Career Development
- Four out of the five programs allow for electives
- At three of the colleges also have programs in Higher Education or Students Affairs from which students could take electives.
Informal Curriculum

- Professional Development
  - New York State Association of College Admissions Counselors (NYSACAC)
  - New York State High Education Services Corporation (NYS-HESC)
  - State University of New York College Admissions Professionals (SUNYCAP) Operation Inform
  - WNYCHE Annual School Counselor Breakfast
- Casual Interactions of Counselor and Admissions Professionals
Conclusion

- An under reliance on the formal curriculum to prepare Guidance Counselors to become college advisors
  - Focus on Counseling aspects of the position
  - Career and College Counseling exist as 3 credits out of a 60 credit hour program
- Opportunities exist for training but not universally accessible
  - No single source provides a complete picture
- The counselor to student ratio isn’t the only college counseling challenge the system faces
Questions?

Nathan Daun- Barnett, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Educational Leadership and Policy
University at Buffalo
nbarnett@buffalo.edu

Cory M. Bezek
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership and Policy
University at Buffalo
Assistant Director of Admissions
SUNY Fredonia
bezek@fredonia.edu