IDRA Newsletter

Effective Higher Education Recruitment Strategies
Findings from a Research Study of San Antonio College

Special Reprint

by Josie Danini Cortez, M.A., and Albert Cortez, Ph.D.

Hispanic students value a college education. Among high school graduates, Hispanic students are second only to Asian students in attendance at colleges and universities. Richard Fry of the Pew Hispanic Center summarizes, "There can be no doubt that Latino families are willing to invest in their children's education" (2002).

Much of what accounts for the gap between enrollment and graduation is a lack of support systems that are available to other students. This, coupled with "underfunded, understaffed, and underperforming high schools," sets up Hispanic students for failure rather than success (Fry, 2002).

Hispanic student enrollment in higher education has grown from 4 percent of the total student enrollment in 1976 to 9 percent two decades later in 1997 (NCES, 2000). Hispanics are also least likely to be enrolled in a degree-seeking program. Public community colleges account for over half of the total undergraduate enrollment in Texas.

With this as a backdrop, the Intercultural Development Research Association recently completed research to identify effective strategies for recruiting Hispanic and low-income students to enroll in San Antonio College. Funded through the duPont Foundation, San Antonio College commissioned IDRA to identify best practices for recruiting Hispanic and low-income students. IDRA conducted focus group and individual interviews to gather insights on what the target groups perceived to be issues, concerns, and effective strategies.

The findings are informing strategies that the college will use to improve its recruitment of Hispanic, low-income students. This is the first in a series of three articles in the *IDRA Newsletter* presenting the results of this research study, with permission from the community college, San Antonio College. This article summarizes briefly the methodology and outlines the results of the literature review and interviews with several "best practices" universities.

Research Methodology Used

IDRA's study in 2002-03 was guided by research questions based on the philosophical tenet that the Hispanic community has resources and assets that have yet to be tapped. The questions also are grounded on the fact that Hispanic families value education and want their children to achieve and succeed (Fry, 2002; Villarreal, 2001). From this valuing model, the research questions for this study included:

1. What strategies is San Antonio College using to recruit students both from the targeted group (minority and low-income in specific zip code areas) and the non-targeted group? How effective are the recruitment efforts (as evidenced by enrollment patterns)?

- How many, where, when and how are students recruited?
- Who is involved in the recruitment process? What is the nature of their involvement?

2. What recruitment strategies worked for targeted students who enrolled at SAC?

- Who enrolled at SAC?
- Why did these students enroll at SAC? What factors contributed to their decision?
- From their perspective, what should SAC do to improve their recruitment process?

3. What institutional changes are needed at SAC to improve recruitment for targeted students?

IDRA's methodology relied both on quantitative and qualitative approaches. IDRA conducted an in-depth analysis of archival data, including demographics of students, school staff (administrators, teachers and faculty) at SAC and the San Antonio Independent School District feeder schools in targeted areas. Focus group and individual interviews targeted key stakeholders, including high school administrators, counselors, high school students, their parents, and current SAC students.

To help inform the best practices inventory, IDRA surveyed and interviewed Alianza directors (college and university representatives who were partners with IDRA in a k-16 effort). Alianza was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to recruit, enroll and graduate non-traditional Latino students. After five years of implementation, this program has a wealth of lessons learned that IDRA tapped specifically for the SAC research study.

The surveys, focus group interviews and individual interview questions were developed in partnership with the SAC advisory committee. This advisory group included the college president and central office staff, representatives from the admissions and student recruitment offices, and directors of specialized outreach programs.

Parallel questions were developed for each of the surveys and interviews in order to triangulate responses. It is important to interpret these findings cautiously given the nature of focus group interviews. While the methodology provides an opportunity for in-depth probing and a greater understanding of the issues, the findings are not representative or generalizable for all colleges and universities. In the final analysis, additional studies should be conducted to gain greater understanding of what has emerged from these interviews.

Inventory of Best Practices – Literature Review

IDRA conducted an extensive literature review focusing on strategies that have proven effective in recruiting non-traditional students, i.e., low-income, minority students. Most research and lessons learned that are featured in the literature are unfortunately, but not surprisingly, deficit – focusing on "fixing" the student or family rather than strengthening or changing the institutions to better serve their clients.

Examples of deficit strategies include the following.

- Expanding efforts to increase

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student "motivation" to attend college when, in fact, the vast majority of students, including low-income and minority students, already want to go to college;

- Informing low-income, minority parents of the "importance" of college and the long-term financial benefits of a college education when parents already value education and see it as a way for their children to have a better life (Fry, 2002; Villarreal, 2001); and

- An exclusive focus on "fixing" k-12-based functions without looking at any cross-institutional (k-16) barriers such as a lack of curriculum alignment, cross-level communication, or cross-level coordination that impact students' post-secondary options.

Given the fact that the documented enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of Hispanic, African American and low-income students is still dramatically lower than their non-Hispanic White and Asian counterparts, it should be clear that a deficit approach has not worked.

What is needed is a radical shift from "business as usual" to a profound systemic, cross-institutional change that serves students' needs and capitalizes on their strengths. The literature clearly shows that college recruitment is most successful when it is part of a process that begins with a child's first entry into formal schooling. Inherent in this mindset is a universal assumption that all students will graduate and be prepared to enroll in a college or university. More and more studies are re-affirming this approach.

Expanding Alignment and Access

The Stanford University's Bridge Project, a six-year national study, analyzed high school exit-level policies and college entrance policies to learn if the

> ## "Affirmative action continues to be an essential tool to give qualified individuals equal access to opportunities in higher education."
>
> **– Wade Henderson, general council, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Fund in "Blend It, Don't End It," Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2004**

standards were different. This research showed there were many gaps in knowledge and many misunderstandings between kindergarten through 12th grade (k-12) schools and colleges.

Given these gaps and misunderstandings and their serious implications for students and their parents, the study recommended three actions that would have the most immediate impact.

- Provide all students, their parents, and educators with accurate, high quality information about, and access to, courses that will help prepare students for college-level standards, and do this early in their middle or high school enrollment.

- Focus on the *institutions* that serve the majority of students, because such a focus has the potential of yielding the greatest benefit.

- Create awareness that getting into college is not the hardest part. This translates to expanding the focus of local, state, and federal programs from access to college to include success in college. "High school content, academic counseling, college outreach, and other programming need to reflect this so that students are clear about what it takes to succeed in college, including community college" (Venezia, et al., 2003).

More long-term recommendations include the following.

- Ensure that colleges and universities clearly state, and widely publicize, their academic standards so that students, their parents, and educators have accurate college preparation information.

- Examine the relationship and alignment between the content of post-secondary education placement exams and k-12 exit-level standards and assessments to determine if more compatibility is necessary and possible.

- Review the post-secondary education placement exams for reliability, validity, efficacy, and the extent to which they promote teaching for understanding.

- Allow students to take college placement exams in high school so that they can prepare, academically, for college and understand college-level expectations.

- Sequence undergraduate general education requirements so that appropriate high school senior-year courses are linked to post-secondary general education courses.

- Expand successful dual or concurrent enrollment programs between high schools and colleges so that they include all students, not just traditionally "college-bound" students.

- Collect and connect data from all education sectors, including high school graduation and dropout data and college attendance and persistence information.

- Provide technical support to states by having the federal government establish voluntary data collection standards.

- Expand federal grants to stimulate more state-level k-16 collaboration and integrated policymaking.

K-16 Linkages

A study by the Institute for Higher

Education Policy found that low-income and minority high school students are more likely to pursue higher education when given access to programs that provide college information early and persistently throughout their secondary level enrollment.

They found that access to financial aid alone was not enough for students who lack information about or those who do not expect to go to college. Other factors that play a critical role include adequate and appropriate academic preparation, college as a goal of students and their parents, and access to information about college and financial aid.

Two- to Four-Year Transfers and the Role of Community Colleges

Since the inception of community colleges in 1901, more than 100 million students have attended community colleges "for everything from workforce retraining to English language acquisition to advanced mathematics for university-level credit" (Bueschel, 2003). While four-year college enrollment has doubled from 1960 to 1990, community college enrollment has increased five-fold.

Community colleges often serve as the point of entry for students who would not otherwise attend college. For many students, the two-year institution is the only way they can improve their chances for a better quality of life – it is their "second chance."

Public community colleges account for over half of the total undergraduate enrollment in Texas. Cost may be a significant factor impacting selection, with an average community college tuition of $910, compared to $2,741 annual average for a public four-year tuition.

While two-year to four-year program transfers have long been considered one of the missions of Texas community colleges, "the state has hesitated to make baccalaureate transfer and degree attainment a specific goal for community college students, because policymakers believe that many students do not want or need to obtain a degree" (Adelman, 1999).

Since 1997, however, as an attempt to facilitate transfers among Texas institutions, Texas has had a transfer "general education core curriculum" that allows individual institutions some flexibility in designating core courses. If a student completes an approved core curriculum, the receiving institution (be it a two- or four-year college) must accept those courses as a substitute for its own core requirements.

In 2001, Texas completed a study of the effectiveness of its statewide transfer policies. The task force's recommendations for strengthening transfers included improvements in reporting student performance information from receiving to sending institutions, a feasibility study for a statewide electronic degree-audit system, and study of best practices in other states.

Perceived "disconnects" between two- and four-year institutions cause some students to delay enrollment at two-year colleges, which also decreases the probability that these students will transfer to and graduate from four-year institutions.

Findings from Best Practices Institutions – Alianza Universities

In addition to the extensive literature review conducted, IDRA developed a survey for the eight university directors of IDRA's Project Alianza, a five-year binational, bicultural program to develop teacher preparation models resulting in university graduates prepared and well-qualified to teach in diverse classrooms (http://www.idra.org/alianza). Following are the key findings shared by the Alianza university directors.

- **Use non-traditional avenues to recruit non-traditional students**
  - Spanish-speaking and English-speaking television stations can be very effective in sending out messages to the community. Universities have experienced the greatest success from public service announcements.
  - The k-12 university partnership with local school districts were highly effective for publicizing and recruiting non-traditional students.
- **Create and use inventories of non-traditional students to facilitate recruitment and outreach.** The non-traditional student list was developed through announcements made at workshops, such as with the local adult education program. Some non-traditional students were recruited at English as a second language classes.
- **Use nontraditional students as recruiters and mentors.** The non-traditional students were provided assistance and peer mentoring from

> **"The Ten Percent Plan and other race-neutral measures cannot wholly replace the affirmative action policies and programs needed to achieve racial diversity."**
>
> **– "Blend It, Don't End It,"**
> **Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2004**

the traditional students in the educational program.

- **Provide financial, social and academic support.** Funding support and peer assistance were the most important factors for the non-traditional students.
- **Adapt recruitment strategies in recognition of language and cultural attributes of prospective students.** The lack of Spanish proficiency at the universities was the greatest barrier for these non-traditional students (*normalistas* – graduates of *normal* schools in Mexico).
- **Ensure institutional advocacy and persistence for non-traditional student admissions.** Advocacy, building relationships with key stakeholders, and consistent follow-up were the most effective strategies.
- **Create flexibility in financial aid packaging.** Non-traditional students' eligibility for financial support was a critical factor considering all costs: tuition, fees, and books.
- **Recommendations for recruiting non-traditional students include:**
  - Build strong relationships with partner school districts.
  - Establish a memorandum of understanding with the school districts to clarify roles and responsibilities and regularly exchanging information, knowledge, resources, and staff.
  - Be inclusive and far-reaching in developing collaborations with other individuals and entities. This strategy develops exposure for the effort and provides insights to others and access for students to potential employment opportunities.
  - Ensure that students take courses as a cohort.
  - Coordinate with key faculty who are the cohort instructors, sharing

Did You Know?

Between 1990 and 1998, American's high-tech employment increased 21 percent while high-tech degrees awarded declined 5 percent.
– *Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board*, 2001

In the United States, 15.5 percent of people age 25 and up have at least a bachelor's degree. But only 6.7 percent of Hispanics and 9.5 percent of African Americans have a bachelor's degree.
– *American Demographics*, 2002

Hispanic undergraduates are much more likely to be enrolled in community colleges. Among young full-time undergraduates, one third of Hispanics and one fifth of Whites attend two-year colleges.
– *Pew Hispanic Center*, 2004

In Texas, less than half of the students who enter a public university will graduate with a bachelor's degree in six years.
– *Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board*, 2001

Over a decade, 4.4 million college-qualified high school graduates from low- and moderate-income families will not have access to attend a four-year college within two years, and 2 million students will not be able to attend any college at all.
– *Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance*, 2002

For more facts and statistics, go to the IDRA web site.

www.idra.org

information about the group (such as the group's academic preparation). Also, keep lines of communication open throughout each semester.

- Incorporate a faculty or staff person to serve as an active and vocal advocate of the students who consistently meets with key administrators in an effort to find solutions to barriers. The result is greater respect for the students' academic preparation and a program reputation of being innovative and progressive.

Summary

The next installment in this series will present the major findings from a review of the archival data and enrollment trends at San Antonio College as well as their recruitment strategies. The third and final installment will reveal the factors that contribute to or hinder low-income minority students from enrolling, achieving, and succeeding in college as told by current and former students and educators during individual and focus group interviews.

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Research Findings – Part II
Effective College Recruitment Strategies

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D., and Josie Danini Cortez, M.A.

Special Reprint

Despite recruitment efforts, a San Antonio community college was experiencing a marked decrease in Latino enrollment, particularly from neighborhood high schools that traditionally had been their feeder schools. The Intercultural Development Research Association examined the problem and found that the college, like many two- and four-year institutions, was faced with high attrition rates in high schools, competition among colleges and universities for a smaller pool of students, and shifting demographics. This article identifies the factors contributing to this phenomenon and reinforces the need for colleges and universities to work with K-12 schools to support student achievement throughout the K-16 system.

IDRA recently completed research to identify effective strategies for recruiting Hispanic and low-income students to enroll in San Antonio College. Funded through the duPont Foundation, San Antonio College (SAC) commissioned IDRA to identify best practices for recruiting Hispanic and low-income students. The findings are informing strategies that the college will use to improve its recruitment of Hispanic, low-income students.

This is the second in a series of three articles in the *IDRA Newsletter* presenting the results of this research study, with SAC's permission.

Enrollment Patterns

The first level of data review and analysis focused on identifying the enrollment patterns at SAC. An assessment of the geographic distribution of 18- and 19-year-old SAC students provided a geographic and demographic profile of enrollment patterns.

SAC's Institutional Research and Effectiveness Department provided the fall 2002 enrollment data as well as three years of its fact books containing profile data of students and faculty. IDRA also accessed high school data from our own databases and the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) in order to analyze the potential post-secondary education impacts of key variables at the feeder high schools.

Variables included number of high school graduates, number enrolling in the college track curriculum, and trend data over nine years on the number of graduates from selected feeder high schools. In addition, IDRA requested Alamo Community College District campus-specific data in order to assess whether changes in competing institutions' enrollment is contributing to changes in SAC enrollment trends.

IDRA also engaged in conversations with project staff focusing on their assessment of college attendance trends in feeder high schools as a way of triangulating data from multiple sources.

Limited Applicant Pool

One of the key findings was that the major target feeder high schools have very high attrition rates (students enrolled in the ninth grade who are no longer present three years later). According to IDRA's research on school holding power, most of these schools suffer from a 30 percent to 50 percent attrition rate.

The loss of one third to one half of prospective graduates significantly reduces the number of students from the target high schools who might have been recruited for college enrollment. These attrition rates have been persistent over time: only two of the six targeted high schools show even a minimal increase in the number of graduates over a nine-year span. Unless such trends are reversed, it may be difficult for SAC to increase its enrollment from these schools.

A second factor impacting college enrollment is the extent that students have access to and enroll in college preparation curriculum. Enrollment in college preparatory curriculum was relatively limited. And there were no substantive increases until 2001, the year the state announced its intention to have the recommended program become the default program for students.

A projected increase in the number of students enrolled in the college-track curriculum may help improve the prospects for increasing the number of students from target high schools who ultimately enroll at SAC.

Shifting City Demographics

Data analyses also suggest that increasing numbers of students enrolling at SAC reside in the city's northeastern and northwestern quadrants. This is a shift in the enrollment trends experienced in prior decades when greater percentages of the college enrollment were drawn from the western, southern and eastern sectors of the city. The new trend however, is reflective of a broader city trend of expanding population growth in some sectors, coupled with either population stagnation or decline in the others.

This would suggest that the decreasing proportion of students enrolling at SAC from westside, southside and eastside schools may be due, in part, to a proportionally stagnant or smaller graduation pool at these historical feeder high schools.

A more important factor, however, may be the overall shift in city population, a factor that will continue to impact SAC's enrollment profile. This is a development that the college may not be able to alter, even with increased recruitment in targeted feeder high schools.

One confounder in the high school feeder counts was the inclusion of dual credit enrollees from the Northside Independent School District (ISD) and the Northeast ISD that may be inflating the enrollment figures for these northwest and northeast sectors. IDRA was unable to secure additional data from SAC that disaggregates dual credit students from the general student enrollment population. Further analyses are recommended to discern the extent to which dual enrollment may be inflating enrollment profiles.

IDRA analyses did include enrollment by age range. Preliminary data analyzed suggest that only a quarter of the fall 2002 enrollees were between

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the ages of 16 and 19 years old. Twenty-to 39-year-olds comprise two-thirds of the fall 2002 enrollees. These data suggest that the college may be more successful in recruiting and retaining older individuals who return to school after spending time in the local workforce.

This high concentration of older students, however, may contribute to a perception by some high school students that SAC is an institution that focuses on serving older populations. The 16-to 19-year-old percentage may be even smaller, given that the dual credit students are still included in the total. Prospective interviews with current SAC and high school students may provide some insights on these issues and what the college may be able to do to address such perceptions, if they indeed exist.

Given changing demographics within San Antonio, limited enrollment pools in the targeted feeder high schools and increased competition from other community colleges and the University of Texas at San Antonio Downtown Campus, the decline from the targeted older feeder high schools should be expected. These trends will persist unless new strategies are developed in specific areas, including:

- increasing the high school graduation rate,
- increasing the number of students enrolled in college-track courses,
- creating a unique niche that distinguishes SAC from the other community colleges and four-year universities, and
- re-assessing recruitment efforts in light of new competitors and changing demographics.

Overview of SAC Recruitment and "Enrollment Management"

SAC recruitment efforts are integrated into a larger management structure that focuses not only on incoming students, but an array of student subgroups. These include currently-enrolled students, transfer students, former students, continuing education students and first time (new) enrolling students.

General Recruitment Efforts

SAC has engaged in various efforts to expand its minority student population, and particularly its Hispanic enrollment, over the years. In addition to collaborating with Project STAY (a San Antonio-based TRIO program that works with students to help them get into college), SAC staff have also established good working relationships with the San Antonio Education Partnership. The TRIO program is a federally-funded educational outreach program targeting low-income, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities to succeed from middle school thorough graduate school. The program guarantees that students graduating from 10 participating area high schools with a B average and a 90 percent attendance rate automatically qualify for scholarships to help offset some college-related costs. Between the two programs, SAC enrolls an estimated 1,300 pupils per year, mostly low-income and Hispanic students.

The college has also created positive working relationships with the San Antonio Pre-Freshman Engineering Program (PREP). This is a citywide effort that provides middle and high school students an opportunity to experience summer math and science classes in a college campus setting. With annual summer enrollment of more than 1,000 pupils, many of whom are high school seniors, the PREP program provides SAC an ideal group from which to recruit prospective students.

Though useful as "feeder" programs, these efforts do not recruit students specifically for enrollment at SAC. Recognizing the need for more targeted recruitment efforts, the college has created its own internal recruitment efforts.

Focused Recruitment Efforts

SAC has created and funded or acquired external funding for developing and implementing its own student recruitment efforts. Since 1999, SAC has operated its own College Access Project designed to recruit students specifically for enrollment at SAC.

The project includes having a team of SAC counselors who visit area high schools to advise students of opportunities available at the college. Students can participate in off campus registration and school-based college assessments needed to help guide them in course placement discussions.

About 40 local high schools currently are targeted by the College Access Project, including all eight San Antonio ISD campuses. The project for high school seniors recruited 325 pupils from San Antonio-area schools in 1999. In 2000, the project outreached to more than 9,254 students, and 535 of those students enrolled at SAC. By design, existing outreach efforts focus on specific school and zip code areas, concentrating the potential impact to targeted schools.

The college also operates the College Access Project for Corporate World Business. The effort employs a SAC counselor to work with local corporations and business groups who have in-house employee tuition assistance programs or other options that encourage employees to continue or expand their education. Using the SAC mobile team, this effort provides comprehensive on-site support for working students who want to pursue

further training or post-secondary degrees.

SAC sponsors the Young Women's/Young Men's Conference, which brings 500 high school juniors and seniors together at the college campus for a conference. The one-day event provides local youth experiences that "promote regular class attendance in school, encourage academic productivity, and encourage them to consider higher education."

Prior to 1999, San Antonio ISD graduates could not attend SAC summer school classes because graduation dates occurred after the start of the SAC summer session began. To deal with the problem, SAC designed and established a summer senior program. This is a series of classes with start dates designed for San Antonio ISD graduates. This simple change resulted in a 168 percent increase in San Antonio ISD graduates' enrollment at SAC in the summer of 1999 and continues to pay dividends for both San Antonio ISD students and SAC.

SAC offers a specialized recruitment program targeting students pursuing health-related careers. The Summer Enrichment Program – Center for Health Policy Development provides 60 low-income high school students a summer bridge program that encourages them to consider or pursue a career in a health-related field, earn college semester credit hours, receive comprehensive student support services and assistance in planning and preparing for subsequent fall semester enrollment.

Documents produced by the college also describe two distinct community college options – with no public university within 100 miles – San Antonio now boasts four private universities (St. Mary's University, Our Lady of the Lake University, University of the Incarnate Word, and Trinity University); a major fast-growing state-funded college with a suburban and central city campus (University of Texas at San Antonio); four community college campuses (SAC, St. Philips College, Palo Alto College and Northwest Vista College); and recent incursions from the Texas A&M system.

The expanded number of options may well be impacting SAC enrollment patterns, though at least some of these institutions have been in existence for decades. There are increasing numbers of minority students, specifically

Too Few Seniors Demonstrate Strong Academic Skills

The most recent trend data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that gaps between groups of students are still wide.

	African American	Latino	White
Reading at Age 17 – NAEP 1996			
Learn from specialized reading materials	2%	2%	8%
Understand complicated information	16	18	37
Interrelate ideas and make generalizations	49	44	42
Show partially developed skills and understanding	28	30	12
Writing at Grade 11 – NAEP 1996			
Effective, coherent writing	1%*	1%	3%
Complete, sufficient writing	16	18	34
Beginning focused, clear writing	53	51	51
Incomplete, vague writing	28	28	12
Mathematics at Age 17 – NAEP 1996			
Multistep problem solving and algebra	1%*	2%*	9%
Moderately complex procedures and reasoning	30	38	60
Numerical operations and beginning problem solving	60	52	30
Beginning skills and understanding	9	8	1

interpret with caution

Source: NAEP 1996 Trends in Academic Progress, U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, NCES 97-985, Washington, D.C., September

Higher Education Characteristics of Six States

	Arkansas	Florida	New Mexico	New York	North Carolina	Texas
Completion grade (composite grade, based on the four measures immediately below)	D+	B+	D-	A-	B+	D+
Percent of first-year community college students who return for a second year	54%	61%	52%	62%	52%	41%
Percent of freshmen at four-year institutions who return for a second year	67%	80%	69%	78%	80%	73%
Percent of first-time full-time undergraduates who complete a bachelor's degree within five years	32%	52%	30%	53%	56%	43%
Number of certificates, degrees, and diplomas awarded per 100 undergraduate students	15	18	12	19	19	14
Public community college enrollments as a percent of total post-secondary enrollments	38%	55%	55%	29%	43%	51%
Number of enrollments in public community colleges	38,997	320,710	51,674	241,502	143,006	432,362
State grant aid targeted to low-income families as a percent of Pell Grant aid	21%	10%	10%	92%	26%	13%
Expected percent change in number of high school graduates by 2010 (compared with 1999)	-2.1%	26.4%	5.1%	9.1%	20.1%	11.7%

Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000.

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Hispanic students who tend to enroll in two-year institutions. This suggests that even with greater competition, SAC could be maintaining if not increasing its Hispanic enrollments.

The high attrition rate from feeder high schools and shifting demographics are not unique to SAC. These phenomena are common to many two-year and four-year institutions and should serve to inform recruitment and retention efforts.

One additional source of information, and perhaps the most important source, are the clients (current and prospective) themselves. The next installment in this series will provide key information from interviews with high school students, college students and educators. It will shed light on what SAC and other colleges can do to ensure that all students have access and success in post-secondary education.

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INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT • RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Research Findings – Part III
Expectations Drive Effective College Recruitment Strategies

Special Reprint

by Albert Cortez, Ph.D., and Josie Danini Cortez, M.A.

Colleges need to identify and remove institutional barriers for students and their parents. This is among the key findings from an IDRA study of San Antonio College that are informing strategies that the college will use to improve its recruitment of Hispanic, low-income students.

This is the final in a series of three articles in the *IDRA Newsletter* presenting the results of this research study, with SAC's permission.

IDRA interviewed different groups of respondents to identify the most critical factors that impacted a decision to enroll in college and graduate. Focus group and individual interviews targeted key stakeholders including: high school administrators, counselors, high school students, parents of high school students, and current SAC students. High school administrators were also surveyed.

IDRA developed the survey, focus group interview and individual interview questions in partnership with the SAC advisory committee. Parallel questions were developed for each of the surveys and interviews in order to triangulate responses by group and identify points of convergence or divergence among groups.

It is important to interpret these findings cautiously given the nature of focus group interviews. While the methodology provides an opportunity for in-depth probing and a greater understanding of the issues, the findings are not representative or generalizable for all colleges and universities. In the final analysis, additional studies should be conducted to gain greater understanding of what has emerged from these interviews.

Key questions across all groups included:
- What has helped students the most in preparing for college?
- What are the most important things that help to select a college?
- What are the barriers of students going to college?
- What are the benefits of going to SAC?
- What are the reasons for choosing SAC over other colleges?
- What are the reasons for choosing other colleges over SAC? And
- How can SAC help students prepare

for college and support them once they enroll?

IDRA conducted content analyses of responses across all groups. These analyses yielded clear patterns across the seven areas of parallel inquiry for all groups. Following are the responses from the five respondent groups: high school principals, counselors, high school students, parents and current SAC students.

When answering **what has helped students most in preparing for college**, respondents most often mentioned visiting college campuses while still in high school and their parents' and families' encouragement.

The top three things that respondents cited as **helping students select a college** included matching individual student goals and scholarships to college, convenience in terms of access and transportation, and online access to help with registration.

The most frequently mentioned **barriers that students encounter** on the road to college were inadequate academic preparation, competing work and family responsibilities, and the lack of transportation.

Respondents listed **benefits of going to SAC**: location (proximity), access to students' homes and work, resources and support for students, ease of transition to a four-year university, convenience allowing for students to live at home and continue working, its low cost (mentioned by every group), and its small class size.

The top reason for **choosing SAC over other colleges** was its low cost. The top reason for **choosing other colleges over SAC** was its reputation as an extension of high school – not academically challenging, same high school classmates enroll there, etc.

Respondents suggested **ways to help students prepare for college and support them** once they enroll. These included providing better student support services such as tutoring,

mentoring, daycare and counseling; providing transportation options for students such as a SAC shuttle for the neighborhood; and providing financial support through scholarships.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications and recommendations from this IDRA research for SAC can be organized into the following five focal areas: communication, academic preparation, recruitment, financial aid and support services. While these recommendations were provided for SAC specifically, they can provide insight for other K-12 and higher education institutions.

Communication
- First find out *who* is getting information and then find out among those who do receive it, what conflicting or vague messages students and their parents are receiving about what is needed to enter and succeed in college and communicate the correct information.

- Make sure student and parent language needs are addressed in all oral presentations and written materials.
- Communicate the expectation that all students are "college material."
- Make students and their parents aware that getting into college is not the hardest part of the college experience, but that challenges to staying and graduating can be addressed and overcome.
- Make sure that students are clear about what it takes to succeed in college, including college academic standards and the importance of strong high school preparation.
- Make sure that high school staff, college staff, and students have regular and ongoing communication.

Academic preparation, coordination and alignment
- Provide solid academic preparation in the K-12 system.
- Create strong partnerships with the local school districts. Establish a

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memorandum of understanding to clarify roles and responsibilities. Regularly exchange information, knowledge, resources and staff in a true K-16 partnership.

• Align high school and college curricula and assessments so that the same knowledge and skills across institutions are emphasized.

• Coordinate with high school teachers, articulating high school and college content areas.

• Allow students to take placement exams in high school so that they can prepare for college and understand college-level expectations. Then offer support to those students who need help.

• Reward high-performing students by enabling them to begin college work.

• Expand successful dual or concurrent enrollment programs between high school and college to include all students, especially minority and low-income students, and ensure their success.

• Coordinate with K-12 education reform efforts that help prepare students for college.

• Connect data systems across institutions so that each can identify and address student needs and issues.

• Sequence undergraduate general education requirements so that appropriate senior-year courses are linked to post-secondary general education courses.

• Improve articulation between the community college and four-year institutions given that Hispanic students' pathways to college differ from those of other ethnic groups.

• Provide extra time and help for high school students who are struggling in making transitions.

• Create a unique niche for SAC that distinguishes it from the other nearby community colleges and four-year universities.

> **If institutions begin with the expectation that all students are college bound and that their families value education and achievement, then many barriers to post-secondary education can be removed.**

Recruitment

• Use unconventional recruitment strategies that include direct communication with community groups rather than conventional school settings.

• Use media (print, radio and television) to expand reach to non-traditional students and their families.

Financial aid

• Remember that many Hispanic students have myths and misconceptions about their eligibility for financial aid and are unaware of the financial aid that may be available, much less how to navigate the system.

• Be aware of Hispanic students' responsibilities and obligations (work, economic, family) and increase financial aid to lessen their struggle.

• Be aware of Hispanic students' work ethic and aversion to building up debt, and adjust financial aid as needed.

Support service and systems

• Establish support systems for students who are historically underserved. Design and implement strategies to address their inexperience with a college environment.

• Include multiple components in the support system, including counseling, mentoring, tutoring, enrichment activities, financial aid and academic support.

• Tailor services to students' age and experience.

• Provide incentives such as waiving a course fee at the university if a student is enrolled in nine hours at the community college.

• Waive test fees and be flexible with test dates.

• Create powerful peer student and faculty support systems that address academic and social support needs.

• Connect students early in their academic careers with local employers.

• Ensure that students take courses as a cohort so students can relate to each other's age and experience.

Perhaps the most important message heard during many of the focus group discussions related to expectations and the need for institutions to "live the expectation that all students will succeed."

If institutions begin with the expectation that all students are college bound and that their families value education and achievement, then many barriers to post-secondary education can be removed.

Then college access and success becomes an issue of identifying and removing institutional barriers and deterrents for students and their parents. This research provides some of the approaches and strategies that colleges and universities are using to change the status quo in recruitment, retention and graduation of Hispanic students.

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