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Report on High School to College Transition

By Carina Zaragoza

Why do some high school students transition more smoothly and more successfully to college than others? This is the central question investigated in the study *School Strategies and the "College-Linking" Process: Reconsidering the Effects of High Schools on College Enrollment*. The study appeared in the January 2008 issue of *Sociology of Education*. The journal is published by the American Sociological Association.

The study was conducted by Lori Diane Hill, assistant professor of education at the University of Michigan. Previous research focused on resources available to high school students, finding wealthier high schools provided their students with advantages and thus ensured high rates of success. However, the focus of this study is college advising as provided by high schools and counselors. The study identifies three general styles and measures the success rate of each.

Hill surveyed a national database that tracks students from high schools across the country in major metropolitan areas. The database includes information about how many students ended up in college, how many didn't, and where.

The report identifies three major styles of guidance counseling:

- Traditional: There is not much hands-on, interactive counseling at all.
- Clearinghouse: Counseling offices provide materials on colleges and financial aid.
- Brokering: An active approach is taken by counselors and departments.

Hill found that brokering resulted in the highest success rates for students. Brokering encourages college enrollment through various activities. Counselors who engage in brokering encourage college visits, assist with completing college applications and financial aid forms, and proactively contact college officials and parents.

Brokering is used at 56% of the schools in the database. However, interestingly, Hill found that brokering is largely practiced in private high schools, which account for almost half of the schools that use the brokering method. Thus, students attending private high schools are more likely to make the transition to college.

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The clearinghouse method did show signs of positive impact on students. However, students who were not considering attending a four-year institution experienced negative results from the clearinghouse method.

The least effective method, traditional, is used at a majority of schools with large black and Latino student populations. Hill found that there is a wealth correlation between brokering schools and non-brokering schools.

Hill hopes the study will bring attention to each school's infrastructure and organization. Also, Hill stressed that all schools, even schools that primarily use the brokering approach, must provide resources to students who are considering community college or who do not anticipate attending college at all. Many of these students do not receive as many resources or as much guidance as those seeking to attend four-year colleges.

On the Net

Inside Higher Ed

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