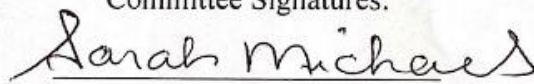


**College Knowledge: The Creation and Implementation of a College
Preparation Program**

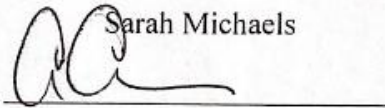
**Praxis Project Thesis: part of the requirements for the degree of the Bachelor of Arts in the
major of Community, Youth and Education Studies at Clark University**

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand how a “College Knowledge” program for high school students, created and led by two Clark University undergraduate students, has impacted a group of students' (attending two public schools in Worcester, MA) sense of comfort and confidence in applying to and attending college. The College Knowledge program appeared to provide helpful information about the college application process as well as the social and academic “college experience.”. Students expressed more comfortability and confidence in their abilities to apply to and attend college after multiple sessions about financial aid, college vocabulary, and college applications. A series of improvements and mid-course corrections were made, based on reflections on the program while it was running. Based on my analysis, I suggest that several changes be made in the future: 1) incentives be provided to participants to encourage participation and attendance, 2) mentors and students work together to create shared group norms, 3) mentors work closely with an advisor to give feedback on sessions (content and executions), and 4) the work be delegated evenly across all mentors involved in the program. These improvements are all suggested to encourage a healthy work-life balance for the mentors and to ensure sessions are engaging and fun for all parties involved.

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our College Knowledge curriculum through a directed study and has been extremely encouraging and passionate about her students and the research they do.

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Thank you to the CYES 2022 cohort for your countless hours of support and feedback on my Praxis Project. Simultaneously supporting each other while running our own Praxis Projects was not easy but was so helpful and appreciated.

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I would like to thank all of the students I have worked with in CSI/CCCC/College Knowledge over the four years I have been involved. I have loved getting to know them and learning how I can be a better mentor from their feedback.

Lastly, thank you to my family for encouraging me to pursue my passions at college. Their support has been especially appreciated and I am extremely lucky to have the opportunities I have because of them.

Definitions

It is important to begin with a shared understanding of some common terms I use throughout this thesis:

Claremont Academy (Claremont): A combined public middle school and high school located a few blocks away from Clark's campus.

Clark-Claremont College Connection (CCCC): The program that morphed from CSI (mentioned below) into CCCC. Run by Clark University undergraduate students and advised by Andrea Allen. This program is modeled off of the CSI program.

College Knowledge: "Information, formal and informal, stated and unstated, necessary for both gaining admission to and navigating within the post-secondary system" (Holland, 2015).

Common App: An organization and program that has a "universal" college application accepted by most schools in the United States.

Collegiate Success Institute (CSI): Created by Mass Ed Co., a program that partnered local Worcester colleges and high schools to mentor Worcester students in their college applications.

Community, Youth, and Education Studies (CYES): A major at Clark University (my major) where information about urban studies, education, and youth. Equity/inequity and social justice are major themes throughout the courses in this major.

Deficit-based thinking: Believing one's deficits are too significant to overcome and that criticisms were accurate. "The belief is that a self-fulfilling prophecy helped reinforce in many young Black male students that there was little hope of attaining positive academic achievement" (Rhoden, 2017) .

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): A free application that students and/or their families fill out to qualify for college financial aid.

Group norms: A list of expectations that every individual in a group follows to ensure a space is friendly, equitable, safe, and inviting.

MassEdCo: A Massachusetts-based organization that provides career readiness and education services to low-income, marginalized and underrepresented youth, and adults throughout Massachusetts.

University Park Campus School (UPCS): A public high school located a few blocks away from Clark's campus.

University Park Partnership Scholarship: "Clark University has offered the University Park Partnership Scholarship to any eligible resident of Worcester who has lived in the University Park neighborhood for at least five years prior to enrolling at Clark. The scholarship provides free tuition for four years. Students must meet Clark's admissions guidelines and complete applications for federal and state scholarship grant programs. After any grants are awarded, Clark will make up the difference up to 100 percent tuition" (Clark University)

Introduction

College is daunting to many incoming first-year students regardless of their backgrounds and previous life experiences. For students who do not have support or knowledge about higher education from their parents/guardians, schools, and other resources, college can seem inaccessible. Not to mention the fact that society has a tendency to inaccurately portray college in movies, television, and to an extent, social media. To be successful at college, it can be helpful for students to get to know more about how colleges work, what resources are available to them, and learn about themselves in order to maintain their physical, mental, emotional, and academic wellbeing while transitioning into college. Learning about what to expect from college, and what

a college expects out of a first-year student is valuable information that many college students wished they had, including myself.

To assist with this process, Emily Dorsey, a fellow CYES cohort member, and I have created a College Knowledge workshop/program through the Clark Claremont College Connection (CCCC) program. In order to understand what Emily and I created, it helps to understand the background of Clark's programming with Claremont students to promote increased access to college. Based on the tradition of CSI, this program begins in the spring semester in junior year of the Claremont students' high school career. In this semester, Clark mentors work with the students to brainstorm their academic and career interests, create a list of colleges they are interested in applying to, brainstorm and start their college essays, and educate them about general college application and college life information as college students who went through the same process as these students. In the fall semester of the students' senior year, we work with them in a computer lab to create their resumes, college essays, supplemental essays, and apply to college. This program was originally called Collegiate Success Institute (CSI), funded by MassEdCo. and after the COVID-19 pandemic sent college students home in March 2020, the program lost funding/contact with CSI and became CCCC.

After the Spring 2021 semester of working with a group of Claremont seniors, Emily and I decided we wanted to offer a program about College Knowledge. We felt that because we were fully remote for the junior year semester, we lost a lot of time and ability to engage with the students who attended the sessions. This program was offered originally to Claremont and UPCS, seniors who intended on going to college in the Fall 2022 semester. However, the program ended up being offered to juniors and seniors at both schools because we wanted the

program to be open to a larger group of students. This caused Emily and me to change some of our program plans to accommodate the wide range of needs in the program.

This program consisted of a series of seven sessions (from January 25, 2022 through March 22, 2022) that worked to advise students planning on entering college. To accomplish this, Emily and I brought guests from multiple departments at Clark University to engage students about the resources and opportunities that will be available to them at the colleges they will be attending in the Fall semester of 2022 (because both juniors and seniors ended up enrolling in the program, we shifted our focus away from students specifically attending college in the Fall 2022 semester). The goal of having panels and members of the Clark community come to these sessions is so that students feel more confident and feel a sense of agency when they start college, and so that they will use these resources from the start of their college careers. Often, students, including myself, can feel intimidated by certain departments or resources that a school offers, and we hope that the students in this program understand what resources are available to them and take full advantage of them early on. We also discussed and reflected on topics of engagement (academic and extracurricular), academic life, and preparing for the first semester of college.

While this program ran, I collected data from consenting participants through surveys, written work, and field notes. This information is used to answer the following research questions:

1. How prepared/comfortable do these students feel about attending college in the Fall 2022 semester?
 - a. What are interesting noticings where this program has positively impacted/been successful for students?

2. How has this College Knowledge program helped or hindered these students' comfortability and confidence in themselves in starting college?

These questions aim to help me understand participants' feelings and perceptions of college before the program starts. They were designed to give me insight on what students are most concerned about which can help me cater the sessions to ease their concerns. Additionally, these questions were designed to help us understand how the program impacted the participants. We would be able to use this information to make changes in the curriculum and program in the future. This information would also be useful for me in future youth work settings where I might well be working with youth who are preparing to go to college.

In designing and implementing the program (engaging in theorized action and reflection), I had and still have several core aspirations; I hope that the students who participate feel more confident and comfortable about going to college. For myself, as an aspiring youth worker, I hope that I learn more about youth work and my style of "teaching" or interacting with youth. It is important to know how I interact and deal with certain situations and given the wide range of topics discussed in this program, I think I will learn a lot about myself in a youth work setting. I would also like to learn about what works well in this program that can be implemented in the following years for the same program or for other programs that I may take part in.

Positionality and Identity

In the College Knowledge program, I am an outsider. I am coming into a space where I do not know the students well and have not spent a lot of time at Claremont or UPCS to understand what their high school experience has been like. I have worked with Claremont students since my first year at Clark which may give me extra perspective (and maybe a bit of an insider

position); however, I do not believe that I know what it is like to truly be a Claremont or UPCS student.

I am also white and not a first-generation student like many of the students are in this program. My identities and where I grew up have given me the advantage to have the knowledge I needed for college applications (I have also gone through the college application process so I have knowledge from personal experience). I lived in a wealthy town where the resources at my public school were abundant for college applications and any life-after-college scenario. I also was lucky enough to have outside resources to tutor me for standardized tests and meet with a private college counselor who helped me investigate colleges that sparked my interest based on my passions. My college application process was vastly different from the college application process in this program because of the resources and knowledge I had access to (COVID-19 also differentiates my college application process from the “current” application process and requirements). I went into the college application process knowing what FAFSA, Common App, CSS Profile, safety, target, and reach schools are but most of the students in the CCCC program have never heard of those terms.

For most of the students in the CCCC programs, the CCCC mentors are one of their only resources (besides their school counselor and siblings) for all things college related. And most of the students who are eligible to participate in CCCC (they must be either a junior or senior in high school) are not in the program or may have not heard about it (even though they were all sent the information about the program multiple times). Although we have tried our best to spread the word about this program and offer support to whoever wants it, it is their decision to join the program—and students may not be able to make it to the sessions if they have extracurricular activities, jobs, or have to watch their family members at home after school.

Given this information, though I am an outsider, I have been using my resources and knowledge that I have gained from working with the Worcester Public Schools to recruit students. The connections I made over the years and my understanding of how students in the past have participated in this program was helpful information that insiders have more than outsiders.

It is made clear to the students that the program is run by Clark students which also may or may not be something that the students want to experience. Because of the insider/outsider dynamic that is built because of differing backgrounds and experiences, I can understand how that could be a factor that plays into the participation of the program. Clark also does not appeal to many Main South residents because of its role in gentrification which was made clear to us by one student in the group.

I am also older than them which can also create a power dynamic. Additionally, I am a co-researcher and co-designer of the College Knowledge program. Being labeled as such may also make the outsider label more present because of the nature of the title and how it holds power over the students being researched on.

Many Claremont and UPCS students do not even realize there is a possibility that they can apply and go to college because of the financial stress of tuition prices. They automatically assume that they cannot afford it and that it is not accessible to them. While college is extremely expensive, there are many ways to make the cost lower that many students do not realize (ex. University Park Partnership Scholarship). Using my positionality, privilege, and experience with mentoring, I hope to show students that college (any degree at any type of college) can be a feasible option for those who choose to continue their education past high school.

Applying to state schools, scholarships, and loans are all methods that can make college more affordable, and many students are never told this or given the resources/information to seek them

out. Although it is also important to inform them that some of these can cause financial setbacks in the future, they do make college more affordable in the moment. Having a program that shows students that they can apply, get accepted, and afford college can be incredibly empowering, helpful and be the deciding factor that allows students to consider applying to college if they choose to. With my understanding of how the program runs and knowledge of the college application process, I can help students gain a better sense of what they may want to pursue in the future and help them to the next step of achieving their goals through applying and attending college even with our differing identities. Being mindful of the insider/outsider dynamics that may be present is essential throughout the entire program (planning, reflecting, during the sessions).

Ethnographic Context

The CCCC program (formerly known as Collegiate Success Institute or CSI) is a college mentorship program run through Clark University. It works to help educate students in Main South and assist them with their college applications. I have been working with CCCC as a mentor since my first year at Clark. The first year, the program ran normally (in person at Clark and Claremont Academy) and the next year occurred over Intersession/winter break at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 over Zoom. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were not able to meet in person and the program was not supposed to run at all. We lost contact with Mass Ed Co who funded the program with Hannover Insurance but still wanted to continue the work they did, thus creating CCCC. The mentors agreed that we still wanted to offer the program for Claremont students because many of them had already signed up for the program before the pandemic forced school and work to go online. Unfortunately, there was no time to play games to educate students about how to apply to college because of the late start to the program. Most

of the Zoom meetings were one-on-one meetings with a Clark mentor and Claremont student. We thought that this would be most effective and helpful because college application deadlines were quickly approaching and there was very little extra time for the more entertaining and fun activities that we have done in the past.

In my first year of CSI/CCCC Claremont students would come to Clark twice a week in the spring semester of their junior year. This semester was dedicated to finding passions/major interests, creating a list of schools to apply to, and coming up with the personal essay/personal statement topic. The second semester took place in the fall of the students' senior year. This is when they would write their essays, resumes, and apply to college. As stated previously, in the Spring 2021 semester, the program ran remotely through Zoom. Emily Dorsey, Kelly O'Brien (another CYES student in our cohort), and I designed the program ourselves and we matched it mostly to the first CCCC/CSI session that ran our freshman year. We focused on team building/bonding, personal writing in preparation for their personal statements, and starting a list of schools to apply to. In the Fall 2021 semester, we hoped to have students write their essays (if it is not done in the summer), create their resumes, and apply to college and outside scholarships.

As stated earlier, we were working with current juniors at Claremont Academy. Because the students kept their cameras off throughout the Zoom sessions, we were unable to see them; however, in previous sessions, most participants were BIPOC individuals and are usually first-generation college students. Additionally, many students were born in other countries, and some are or have been undocumented. All the students speak English and although we do not know for sure, in previous years many students speak at least one other language. All students in the College Knowledge program attend Claremont Academy or UPCS and are Main South

residents. Most of them are BIPOC individuals, speak multiple languages, and some have been born outside of the United States.

In the Fall 2021 semester, the students were seniors at Claremont and we had three returning members and one new member, Student 1. All the students that came to our sessions are BIPOC individuals and some (if not all) speak multiple languages. When we met, students had time to work on whatever part of their applications that they would like to work on. We did not have a lot of structure for each session because each student had different needs and where they were in the application process varied significantly. We made ourselves available to them and were usually talking to them or helping them revise something so we saw the time we spent together in the sessions as productive. On Mondays, we met in Jonas Clark 105 (computer lab) and on Fridays we met in Jonas Clark 001.

After all of this, we are now starting the College Knowledge program. We had the help of a Claremont/UPCS guidance counselor to recruit students for the program. Emily and I also reached out to the students who attended the Fall 2021 CCCC program to invite them to the College Knowledge program. As stated earlier, this program will meet on Tuesdays directly after school until around four in the afternoon. Sometimes the meetings ended early, it depended on the session's activities and the level of engagement of the students in the program. We met in The Grind for the first few sessions but most sessions occurred in Jonas Clark 102.

Literature Review

In reviewing the literature on college accessibility, I wanted to understand more about how accessibility to college relates to the accessibility of college knowledge, trust, and school climate. Understanding how college is discussed (or not discussed) in school can help me understand how I can positively contribute to increasing accessibility of college knowledge. The

goal of this literature review is not to shame schools or teachers, but to look at how and why students believe college is inaccessible to them based off of the resources and information they are provided. This can give me a better understanding of the role I can play in the College Knowledge program.

Why is college knowledge necessary and why is it not more accessible?

In many urban and low socioeconomic status (SES) public schools, BIPOC students are not given the support they need to graduate let alone apply to college (Radcliffe & Bos, 2013, p. 136). These students are therefore in a position that makes it more difficult to apply to and attend college. Typically, those who do go to college are less likely to earn a degree because they were not given the information or resources needed to be prepared for college (Royster et al., 2015).

Additionally:

"First-generation [college] students demonstrated a 71% higher risk of dropping out during their first year than students with college-educated parents... For many first-generation college students, either the decision to attend college came too late in the process or students did not understand how to access supports to ensure academic readiness before applying or matriculating into college" (Royster et al., 2015, p. 210)

It is evident that first generation college students lack support and are more likely to drop out within their first year of college. Though this is because of a multitude of reasons, if these students had resources to better prepare them for college they may not be at as high of a risk to drop out. Preparation for college is vital to success in college and it has nothing to do with grades. The smartest student at their high school is still at risk of struggling and dropping out of college if they are not properly prepared. Without knowing the resources available to them to ensure academic, social, and emotional readiness, first-generation students may have a harder

time adjusting to college compared to their peers who are not first generation students. This concept is one of the driving factors that led Emily and I to design the College Knowledge program.

Studies show that, “less advantaged students may have difficulty completing the college application process due to a lack of college knowledge” which can be defined as “information, formal and informal, stated and unstated, necessary for both gaining admission to and navigating within the post-secondary system” (Holland, 2015, p.245). Generally, in more affluent settings, students gain college knowledge from their parents but in areas that are more urban and low SES, students rely on their schools to educate them (Holland, 2015,).

The issue with this is that in many low SES and urban public schools, there is not enough funding, resources, or time for many high schools to provide the support and information necessary to educate students on the college application process, college life, and expectations going into college. Holland explains, "schools clearly play an important role in helping students through the college application process, especially minority, low-income, and first-generation college students" (Holland, 2015, p. 246). So, there is evidence that schools play an essential role in helping low SES, BIPOC, and first-generation college students in getting them through the college application process yet they are frequently underperforming in the college readiness and education aspect of the high school education and experience. This is through no fault of their own, this is about the opportunities and resources that they should have been given but were not due to issues such as a lack of funding in school budgets.

Trust, Race, Relationships, and School Climate

When learning more about the lack of trust that many students in urban and low SES public high schools have, racism plays a large role in the absence of trust. Rhoden (2017) writes,

"schools in low-income areas serve a 'captured market,' meaning parents and students have no choice but to attend the local public school and receive whatever types of services they are given" and because of this, over time, a lack of trust in urban school districts has increased (p. 54). Many BIPOC students and families live in low SES areas and are therefore forced to attend underfunded and under-resourced school districts who are unable to properly prepare their students for college. With a lack of trust also comes a negative school climate "which is an inhibiting factor in college preparation" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 364). Frederiksen (2016) also explains, "the predominant hypothesis is that the socio-economic status associated with different levels of education leads to different types of experience that support either trust or mistrust" (p. 294-295) which further emphasizes the point that students in urban and low SES areas are less likely to trust their schools, school districts, and teachers.

It is evident that there is a lack of trust between students/families and the institution but there are also issues of trust between students and their teachers. It is common that many students do not feel safe, physically, and emotionally, in schools. Without feeling safe, learning and healthy development are not able to occur as well (Thapa et al., 2013). Additionally, Conner et al. (2014) explains, "students in under-resourced, urban schools often report poor student-teacher relationships and low levels of support" (p.25). Teacher support is vital in any school for a student to feel safe and learn as best as they can. Through teaching a class at Claremont Academy, here in Main South Worcester, Eric DeMeulenaere (2012) came to the conclusion that, "trust...is difficult to build and easy to lose" (DeMeulenaere, p. 34). Although teachers are not the only individuals who can build trust with students, they play an important role in the success of a student regardless of if they go to college or not. Frequently when there is

not institutional trust, the phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy can negatively affect the school performance of BIPOC students. Rhoden (2017) explains:

“The prevailing belief is that deficit-based thinking has hampered policymakers, educators and in many ways, Black males themselves, into believing their deficits were too significant to overcome and most importantly said criticisms were accurate.

Therefore, the belief is that a self-fulfilling prophecy helped reinforce in many young Black male students that there was little hope of attaining positive academic achievement” (p. 52)

In other words, if we continue to believe that the students and their own actions are the reason why they are doing poorly in school, they are going to believe it themselves and continue to do poorly rather than understanding the factors of their school system and world and how they contribute to the lack of academic success for many low SES students. Believing that students are not capable of certain things in school is extremely harmful. It can put a damper on motivation and cause students to work less hard in school. This can result in grades slipping, dropping out, or giving up on goals such as going to a certain college, getting a job they want, or achieving important goals. Shifting the focus away from students and onto the underlying factors of why many low SES students struggle academically can help move away from deficit-based thinking.

There are many suggestions on how to improve the relationships between students, teachers, and institutions. School climate reform is one way to “promote healthy relationships, school connectedness, and dropout prevention” (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 357). It also promotes mutual trust, respect, group cohesion and cooperative learning (Thapa et al., 2013). All of these can have a positive impact on academic achievement which can also promote college readiness

and education. Additionally, Rhoden explains that student voice is essential when building school culture. Treating students as responsible individuals shows them that their school and teachers trust them which also builds confidence and allows for the opportunity of mutual trust.

An essential component in school climate reform is earning and building trust between students, teachers, and institutions. DeMeulenaere created a framework that he used in a classroom at Claremont Academy. The six components of his framework for a trusting environment include the use of community rituals, the development of powerful shared experiences, risk taking on the part of teachers, the addressing of conflict, the teachers' alignment with students, and the grounding of the course's curriculum in students' realities (DeMeulenaere, 2012). DeMeulenaere also explains that he and his colleagues provided a space for students and teachers to develop trust by connecting with each other's humanity (DeMeulenaere, 2012). Creating a trusting environment gives students agency and confidence which can help them be more ready for college applications and college itself. Additionally, Moore (2009) explains the importance of emotional intelligence and handling emotions in teachers; they can use them to build trust and cooperation (Moore, 2009). Moore also writes, "school administrators that have high emotional intelligence will not only have stronger relationships with their colleagues, teachers, parents and students, but may be more effective in leading change and initiating school reform" (Moore, p. 26). Using emotional intelligence to promote stronger relationships can have lasting impacts on academic achievement in high school which can also carry onto academic performance in college. Additionally, mutual trust can allow students to be more confident in themselves and in college readiness programs, be able to be more prepared for college and successfully apply and get accepted.

Using trust building and school climate reform, schools will be better prepared for teaching their students about college and the application process. It is suggested that schools have a college culture where they introduce information about college and higher education opportunities in high school and early adolescence to help students consider college (Radcliffe & Bos). There are difficulties associated with implementing a college culture in schools because school counselors are usually the individuals in charge of helping students with college applications and education. According to Royster et al., the counselor to student ratio is about 450:1 so it is essential for "schools and district policymakers to consider other ways to support students, " in college applications and other higher education opportunities (Royster et al., 2015, p. 221). Because students cannot always rely on their parents for help with college applications and education, they must turn to their school and counselors for assistance even though their counselors are likely to be overloaded with work because of the high counselor to student ratio (Holland). Having frequent contact between counselors/teachers and students can increase the student's likelihood of attending college, especially in low-income students (Holland). Having educators and counselors be approachable and available to their students can also build trust (Rhoden). It is suggested that teachers and counselors become involved and invested in their students' lives outside of school (going to their sports games, coaching or hosting club meetings, etc.) (Rhoden). This shows students that their teachers care about them and are invested in their lives. This is also one way for teachers to humanize themselves and their students. Frequently, teachers are looked at as an authority figure but when they become more than that, it makes them approachable, and students will be more inclined to ask for help (in high school and college) in the classroom which will improve their academic performance (Rhoden, 2017).

Race, racism, and trust have an extremely complicated relationship. Given the nature of race relations in America (and throughout most of the world), trust between people in power, who are often white, and people who are not in power, mixed races and ethnicities, can sometimes be lacking. For instance, certain BIPOC individuals are more heavily policed in school because of their race. The individuals doing the policing are more likely to be white or do not share the same race as the students. Building trust while acknowledging (and acting on anti-racism actions and ideologies) race and racism is vital to having a safer and healthier school climate. This can promote better academic, emotional, and social responses within schools. Rhoden also explains how the rhetoric around Black males must be changed; instead of fixing them, teachers and school districts must focus on “how to fix the structures in which Black males reside” (Rhoden, 2017, p. 55). This also means that there must be mentorship and programs aimed at BIPOC students who may or may not also be first generation-college students (Rhoden, 2017). In these programs and in the classroom, it is essential to have teachers and mentors who have common backgrounds and racial-ethnic identities of the students because these teachers are more likely to perceive these student-teacher relationships in a more positive light (Maele & Houtte, 2011). Within these relationships, it is also recommended that “teachers focus on sending messages of general care and respect to all of their pupils,” rather than a select few students (Conner et al., 2014, p. 39). This can show students that they are all cared for by their teachers which can boost confidence and academic performance. Additionally, White teachers in schools that are composed of mostly BIPOC students must recognize that they cannot dismantle the institutionalized racism in which students experience but White teachers can become allies to their BIPOC students (DeMeulenaere, 2012). Showing unconditional support for students is vital in a trusting student-teacher relationship.

In order for college readiness and education to occur in low SES and urban public schools, there must be a trusting relationship between the student and teacher. Sharing information about personal lives and grades which may be included in the college application (personal statements, transcripts, etc.) can make students feel vulnerable and uncomfortable if they do not trust their teacher or mentor. It is also vital that the teacher population represents the student population, meaning that the teachers have similar backgrounds and racial/ethnic identities as their students. Not only does this help students trust their teachers and schools more, but it makes students understand that they are cared for and are represented in their school and school district.

Knowing all this information, the ideal college preparation program would encompass all these components to create a comfortable and safe environment and would give students all the information and resources they need to successfully apply to and attend college for students who want to pursue higher education. Regarding the College Knowledge program, finding ways to foster mutual trust and have an asset-based mindset is vital to the planning of the program. These core themes were considered in every session planned and carried out to the best of mine and Emily's abilities. We are by no means ending the inequity of the accessibility of college knowledge however, we hope the students in the program feel more comfortable with the idea of going to college.

Conceptual Framework

In this section, I aim to analyze the key themes and underlying concepts that helped shape my research questions and the College Knowledge program. This project aims to study confidence and comfortability (through survey responses) while getting acquainted with college life, applications, and preparing for the first semester. College can leave students quite vulnerable

as they are entering a new era of their life. They will be meeting new people, making new friends, creating lifelong career and friendly connections, and in a way, reinventing themselves. To get to that point, it may be beneficial for these students to learn about the resources they have access to and to build their confidence and comfortability now with their mentors and other students in the program so they can thrive throughout all of college. There is a lot of information in this program and some of it may be intimidating or cause stress for students. We hope that throughout this program, we can alleviate that stress and give helpful resources for academic and social success in college.

Additionally, it can be especially difficult for students to share their concerns and college stressors with their counselors or mentors if they do not share similar identities with them. There can be less understanding and empathy in relationships that do not consist of shared identities. On top of that, some college counselors, especially if they are not a part of the school district, are in an outsider position where they are usually not trusted by insiders. Distrust in insider-outsider relationships can accompany the lack of shared identities if the outsider has not had similar experiences to the insider. As I mentioned earlier in the Positionality and Identity section, I am an outsider to the students in the program. Although I have worked with many Worcester youth throughout my time at Clark, I will never fully know what it is like to be these students, thus, I can never be an insider to them. Because of the natural insider-outsider relationship the mentors and students have in this program, it is important to find ways that foster mutual trust.

In this program, as a mentor, I do not share common identities such as being a BIPOC individual, first-generation American or college student, not being born in America, being from a low-income and urban area such as Worcester, speaking multiple languages, etc. These shared identities can help build a layer of trust between mentors and mentees; however, if mentors, like

myself, do not share any of these identities, an initial layer of trust may not be there and can be difficult to acquire. This is what it means to be an outsider. I have very little knowledge of what it is like to go to school in Main South and what it is like to live here. Though I have lived here for multiple years and have learned a significant amount about education in school districts like Worcester, I did not have a similar upbringing as most College Knowledge mentees and therefore cannot relate to them as much as they could with a former Claremont Academy graduate who is a mentor in the College Knowledge program. This relates to my conceptual framework because it is vital to acknowledge the insider-outsider relationships that are inherent in this program. Recognizing this and doing what I can to make all parties feel welcome, comfortable, and included can encourage a healthy and safe environment.

Pedagogy of Trust

In Eric DeMulenaere's piece, *The Pedagogy of Trust*, he asks, "how do teachers with a critical awareness of their status within an oppressive educational system begin to *earn* the trust of their students?" (DeMeulenaere, 2012). This idea is something that I tried to remind myself of throughout the College Knowledge program. I wanted to be able to work with students in the program while also being aware of how they may be experiencing schooling in their educational system and how they may experience college. Frequently, college students who were very successful in their high schools which were in urban and low-income areas do not excel in college and are likely to struggle through college (Valedictorian Project). As stated before, this is not because the students are at fault, it is because they were not adequately prepared by their school districts to be successful in college. This is not the case for every student in this situation but is not uncommon. Although I will not be able to change the system in which creates and perpetuates these issues, I want to find a way to not actively contribute to it or at least to not

create a false sense of reality regarding expectations of college, without reifying stereotypes in the college context.

Countering Deficit-Based Thinking

Deficit-based thinking is a way of thinking (conscious or unconscious) that educators often use to think about problems with students, rather than choosing to see and value their potential. Deficit-based thinking is extremely problematic and should be something educators are more conscious of. In Sayani's *Deficit Thinking*, they use Valencia and Solórzano (2004) to explain:

Given the endogenous nature of deficit-thinking, systemic factors... are held blameless in explaining why some students fail in school. The popular 'at risk' construct, now entwined in educational circles, views poor and working-class children and their families (typically of color) as being predominantly responsible for school failure, while frequently holding structural inequality blameless (Valencia & Solórzano, 2004)

Throughout this research and the creation of the College Knowledge program, I was constantly thinking about how this program can come to fruition without deficit-based thinking. The students in this program are not at fault or to blame for their school or district performance. They are constantly putting in effort to succeed and their determination is very evident. The fact that these students took two hours out of their Tuesday afternoon to voluntarily learn about college and how to prepare for it speaks volumes about the determination and passion these students have for education. This program was not created because we think these students will fail without it, this program was created to further their knowledge of college and to attempt to provide resources that will make the college application process and actual enrollment in college slightly more equitable for students who may not have gotten the knowledge they wanted or

needed from their school districts. We believe in the potential for great success in these students, all we are trying to do is to equip them with the knowledge and opportunities to reach their goals in college.

Recruitment and Participants

Student Make-Up



**WORK WITH CLARK STUDENTS ON
BUILDING SKILLS FOR COLLEGE!**

- COLLEGE 101
- ACADEMIC SUCCESS
- ENGAGEMENT
- WELLNESS
- WHAT TO EXPECT
- SELECTING COLLEGE COURSES
- FIGURING OUT CAREER AND ACADEMIC INTERESTS
- HELPFUL RESOURCES COLLEGES PROVIDE



Image 1. A flier the guidance counselor sent out to students during the recruitment process.

The recruitment process was done with the help of a guidance counselor that works at Claremont Academy and UPCS. She sent out flyers (Image 1), emails, and announcements about the program and was the liaison between the schools and Clark/Emily and I. As stated previously, after recruitment, there were ten students who signed up (the eleventh student came with the large group of friends later on in the sessions). Two of those students never attended any of the sessions/did not communicate if they wanted to be a part of the program, one dropped out, and one student, Student 1, got a job in the middle of our sessions and could no longer attend the meetings. The data I will be analyzing are mostly from Student 3 and Student 8. I will be discussing the success of Student 1 as well. I provide extended portraits of each of them:

Student 1: He has been a part of CCCC/College Knowledge since October 2021 (Fall 2021 semester). We invited him to the College Knowledge sessions to continue to prepare him for college. He is a senior at Claremont Academy and he has been academically involved with Clark University since his sophomore year when he was in a research math class that Sarah Michaels, our research advisor, and Emily observed. In the Fall 2021 semester, Emily and I ran CCCC in a computer lab and we helped Student 1 with his application. We read and revised his essays and showed him how to create his Common App account. Student 1 is an eager student who's dream school is Clark University. He speaks at least two languages, including English, and is a BIPOC individual. Student 1 is not part of a friend group on College Knowledge, he usually sat alone or with Emily and I. Towards the middle and end of the sessions, Student 1 got a job and was unable to come to the rest of the sessions, but we kept in contact with him to make sure he had the support he needed with his applications and college decisions.

Student 3: She signed up for College Knowledge in the Spring 2022 semester, is a junior from Claremont Academy. I knew her from a previous research class that Emily (she took the class a year earlier and met Student 1 in the class) and I took. Sarah teaches this course every year and because I took it a year after Emily, the course was on Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic so I was unable to get to know the students well. She participated more than many of her peers in her math class and in College Knowledge. She is also a BIPOC individual and speaks at least two languages including English. She was in the large friend group mentioned earlier.

Student 8: She signed up for College Knowledge in the Spring of 2022 and is a junior from Claremont Academy. She was friends with and would arrive with her friend, Student 5, but would also come to the sessions alone if he did not attend a session. Student 8 also participated frequently in the sessions she attended. She speaks at least two languages, including English, and is a BIPOC individual.

Participation

Participation in this program was necessary for Emily and I to understand how students were understanding the material we presented to them each session. We would ask questions about the content we were learning throughout the sessions, would leave time for their own questions, and would ask students to write responses and take surveys to show their understanding (or lack of understanding) of the material. We also left spaces on the written work and surveys for feedback, suggestions, and what they want to learn more about.

Every week, I would send a text message (usually a message in our group chat) reminding students about the upcoming session and would ask them to let us know if they would not be attending a session so we could prepare for how many students would come. Students 1, 3, and 8 (along with Student 5, but I am not focusing on his responses) regularly attended as

many sessions as they could and usually notified me or Emily when they were not able to attend a session.

As I mentioned earlier, sometimes when certain students in the large friend group (Student 3 was a part of this group) would not come to a session, the whole friend group would not attend. As a result, the sizes of our groups were often smaller than expected. Although this is not necessarily a bad thing, I found it frustrating and often felt defeated. I frequently wondered if the sessions were boring, not engaging enough, or if there was something I could be doing better to make the students more engaged and excited to come to the sessions. Although they were not always enthusiastic, most of their feedback was positive which you will read later on. For the duration of the program (January-March 2022), most students continued to attend the sessions fairly regularly. So, even though their participation was not always high, they attended many sessions indicating that they wanted to continue coming back to learn more.

Methodology

Research Approach/Tradition

I am using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to this project. By PAR, I mean emphasizing participation of the research subjects, the students, in my project. PAR is about including the affected communities in the research and seeks to understand something while simultaneously making a change/impact within the community (McIntyre, 2007). I am using this approach because I believe that encompassing both research and change is essential to the goals that Emily and I have for the College Knowledge program. Because I essentially am focusing on how to make this program more effective for future use, it is imperative that I include the participation of students in the research so I can use the information they provide as

feedback. I can then come up with a concrete list of suggested improvements for the next time this program runs.

I will be taking a criticalist approach and viewpoint on the research that is conducted. This lens focuses on the context of situations, rather than individuals (Merriam, 2002). It also focuses on race, gender, and class and how they interact and intersect with the issue at hand (Merriam, 2002). This can help give me context to the way students participate in the program. Additionally, asking questions about the students' perspectives and perceptions about college, and what they want to get out of the program can help me better understand how to best structure the program for the benefit of the students participating in the program. It also allows me to see what activities the students thought supported them the most and least. Using the criticalist lens, I will be asking myself questions about what and how certain aspects of the program can be changed for a more equitable and socially just space. I chose to focus on both lenses because I believe they best allow for a mindset of change while simultaneously conducting research. In other words, these approaches force me to ask questions that aim to instill change and require participant feedback to improve the program.

Data Sources and Data Collection

The data collected in this project are Google Form surveys and exit tickets and writing samples from "quick write" activities. Data will only be collected from consenting participants of the program. The surveys and writing activities were given to every consenting and non-consenting student in the program. The information from the non-consenting students is for feedback purposes only, and responses will not be analyzed or used in this paper. Not only is this to ensure that students do not feel left out, but it gives students the chance to give their honest opinions about the program and activities throughout the sessions. This will not be used for

research purposes since non-consenting and consenting students will be filling out the same survey.

Data Analysis Approaches

The data that we collect connects to our conceptual framework because it allows us to ask questions and analyze responses and session content surrounding comfortability and confidence about college throughout the program. Themes of comfortability and appreciation come up in the data which may be related to trust and a safe environment created in the sessions. Emily and I also approached the construction of the program and planning of sessions considering the harm of a deficit-based mindset. As mentioned earlier, our approach to this program was not that the students will fail out of college because they are not prepared (because that is untrue), our approach was that we would like to create a program that shows students the resources colleges have to support their students and teach them more about the college applications so that they feel more comfortable attending college. It also gives us insight into how the students felt about the program. The surveys and quick write activities specifically will help mentors understand how they can better accommodate the students and make the program as helpful and useful as possible. Lastly, they can help us better understand the college knowledge that the students do and do not have about certain topics related to college knowledge and the curriculum that Emily and I have developed. This will allow us to plan lessons that are most useful for the mentees. Having input from participants about different concepts is vital for the success of the program this year but also in future years as more changes can be implemented.

Our Curriculum as Our Theory of Change

This program serves to help educate participating students about what they can expect in college. It is designed to cover multiple aspects of college life such as navigating academics,

social life, wellness, engagement, and the resources that colleges offer their students. My intention with this program is that these students will feel less overwhelmed about starting college and a new chapter of their lives and thus, feeling confidence in themselves for their own academic, career, and social success. The media can warp peoples' visions of college and although some students may feel that their experience of college is similar to how it is portrayed in television, movies, and on social media, this is usually not the case. This program intended to show the students resources that they may want or need to use throughout their college experience to enhance their experience.

The program shifted away from just preparing for the first semester of college to focusing more on education on college applications and a general idea of what college is really like—along with the resources colleges can offer. This is because we expected mostly seniors to sign up; however, a majority of the students were juniors so we wanted to make the program applicable to all students. We outlined sessions dedicated to learning about college, open conversations, and inviting staff and faculty members (along with various student representatives) from Clark University in different departments to explain their roles and resources on campus. We planned to have open discussions about various questions that arise from the students.

An example of this may be a student asking about how they can afford to go to college. Often, many students do not know that they can apply for financial aid (FAFSA, CSS Profile) or appeal for more through their schools. Because Emily and I are not experts on financial aid and how students can make college more affordable, someone who works in a college's financial aid office would be better equipped to have a conversation regarding paying for college. Emily and I view this program as “what do we wish we knew when we started college?” Asking ourselves

this question can give us a sense of what would be helpful for the students in the program.

Overall, my goal with this program was for the students to leave with their questions about college answered and that they feel more comfortable and confident about starting college.

The curriculum we set off to follow is split into four sections: College 101, Academic and Life, Engagement, and Wellness. These units are meant to organize common themes and experiences that college students experience in their everyday lives. Each unit leaves room for questions dedicated to various topics on the themes. This gives students agency to ask whatever questions they have. Emily and I also made sure we had input from students about what they want to learn more about to cater to their needs and preferences.

Below is an outline of our proposed curriculum. The writing in red are explanations about why we put certain topics and opportunities in the curriculum.

Unit 1: College 101

January 25th

- *Your* college journey
 - >not linear
 - >no right or wrong path
 - >our journeys at Clark and how it different than expected and has changed
 - >exploration, getting connected, networking, and reflect
 - >setting yourself up for who *you* want to be and what you want to stand for
- Circles of multidimensional self activity
- Common College terms
- Clark student panel
 - Housing
 - Courses
 - Academics
 - Being 1st generation, student of color, and or experiences as a Clark student
 - Having perspectives that are similar and relatable to incoming college students from Claremont is essential to make their perspectives be heard and communicated. Emily and I do not share the exact same identities as the students that we are working with, so it is essential to have voices in the program that more accurately represent the students participating. This also may make students more comfortable when participating; they have someone who looks like them and comes from a similar background as them. This student would also hopefully be an alumnus of a Worcester

Public School making the experience even more relatable to the students in the College Knowledge program.

- Transitioning to college
- Involvement
- General advice
- What they would like to hear about
 - Get to know each other
 - It is vital for this group of students and mentors to feel comfortable around each other. If they are not comfortable in the space we have created, they will likely not feel comfortable asking the questions that they have, which defeats the purpose of the program.

February 1st

- Understanding realities of higher education
- Agency in *your* education
 - College is more reliant on the students' choices. Students have more agency over their academics than in high school and it is important to highlight that and explain how to use agency to their advantage.
- CYES professor speaker—Jie Park? (does work with ACE program)
 - Students positions as students
 - Students rights from professors
 - Advice for students
 - Ways to make college work for them
 - Having a professor who has worked with or currently works with first generation college students and students of color can help students feel less alone at college and can also give them information and advice that Emily or I may not be equipped to give these students.
- After panel, reflection time through discussions and written work/surveys

Unit 2: Academic and Life

February 8th

Learning more about how to navigate academics at college and different ways students are successful in college can be inspiring to students and can give them ideas on how to prepare and start their academic life at college.

- Navigating college academics
- Academic success plan
- Study skills and work habits
- Defeating procrastination
- Speaker from academic advising, tutoring, and or writing center?

February 15th

Money and paying for college can be a large stressor for students who are starting college. Having someone/multiple people from the financial aid office at Clark (and maybe student workers?) explain how to afford college can be relieving and save time and stress related to finances. There are many options and lanes to pay for college and it can be helpful for students to see all of their options.

- Financial aid
- Finances

- Jobs on and off campus
- Forms students will likely need
- Speaker from financial aid
- After panel, reflection time through discussions and written work/surveys

Unit 3: Engagement

March 1st

- Clubs and involvement on campuses--invite a panel of student representatives from some of the clubs listed below--at least one from each section that clark outlines on this website: <https://www.clarku.edu/life-at-clark/student-clubs-and-organizations/>
 - Arts and Performance
 - Hip Hop/ADDA/DS/Variant/Salsa Encienda, Counterpoints, Radio of Clark University
 - Community Service
 - Clarkies for Kindness, Clark University Rapid Response, FIRM--Rory and Kaila, MFOL, AKOG
 - Culture and Diversity
 - BSU, Prism, Asian Cultures Society
 - “Fun” clubs
 - yoga, outdoor/frisbee, Beekeepers of CU

After panel, reflection time through discussions and written work/surveys

Engagement and student clubs are ways for students to explore their passions and multiple identities. Showing examples of what colleges may have on their campuses can inspire and excite students to find new passions or continue with old ones.

March 15th

- Second half of clubs and panels:
 - Professional and Academic
 - MUN, Women in STEM
 - Leadership and Governance
 - STAND, Amnesty International
 - Politics and Activism
 - Clark Undergraduate Student Council

After panel, reflection time through discussions and written work/surveys

March 22nd

Unit 4: Wellness

Wellness is something that is discussed less frequently when entering college. There are resources for students at every college but they are frequently inaccessible or are not discussed in a way that makes them accessible. Discussing opportunities that colleges have that are related to wellness can make students feel comfortable with the idea that their wellness is essential to their academic success. Showing different ways to achieve and strive for wellness can be useful for students; they can think about and try different methods to see what works for them the best.

- Defining self-care and the importance
- Time management strategies

- Balancing school, new friends/life, and mental health
- Create a wellness and success plan
 - What do the students currently do to maintain their mental and physical wellbeing? What can they continue to implement in their college lives? What strategies do they want to try in college? HS promoting wellness?
- CPG guest speaker
 - Clark U Peer Support Workers
 - Someone from CPG (counselor or a rep)
- After panel, reflection time through discussions and written work/surveys

March 29th

Student resources

This session is used to wrap up questions that students still have. Emily and I will be keeping track of the students' needs and questions that have gone unanswered to hopefully give them one more opportunity to have their questions and voices heard.

- Invite reps to discuss student resources, questions that Emily and I are unable to answer
 - Academic advising, career center, engagement office, financial aid (again?)
- After panel, reflection time through discussions and written work/surveys

April 5th

Closing session

- Reflection time
 - What have they learned?
 - What was helpful/not helpful?
 - What would you change?
 - Are you satisfied with the information you learned?
 - How can we continue to support you this summer and in the fall as you start college? Would you like our continued support then?

We want to provide a space for students to give their honest feedback about this program and give them agency to explain what they liked and disliked. This can help Emily and I learn about how we can improve this program for future use and to also use the feedback to implement into our own lives in the future as youth workers. We also hope that we will hear about students feeling more comfortable and confident in themselves for the start of their college journey.

*WPS Break 2/21-2/25

*Clark Break 3/7-3/11

When Planning, What went Awry and What did we Learn?

In this section, I will be describing the changes to the program and curriculum since the Fall 2021 semester going into the Spring 2022 semester, where the research took place. I then discuss attendance, participation, overall adjustments to the program before discussing the data I am analyzing. These segments before the data analysis were created to give more context about the

students involved in the research and the group dynamics within the sessions in the hope that the reader has more perspective on the data and how it was interpreted. Because so much of the program has changed between the Fall 2021 semester and Spring 2022 semester, it may be helpful to understand those changes and the way students responded to the individual sessions and program as a whole.

Adjustments from the Fall 2021 semester and future planning

Since Emily and I created the curriculum from the previous semester, it was adjusted as we started the program and during the duration of it. This was necessary because of scheduling conflicts with invited guests and other factors such as student feedback, participation/interest, and attendance. A few students never showed up to the sessions/never communicated back to us, one dropped out of the program (they are a nonconsenting student, so I am unable to discuss anything about their reasoning for leaving), some students had jobs they started (e.g., Student 1, his story comes later), and some students had other commitments that forced them to miss multiple sessions.

From the curriculum from last semester, it is clear that Emily and I had a lot of information to get through quickly, meaning we would only be able to cover the basics of the topics we had planned. Emily and I also decided to end the workshop a few weeks earlier than scheduled. This was because we were incredibly overwhelmed and exhausted with the amount of work we had to do for our thesis and for finalizing the last details of each remaining session. I also felt extremely burned out, I had too many commitments and not enough time to dedicate to everything. Because of this, I suffered; I was extremely stressed, and felt like I did not have enough time to get everything done in time, including this thesis. I also did not want to plan

sessions that I was not confident in or did not spend enough time planning because it would not be a useful time for the students who attended the sessions.

It was not ideal to end the program early and Emily and I ended up skipping over the entire wellness unit. Although wellness is extremely important in college, we had to take our own wellbeing into our own hands. I wish we were able to keep the wellness unit in the program, it could have been extremely useful; however, Rhya, a rising CYES senior, is planning on taking over the program for her Praxis Project. Emily and I are planning on giving her all the materials we used which will include any information and plans we had for the wellness unit. She is also planning on reaching out to the students who will be seniors (juniors in the current program) for her recruitment process. Hopefully the returning students will be able to learn the information that Emily and I were not able to provide.

Attendance

We did not plan or expect so many students to be absent in our sessions. Initially, eleven students signed up for the College Knowledge program but in some sessions, only two or three students attended the sessions. In nearly every session, perfect attendance of the remaining groups of students who would regularly come to the sessions was rare. Along with these students having multiple commitments, there were clear friend groups that were formed going into the program. Student 3, who you will learn more about later, was part of a large friend group consisting of five students. Student 8 was friends with one other student. So, usually when one or two members of the friend group notified us that they would not be attending a session, it was generally expected that none of the students in that group would come. This made it extremely difficult for Emily and I to adjust our sessions so that students could catch up on the information they missed. Although we were not responsible for whatever information a student missed out

on, I personally (and Emily did too) felt like I was obligated to catch the student(s) up from the week prior and ensure that they have all the resources that their peers had. Again, their attendance was not Emily's or my responsibility however, I felt like they would be missing out on vital information that would be helpful for their application process/their college knowledge.

How did the curriculum actually change?

Along with cutting out the Wellness unit, we condensed the engagement unit into one session. When revising our curriculum over the winter break and first week of the Spring 2022 semester, we kept the general structure and topics of the first two units the same. We saw these units as essential information for students going to college. The information that we presented throughout the sessions is all information that Emily and I wish we had learned and also taught in CSI which students explained was helpful. After the engagement session, we used the last few weeks to wrap up and give a recap of information along with a session dedicated to the college application process. We included handouts such as a good resume (Image 2 in Appendix) (a "bad" example resume was projected onto the screen but was not handed out), a timeline for the application process (Image 3 in Appendix), and differences between high school and college (Image 4 in Appendix). All of these resources serve either as models (resume) for the students or as guidelines for their college applications. The students had expressed not knowing when they should have parts of their application done so to help ease their anxiety, we provided them with a suggested guideline. The timeline and differences between high school documents were provided by Andrea Allen. This document serves to show students about the independence that comes with college but also the extra responsibility as a result of the independence. All of these documents were brought to the next session to give to students who were unable to attend. The last session on March 22 was dedicated to answering any lingering questions, handing out gift

cards to students who expressed they would be at the meeting (only four students responded to my multiple text messages and more than four students attended the session), and filling out a Google Survey with general and overall thoughts. This brief overview of the College Knowledge program and its modifications serves to illustrate a more clear picture of the program.

Findings

Below is the data in which I am analyzing. Not every question and response from every survey and written activity is listed in this. If only one of the two students' responses are listed, the other student was absent for the session. The responses in the tables are exactly what the students wrote and if they were handwritten, they were transcribed onto the computer. The information presented in this section is introduced in chronological order. This is because it can show the progression of the suggestions and “wants” from students, Emily and I trying to provide the information that will answer these questions in later sessions, and then the students' responses to that new information.

Each subsection is structured in the same format. It starts with the date, then explains the topic(s)/themes of the session, then lists the form of data (survey, Google Form, etc.). Each table lists the students that participated in the research for that day (each consenting student who was present participated in every survey/Google Form. Certain questions from the surveys/Google Forms have been selected to analyze along with the students' answers which are also in the table. Not every session that uses a survey/Google Form is included in this section. Under the table is my analysis of the students' answers. The table comes before the analysis so readers are able to think about and understand the responses without my thinking influencing theirs.

January 25: Introduction to College Knowledge program, survey

	Is there anything that you are curious about to learn	Biggest concerns about the college process?
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	about regarding the college application, transitioning to college, or anything else?	
Student 8	How to apply to college	Grants

In the question asking what students would like to learn, I found it interesting that Student 8 wrote about wanting to learn how to apply to college. This program was initially designed for seniors who have already applied to college and was then modified to fit the needs of mostly juniors and two seniors. On the flier, Image 1, college applications were not mentioned, only subjects about getting ready for college and navigating college were mentioned. Looking at Research Question 1, it can be modified to leave out the Fall 2022 semester section so it asks about students' overall feelings of preparedness about college. For juniors in the program, they are focusing more on preparedness for their applications. Considering this information, Student 8 does not have a good understanding on how to apply to college, as stated above. This is something Emily and I were not planning on discussing in the sessions. There is nothing about college applications on the curriculum we wrote in the Fall 2021 semester so we adapted to meet her needs and the needs of the other students who wanted more support in applying to college. As the sessions go on, we will be able to analyze the progression of both students' comfortability in applying to college and about college in general.

I also am interested in why she is most concerned about grants. Many students are worried about affording college because they were never taught anything about financial aid and FAFSA. Throughout the years in CSI/CCCC/College Knowledge, a majority of the students have not learned that financial aid exists and makes it possible to afford college at the moment. Student 8 knows that grants exist but this may have been all she knew about affording college.

Thinking back to the literature review, it is unsurprising that students in this program do not feel well prepared to apply to (or even go) to college. Their school and other schools similar

to theirs are not able to provide the information and resources necessary for students to feel well informed and comfortable with going to college. Students must resort to other methods to learn about college and the college applications. They can do this from older siblings/friends/family, programs like College Knowledge, or with the help of the internet. Unfortunately, not every student has access to some (or all) of these methods which can make it even more difficult to become prepared for college and the college applications. The students in the College Knowledge program were able to find a resource that helped them learn more about all things related to college and hopefully more programs like this one are offered throughout the country.

February 1: College vocabulary/fly swatter game, written reflection

	Did you learn any new terms? If so, which ones?	Does having this list of terms make you more comfortable or less comfortable about applying to college? Please explain why.
Student 3	Yes I learned study Abroad and dual enrollment	More comfortable because i won't look stupid also, Note that I will participate but do not like to be called on
Student 8	Yes I did learn new thing like FAFSA	It makes me more knowledgeable to know what it is but not comfortable to apply for college

On this day, we played a classic CSI/CCCC/College Knowledge game which happens to be a fan favorite. We call it the fly swatter game, although we did not have fly swatters this year. For this game, two sets of the same vocabulary words are written on the white boards. The groups of students divide into two teams and create lines going to the white board. The students in the front of each line hold a fly swatter and are read a definition of a word on the board. They must find the correct word that matches the definition and hit it with their fly swatter. The group that swats the correct word first wins the point. At the end of the game, we go through each definition and make sure students understand the correct answers.

Both Student 3 and Student 8 learned new terms that are essential to understanding college and the application process. Student 3 also expressed comfortability in knowing more terms about college. Her comment about not looking stupid seems to be related to confidence and self-esteem which makes me wonder if her peers know more about college applications than her. All of the students in the program were at a similar level of understanding for college terms and college knowledge when they entered the program so there must be other peers/individuals/factors that make her feel insecure about how little she thinks she knows about college and the application process. Regardless of where she got the notion that she is stupid for not knowing this information, her not knowing this information is not her fault. She has internalized a deficit mindset and blames herself for not knowing college application and college knowledge terms; however, she has likely not been given the resources to learn all of this information like many schools should provide.

Student 3 and another student, Student 4, also wrote that they were not comfortable being called on. After the fly swatter game, when we read out definitions, we asked students to tell us the answer and after a few questions, they stopped answering. An MAT student who came to a few of our sessions cold called a student and they responded well so I began to cold call the students when needed. It is clear that they did not like it and were not comfortable with me calling on them. After I read their responses, I stopped cold calling. While it was effective, it made students uncomfortable, and I never wanted or intended to make any student feel this way. As I mentioned earlier, it was difficult to have students participate in the sessions and a quick and easy solution in my opinion was to cold call students. I never found another method to get students to participate more and stay more engaged; however, I did not want to risk losing the student's trust or interest in the program for the sake of verbal participation. As I discussed in my

literature review, having a safe and welcoming environment for the students is extremely important for the effectiveness of the program. While cold calling may not be the best way to create the desired environment, finding more comfortable methods to get students to participate can contribute to a better climate in the sessions and can encourage participation in the future.

Student 8 also explained how she feels more knowledgeable with the new terms that she has learned which can also help with comfortability and confidence relating to starting college and the application process. This idea references Research Question 2, the program has given the students an opportunity to learn, feel more confident, and comfortable with the idea of going to college and applying to college through a simple game. Overall, the general feedback from the entire group about the February 1 session and game was positive (and was brought up in the March 22 Google Survey responses by multiple students as well). This game appeared to be a fun introduction to all things related to college without being too overwhelming which was something Emily and I feared. Especially because we had so much information to cover in such a short amount of time, it was helpful to have activities that made something feel less daunting.

Though this game was successful in introducing students to the idea of college, the internalized deficit mindset of Student 3 makes me wonder if other students in the program felt as she did (in the moment or throughout different sessions). I wonder what it would have been like if we had a conversation about these feelings and how to avoid them. As I mentioned before, it is not the student's or their families' faults for not educating them about college. Their schools/school systems should be able to provide the necessary information for any student who is interested in college. However, at least one of the students in this session (and how many other students in similar situations as Student 3?) felt that she looked stupid for not knowing certain vocabulary words that were not provided to her through school. The objective of this game is not

to shame students, it is to introduce them to a new set of words that will help them learn about what they want out of college. Although I do not think that this game made students feel shameful, I think that it can be stressful for some students especially if there has not been a trusting/safe environment created.

1. What is a college entrance exam that students generally take during their junior and/or senior year?
 2. How many colleges should a student have on their list by the end of their junior year?
 3. What is it called when you meet privately with an admission representative?
 4. What is a 4-year degree called?
 5. What is a 2-year degree earned at a community college?
 6. What is the most important document you send to a college admission office?
 7. What is the government form that must be completed in order to be eligible for grants, loans and scholarships?
 8. How is the college year usually divided?
 9. What is the average of a student's semester or end of term grades, starting with their freshman year?
 10. What is the money paid to attend college called?
 11. Where do students live on campus?
 12. What is money students can borrow to go to college?
 13. What is a four-year institution of higher education with a focus on various programs of study that lead to a bachelor's degree?
 14. What is a 2-year college?
 15. What is a 4-year college?
 16. What type of paper do you write when applying to college or for scholarships?
 17. What is a document that shows your grades and GPA?
 18. What are the letters called that you get from teachers or guidance counselor for your college application?
 19. What is the name of the area you want to study the most?
 20. What is the land on which a college is built?
 21. What is a high school student taking classes that count toward both HS and College credits?
 22. What document that you send to a college admissions office is written by you and could set you apart from other students?
 23. What is a service that is offered to students who would like extra help with schoolwork or study skills?
 24. When should you take SATs or ACTs?
 25. What type of financial assistance is considered "FREE MONEY"?
 26. What is it called when a student has an opportunity to spend a semester in another country?
 27. Who are the best people to talk to about an experience at a college?
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- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. ACT/SAT | 10. Tuition | 19. Major |
| 2. 10-12 | 11. Dorm | 20. Campus |
| 3. Interview | 12. Student Loan | 21. Dual Enrollment |
| 4. Bachelors | 13. Liberal Arts College | 22. Essay |
| 5. Associates | 14. Community College | 23. Tutoring Service |
| 6. Transcript | 15. College or University | 24. Junior Year |
| 7. FAFSA | 16. Essay | 25. Scholarships |
| 8. Semester or Quarters | 17. Transcript | 26. Study Abroad |
| 9. GPA | 18. Recommendation | 27. Students enrolled |

Image 5. Fly swatter game definitions and questions

This image is the document we used for the words and definitions in the fly swatter game. All the vocabulary in this game is standard vernacular in a college student's life and for many graduating high school students who have applied and are going to college. This document

serves to give the reader a clearer understanding of the vocabulary that was in the game. Words like FAFSA and Dual Enrollment were not as well known as words like Major and Dorm.

February 8: Financial aid basics, closing written reflection

	What first comes to mind when you think of financial aid?	Prior to today’s session, what did you believe to be true about financial aid? What prior information did you know?	After the session, do you feel you gained more knowledge, understanding, comfortability, etc. around financial aid? If so, what did you take away?	When thinking about financial aid what questions do you still have?	What can we do to help you with moving forward
Student 8	Help to get free money	I didn’t know it gave you all that information	Yes, I feel like I know more and I’m more comfortable with the idea of college	Do we pay them a little	Fake application <i>(line break)</i> Looking up college based on what we wanna do.

On February 8, we were in The Grind so we did not have access to a projector. Emily created a list of important definitions and themes related to financial aid. It was on a slideshow that she made so we used her computer to look at the lists and then later sent the slideshow out to our group chat. Additionally, Emily and I made it clear to the students that we were not experts in FAFSA and anything related to financial aid. If they had specific questions, we encouraged them to go to their guidance counselors who are more equipped to handle that information. We were using this session as an introduction to financial aid and anything related to paying for college. We discussed scholarships, grants, loans (subsidized and unsubsidized), FAFSA, CSS profile, etc.

Although the room set up was not ideal, we made do with what we had. After the session, we asked students a series of questions (table above). Student 8’s response to “What first comes

to mind when you think of financial aid?” and “When thinking about financial aid what questions do you still have?” were particularly interesting because it seemed like although she learned more about affording college and stated that she is “more comfortable with the idea of college,” she still seems to be struggling to fully understand how exactly financial aid works. The free money may have been a response to wanting to find scholarships to apply to because we mentioned them and in a later session (March 15) discussed where to find them in more detail.

Student 8’s responses directly relate to Research Question 1 and Research Question 2, touching on topics of comfortability, confidence, and overall general feelings regarding college in the future. She discusses feeling like she knows more (about financial aid or college? Both? It is unclear in her response) and is more comfortable with the general idea of college which leads me to believe that this financial aid lesson was informative and helpful.

Affording college is usually a large concern for many students who attend the CSI/CCCC/College Knowledge sessions. Having a whole day dedicated to the basics of financial aid and general ways people are able to pay for college is something that Emily and I wanted to include in the sessions because we understand how affording college can be stressful. Throughout my years working with this program, many students explain that they automatically assume they cannot go to college because of how expensive tuition is. After explaining scholarships, grants, loans, payment plans, etc., students begin to realize that there are ways to afford college. If more students understood that the tuition price at a college they want to attend is likely not what they would be paying (at least, not all at once), I wonder how many more students would be interested in applying to college and filling out the applications.

March 15: College application introduction, opening questions, written reflection

	What questions do you have about applying to college?	(#3) What do you hope to learn in today’s session?
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Student 8	How can I know exactly what I'm paying	how to apply for schools
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Before we started our session, we asked the students questions about what they want to know about applying to college. Student 8 mentioned that she wanted to know exactly what she would pay when going to college. Looking at my field notes from the financial aid session, February 8, she asked questions about payment plans and loans. She is still curious and wanting to know more information about affording college which is perfectly reasonable considering how expensive it is. It is interesting that she wrote about it after the financial aid session because that is something we would have covered then. She could have forgotten, not heard us, or we also may not have mentioned what it takes to find out how much a student must pay to go to college. At some point in the program (it is not in my field notes but I remember discussing it) we talked about how after students are accepted to a college, they will get a financial aid package that will tell them how much money they would have to pay to attend said school. This is something that we could have made more clear and repeated in multiple sessions.

In Student 8's other response in the opening questions, she writes that she wants to learn more about how to apply to schools. Luckily, that is exactly what we had planned to discuss that session. As mentioned in the February 8 session analysis, it is vital for non-college students to learn that college can be affordable in a variety of ways. Making the information about financial aid and paying for college accessible is essential information for people interested in attending college.

March 15: College application introduction, closing questions, written reflection

	What did you learn about college applications today? Please write at least 2 sentences.	Did this make you feel more relaxed or stressed about applying to college?	Did any of your questions from #3 (March 15 opening questions) on the other paper get answered? Which ones got answered
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			and what were the answers?
Student 8	Yes but i would like to actually try and apply	relaxed knowing how things go in order	Yes and no but I wont know that until I apply

This session was dedicated to learning about college applications. Within the two hours that we had, Rhya, Emily, and I went over the process of applying to college, the resources necessary (recommendations, personal statements, etc.) along with the vocabulary used (safety schools, target schools, reach schools, Common App, resume, etc.) to give a brief introduction to the college application process. We also included a timeline of when the juniors should be getting certain tasks done (Image 3), a list of general differences between high school and college (Image 4), a sample of a good resume (Image 2), and projected a sample of a bad resume that should not be used for their applications.

Student 8's response to the question, "Did this make you feel more relaxed or stressed about applying to college?" indicates that she felt more comfortable about applying to college now that she knows the order of the application process. Her response from the March 15 opening question (#3), "how to apply to schools" was answered throughout the entirety of the session. The College Knowledge program seems to be helping Student 8 with her comfortability and confidence with college in general but especially with college applications. It has been a common theme that she keeps coming back to throughout her written and survey responses and she was able to get a brief rundown of all the information that she had seemed to be wondering about.

Watching the students begin to feel more comfortable with applying to college and even discussing college shows their responsiveness to the program and the information we have been providing. Had this information been provided in their school curriculum, I wonder how much more comfortable/prepared students who are applying to college would feel.

March 22: End of session reflections, Google Survey

	What has been the most enjoyable/fun/most engaging session?	What was your biggest takeaway from being in this program?	Is there anything you with we discussed more?	Favorite activities?	Do you feel more prepared? Why or why not?	Any suggestion for how to improve this program in the future?
Student 3	Getting to know you guys	How to apply for college	No	The college word finder	Yes because I now [this was likely a typo and she probably meant to write "know"] how to get information	I loved meeting you guys♥
Student 8	I think the last session [3/15] was really good and I learned a lot	I learned a lot about what each vocabulary means in college and terms	I would say more of like the actual apply to school	The game that we played in the beginning	I feel okay about it I think I'm better prepared but I think you won't be fully prepared until you do it	No but thank you for everything

This last session was mostly used to ask the students closing questions about the program which can be used as feedback for future sessions and programs that Rhya and other Clark students may lead. We gave students time to ask any last minute questions before we ended the session. We also made it clear to them that although the sessions are over, we are still available to meet with students to answer any other questions they have for the rest of the semester and when they apply to school next semester.

Both Students 3 and 8 enjoyed meeting us and getting to know us. They expressed their gratitude for the program which helped me understand that they felt like they had a positive experience in College Knowledge and that they gained information that will help them with their applications and hopefully through navigating college. They expressed that they learned how to

apply to college and learned new vocabulary that is related to the applications and college life/navigation.

For something we can discuss more, Student 8 explained that she wants to learn more about how to apply to college. As she has mentioned multiple times throughout the written responses, she has been wanting to go through the application and it probably would have been helpful for her to look at a sample application (or a simulation of one if that exists) to better understand what it is like and to ease any anxieties she has about them. As she mentioned, she feels that she will not feel prepared enough until she applies to college. The mystery of the application seems to be stressing her out and making her feel unprepared. Even after all the information she has been given about the college applications and everything else related to college, she feels better but still feels less prepared since she is not able to look at the applications yet. Typically, the Common App opens on August 1. So, near the end of her summer break, she can open her account and start filling out the information. In the meantime, we have told her and the rest of the students that they can start writing their personal statements at any time since they can be copied and pasted into the Common App and most other college applications.

There is only so much the mentors can do within the sessions. The program is not designed to walk students through their college applications or fill out their FAFSA forms for them. The program was created to help students become more acclimated with standard college vocabulary and get them more comfortable with the idea of attending college. A large part of this goal makes it necessary to share information about the common resources that most colleges have. Things like therapy/counseling services, financial aid offices/advisors, academic advising, writing centers, etc., are all provided to students from universities to support students. Because

so many students are not provided with the necessary information to properly prepare them for college, they are not as prepared as they could be with the extra support from their school systems. College Knowledge's contribution to preparing students for college is to show what colleges can offer their students; what common resources colleges have and how they can be more accessible.

Takeaways/implications

Addressing the Research Questions

This program was designed for high school seniors who had already applied to college; they were supposed to learn about navigating their first semester/year. We were not planning on discussing anything related to applying to college; however, when we learned that the program had been opened up to the junior classes, we knew we would have to ensure that it was applicable to both groups of students. I think this hindered the program's structure because there were many last-minute adjustments that had to be made to accommodate for the change in demographics. Nevertheless, we did our best to be able to share relevant and helpful information that would make applying *and* adjusting to college life easier.

That being said, there seemed to be a continuous flow of questions about financial aid and affording college, even after the session we spent discussing financial aid. In this session, Emily and I just barely scratched the surface of the world of college financial aid. It is deeply personal and complicated and is not something either of us are equipped to handle. As mentioned earlier, this was made clear to the students in the program and if they had specific questions regarding financial aid. Thinking about Research Questions 1, 1a., and 2, the topics of financial aid and paying for college is a large stressor that I, an undergraduate college student who has had no formal training in college counseling or experience working with students' financial

information, am not equipped to take on. I can give definitions and the general information about financial aid; however, I cannot help students fill out any financial aid forms or discuss their personal or families' finances. It would have been helpful to get a financial aid advisor of sorts yet, that would have required more planning and research than what we intended on doing.

Overall, the feedback from students about our individual sessions and the College Knowledge program as a whole was mostly positive. Students expressed that they learned new information that would be helpful for them to apply and (hopefully) navigate college in the future years. The only thing students expressed they wanted us to improve on was talking louder and spending time looking at a college application (and physically applying to college). Although some of that is not in our control, we are not able to have them start their college applications until August 1, they could begin by creating a list of schools they want to apply to, thinking of potential majors and programs at said schools, brainstorming topics for their personal statement, and writing a draft of their personal statement. We have told them this information and now it is in their hands to use that information and start on their application process. Speaking louder is an easy fix and something that I have worked on throughout my time in CSI/CCCC/College Knowledge. With face masks being worn over the past two years, it has made hearing people speak more difficult and this is something I have tried to be mindful of. I also wish students would ask us during class to speak louder. I wonder if they did not feel comfortable asking us to speak louder or why they never explicitly asked us to repeat something if they did not hear us. I'd like to think that Emily and I created an environment that felt safe enough for students to share those thoughts with us but perhaps we could have been better about it. I am wondering if students were uncomfortable asking us to speak louder. Were there some things that they were more comfortable asking for? Out of everything a student could be

uncomfortable asking about, I would assume they would be more comfortable asking questions about us talking louder over content that they would possibly be embarrassed for not knowing. They also could have been comfortable asking questions like these and just did not think to ask them for whatever reason. We often left time for questions throughout the sessions so there were opportunities for students to speak up when they wanted or needed to. I also wonder what information students may not have heard since one student wrote in a survey/written response that we were quiet at times. This could have contributed to the extra confusion or questions that Student 8 had about financial aid. Then again, financial aid is a deeply complex topic and there is a lot to learn about it in a fairly short amount of time.

Power Dynamics and Trust

Reflecting back to the first time I participated in CSI (Spring 2019), about fifteen students signed up and consistently participated in the program for two semesters (each session was at least one and a half hours and occurred twice a week). They attended almost every session, were enthusiastic, participated consistently, and were full of energy. The College Knowledge program had less students sign up, was a smaller time commitment, students did not attend sessions as regularly, their participation lacked, and they seemed tired and uninterested. Although the programs have changed significantly, I cannot help but wonder why there were such stark differences between the groups of students. There are many factors that could have contributed to this. First, Andrea Allen would plan and run most of the sessions. Free food would be provided and the mentors (which included Emily, Kelly, and me) played more of an ally role. We did not have to do any administrative or disciplinary work, our jobs were to help teach the students to apply to college. We planned some activities but most of them were planned by Mass Ed Co. and Andrea. Because of this, the power dynamics between the mentors and students were

still apparent but were less distinct. Andrea also had a list of norms and expectations that the students and mentors created. Attendance was mandatory if students wanted to be in the running for a \$500 scholarship when they graduated from the program which served as motivation to have perfect attendance. There were clear expectations of the students' roles in the program. In the College Knowledge program, Emily and I were able to use our budget to promise each student a \$25 gift card as incentive to participate in the program. There were no attendance requirements and whether the student was a consenting participant in our research or not, they would be able to get a gift card. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, we were also not allowed to eat food indoors during the sessions which prevented Emily and I from using snacks as an incentive to attend the sessions. We also did not set up norms with the group. This is simply because we forgot. We are both extremely busy and stressed college students and we did not remember to create and implement a group norms activity with the students. Had we remembered, it could have yielded different results for participation. Ideally, we would have had an activity where students share what norms they want to see and we would write them on the board. After the brainstorm, it would be interesting to see if the mentors would have anything else to add. Themes I would like to have in the established norms include mutual respect, open mindedness, and participation when comfortable. Hopefully, the norms that would be established with these themes would foster an environment where students felt comfortable asking questions they might have felt embarrassed to ask.

Also, with nobody supervising us, like Andrea, Emily and I were not just mentors, we took on the role of Andrea. Although Andrea expressed her support in the College Knowledge program and provided many resources such as Image 3, Image 4, Image 5, along with printed documents when the student printers were out of service, she was not involved in the creation or

execution of the program. We did not have feedback from a “higher up” who has had more experience from us which could have been helpful. We could have asked Andrea to attend sessions so she could give us feedback however, this was not something we thought of.

Additionally, through most of our college experience, the COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the way learning happens. Having school online with little regard for the suffering and collective trauma the world has been experiencing has led to burnout and exhaustion. While I do not think this is the only reason the College Knowledge program had issues related to participation and attendance, it is likely a contributing factor. Speaking from experience, I am constantly tired and overwhelmed. I have felt like I have not gotten a true break from school in years. School and jobs shifting online was necessary but it made it very difficult to create healthy work-life boundaries and I believe that I (and society) am suffering from the consequences.

Student 1

With this being said, Student 1, who Emily and I met in the Fall 2021 semester, has had a very successful journey working with CCCC/College Knowledge. We helped him create a list of colleges to apply to, look at majors that interested him, helped him schedule a tour at Clark University, assisted him in applying to multiple colleges, edited numerous personal statements and supplemental essays, and wrote him an additional letter of recommendation to add to his Clark application. Student 1 showed passion and interest in attending Clark and also happened to qualify for the University Park Partnership Scholarship. If he were to be accepted to Clark, the University would pay for all of his tuition. On March 16, 2022, Toe was accepted to Clark! All of us were ecstatic that he was accepted and would not have to pay for his tuition, which is often a major stressor and financial burden for many American college students. He will be putting his

deposit down before the May 1 deadline and will officially become a Clarkie! Although we started working with Student 1 before the College Knowledge program started, he actively participated in the sessions and was not afraid to ask us for extra help. After the first session on January 25, he expressed his gratitude to Emily and I. He was extremely thankful for the time and energy we put into his applications and for helping him. It has been an honor being able to watch him grow and help him through his application process. I am extremely proud of the work that every CSI/CCCC/College Knowledge student has put into their applications and programs. I am incredibly lucky that I have had the opportunity to work with him and so many other wonderful students from Claremont Academy and UPCS.

Claims and Improvements to be Made

For the next time this session runs, or a college preparation program similar to the ones Emily and I have participated in or created, there are a few improvements I suggest. First, if there is a budget, incentives for participation and attendance such as checks, scholarships, gift cards, and food can all be helpful in getting students to participate and continue to attend the meetings. When Emily and I were mentors in CSI, the incentive was two scholarships of \$500 for students. The students who had perfect attendance were eligible for the scholarship. After the program ended, the mentors went through the group of students who had perfect attendance and chose the two students that participated enthusiastically and showed consistent effort throughout the program. An incentive like this may make students more inclined to participate and attend every session. Although this immediately rules out students who may have commitments such as jobs and babysitting family members, maybe there could be special exceptions for students to make the running for the scholarship more fair. Although the budget CYES students get for their projects is \$500 (Emily and I shared the \$500, were not able to combine ours to make \$1,000),

we were not allowed to use it as “scholarship money.” Instead, we used \$25 Visa gift cards and did not have any type of attendance requirement. The only requirement was students notified me or Emily that they would be attending the last session where we would be giving out the gift cards. Because only four students notified me about them coming to the meeting, I only got four gift cards and more students ended up coming to the meeting. If communication was more clear and there were more requirements established to get the gift cards (along with the established norms that are suggested), maybe students would feel more inclined to participate and attend more sessions.

There must also be an atmosphere that has been collectively created by every individual in the room. The environment must be friendly, inviting, honest, and trusting. Mentors must be willing to be honest with the students but do so in a way that is comfortable for all parties and is encouraging. It would also be helpful for mentors if they created clear roles and positions. As suggested earlier, group norms should be established during the first meeting. There would then be a collective and mutual understanding of social expectations for the mentors and students. Group norms would ensure that every person in the session understands that the environment created is and feels safe, open, and comfortable. Establishing group norms could also help create a stronger sense of community between students and mentors, mentors and mentors, and students and students. This could lead to more open and honest conversations and questions about anything college related that is being discussed in the sessions.

Tasks and roles should be delegated to committees/mentors so the amount of work is manageable and fair. This will make the planning of and execution of each session more manageable and hopefully lead to less burnout and exhaustion over time. Planning and running the sessions will hopefully be less stressful and will lead to a healthier balance of work compared

to the rest of the work the mentors balance with school. This could also potentially help with any tension that could arise between mentors. If there are not established roles, one mentor may feel pressure to take on extra work while the other mentor does less and possibly feels like they are not doing enough work. This has potential to create a stressful and uncomfortable relationship between mentors which may also lead to tension. It could also affect the quality of the plans and activities in the sessions, making them less engaging or helpful for the students. Establishing roles, even writing the responsibilities of each mentor would be beneficial for the program overall.

Having an advisor, other than a research advisor, who can attend sessions periodically and provide feedback can also help maintain a healthy, safe, and fun environment for all parties. Their presence could also make mentors feel more responsible and accountable for their work if they are benign checked in on periodically. As stated earlier, this would help with the overall group dynamic between mentors. If the mentors work well together and have a strong bond and working relationship, they will be more likely to work better with the students in the program. Having an advisor to overlook and hold mentors accountable will also help with managing workload which should hopefully lessen the risk of burnout. Creating a system that holds every member of the group accountable and responsible for their tasks is vital for a productive and healthy environment.

These suggestions would hopefully make the group culture more inviting for participation and could cultivate a more effective, fun, inviting, and exciting program. These improvements are designed to help work be delegated easier, create a more safe, fun, welcoming, and participatory environment, while also being productive. This program is designed to help students become acclimated with the idea of college and to help them understand the resources

provided through college that are beneficial to the students. Making information about college more accessible is the main goal of College Knowledge and finding methods to do it in an inclusive, safe, and fun setting should be a main priority for the program in the future, or other programs similar to College Knowledge.

Appendix A: Handouts and helpful documents for students

Olivia Shull	
LinkedIn LShull@clarku.edu 203-512-0673 Sandy Hook, CT	
<hr/> EDUCATION <hr/>	
Clark University	Worcester, MA
Master of Arts in Community Development and Planning	Expected Class of 2023
Bachelor of Arts in Community Youth and Education Studies	Class of 2022
<u>Minor</u> : Women and Gender Studies	
<u>GPA</u> : 3.63	
<u>Relevant courses</u> : Complexities of Urban Schools, Education & Social Policy, Youth Work: Practice & Social Justice, American Race & Ethnicity, Activism, Protests, & Social Movements, Approaches to Community Health, Covid, Power, & Inequality, History of American Women, History of Sexuality, Community Power Community Change	
<u>Honors</u> : Dean's list, Fiat Lux Honor Society	
SKILLS	
Computer : Proficiency in Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)	
Social Media : Facebook Instagram LinkedIn Twitter	
WORK EXPERIENCE	
March For Our Lives – Virtual Movement Organizer	January 2022-Present
Focus on chapter membership growth and retention, educational events about current issues we are working on, and track volunteer activity through different sets of data, and lobbying	
March For Our Lives: Massachusetts - Virtual State Director	July 2021-December 2021
Manage and organize the MFOL: MA State Team and local chapters, organize and lead weekly meetings	
TJX – Newtown, CT, Worcester, MA Retail Associate	June 2021-Present
Provide excellent customer service, <u>organize</u> and clean the store	
Parents For Peace – Virtual Program Management and Social Media Intern	March 2021 – August 2021
Assist in organizing and creating programs to mitigate and end domestic extremism, radicalization, and white supremacy	
Holy Cow Ice Cream Shop - Newtown, CT Cashier/Server	June 2016 - August 2020
Serve high volumes of customers, train several employees, maintain hygienic environment	
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	
College Knowledge CCCC-Worcester, MA Co-Creator & Mentor	October 2021-Present
Co-created, organized, and educated group of high school juniors and seniors about navigating the first year of college	
Clark Claremont College Connection (CCCC) - Worcester, MA Mentor	February 2019 – November 2021
Teach local high school students about the college experience, how to apply to college, and edit college applications	
LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE	
Clark University March For Our Lives (CUMFOL) - Worcester, MA Co-Founder & Co-Executive Director	July 2019 – July 2021
Coordinate and lead bi-weekly meetings, organize activities to promote gun violence prevention and social justice	
Clarkies for Kindness - Worcester, MA Co-Founder & Director of Communications	December 2019-Present
Organize and lead weekly meetings, manage all communication and social media	

Image 2. Copy of a draft of my resume from last year, an example for a good resume.

College Timeline

Junior Year (or earlier)

February, March & April

- Register at collegeboard.com and Naviance
- Register for SATs and ACTs
- Start looking at college websites, brochures and other information
- Visit colleges over February & April vacations
- Get involved in school or community based extracurricular activities
- Attend college fairs
- Start applying for Summer Jobs if you want one or apply to college summer programs

May

- Take SATs and ACTs
- Keep looking at college websites, brochures and other information
- Decide what is important to you: Location? Curriculum? Size? Diversity? Athletics? Social Life?
- Make a list of colleges that matches your criteria.

June

- Visit collegeboard.com & Naviance for updates
- Keep looking at college websites, brochures and other information

Summer

- Make plans to visit colleges – schedule interviews on campus, attend information programs
- Consider spending some of your time doing volunteer work
- Consider taking the SAT Subject Tests in June if the colleges you're considering require them
- Do Something!
 - o Academic Program
 - o Job / Internship
 - o Athletic program
 - o Research
 - o Community Service
- Many colleges will begin making their online applications available over the summer. Start taking a look at the requirements for some of the colleges to which you believe you want to apply.

WARNING: Once you return from Summer Vacation and begin your senior year, the application process will move quickly! Many applications have deadlines as early as October or November of your senior year! By doing your homework now, thinking about what teachers you may want to write your recommendations, and thinking about standardized tests, you save yourself the stress of having to do it in the fall.

Senior Year

September

- Visit collegeboard.com & Naviance for updates
- Register for the SAT or ACT again
- Talk to teachers and guidance counselor or anyone else about letters of recommendation
- Create an account at commonapp.org
- Continue to do well academically...your first marking period could make or break your chances!

October

- Visit collegeboard.com, Naviance & commonapp.org for updates
- Take SAT or ACT again if you want to
- Complete college essays
- If you are thinking about applying early decision or early action start completing

November

- Visit collegeboard.com, Naviance & commonapp.org for updates
- Take SAT or ACT again if you want to
- Collect and complete applications for scholarships
- Start / complete college applications depending on deadlines

December

- Visit collegeboard.com, Naviance & commonapp.org for updates
- Start gathering documents for FAFSA (W-2 forms, income tax returns, etc)
- Collect and complete applications for scholarships
- Start / complete college applications depending on deadlines

January & February

- Visit collegeboard.com, Naviance & commonapp.org for updates
- Collect and complete applications for scholarships
- Complete your FAFSA
- Start / complete college applications depending on deadlines.

- Keep a close eye on your mailbox (postal and electronic) for letters from colleges about your application (missing items, acceptance letters, etc.)

March

- Keep a close eye on your mailbox for letters from [Colleges](#) about your application (missing items, acceptance letters, etc.)
- Collect and complete applications for scholarships

April

- Keep a close eye on your mailboxes for letters from [Colleges](#) about your application (acceptance letters!!!)
- Make decisions about what college is the best for you financially and academically
- Collect and complete applications for scholarships

May

- Be sure to let those people who wrote your recommendation letters know what colleges you got into (or not) and thank them...they want to celebrate with you!
- Remind guidance to send your final grades to the college you have chosen to attend.

Image 3. College application timeline

Differences between High School and College

Following the Rules in High School	Choosing Responsibly in College
High school is <i>mandatory</i> and usually <i>free</i> .	College is <i>voluntary</i> and <i>expensive</i> .
Your time is structured by others.	You manage your own time.
You need permission to participate in extracurricular activities.	You must decide whether to participate in co-curricular activities.
You can count on parents and teachers to remind you of your responsibilities and to guide you in setting priorities.	<i>You</i> must balance your responsibilities and set priorities. You will face moral and ethical decisions you have never faced before.
Each day you proceed from one class directly to another, spending 6 hours each day--30 hours a week--in class.	You often have hours between classes; class times vary throughout the day and evening and you spend only 12 to 16 hours each week in class
Most of your classes are arranged for you.	You arrange your own schedule in consultation with your adviser. Schedules tend to look lighter than they really are.
You are not responsible for knowing what it takes to graduate.	Graduation requirements are complex, and differ from year to year. You are expected to know those that apply to you.
<i>You will usually be told what to do and corrected if your behavior is out of line.</i>	<i>You are expected to take responsibility for what you do and don't do, as well as for the consequences of your decisions.</i>

Going to High School Classes	Succeeding in College Classes
The school year is 36 weeks long; some classes extend over both semesters and some don't.	The academic year is divided into two separate 15-week semesters, plus a week after each semester for exams.
Classes generally have no more than 35 students.	Classes may number 100 students or more.
You do most of your studying in class, with homework as a back-up.	You do most of your studying outside of class (at least 2 to 3 hours outside of class for each hour in class) with lectures and other class work as a guide.
You seldom need to read anything more than once, and sometimes listening in class is enough.	You need to review class notes and text material regularly.
You are provided with textbooks at no expense.	You need to budget substantial funds for textbooks, which will usually cost more than \$300 each semester. Textbooks must be bought promptly (before the bookstore returns unpurchased copies).
You are expected to read short assignments that are then discussed, and often re-taught, in class.	You are assigned substantial amounts of reading and writing which may not be directly addressed in class.
<i>You will usually be told in class what you need to learn from assigned readings.</i>	<i>It's up to you to read and understand the assigned material; lectures and assignments proceed from the assumption that you've already done so.</i>



High School Teachers	College Professors
Teachers check your completed homework.	Professors may not always check completed homework, but they will assume you can perform the same tasks on tests.
Teachers remind you of your incomplete work.	Professors may not remind you of incomplete work.
Teachers approach you if they believe you need assistance.	Professors are usually open and helpful, but most expect you to initiate contact if you need assistance.
Teachers are often available for conversation before, during, or after class.	Professors expect and want you to attend their scheduled office hours.
Teachers have been trained in teaching methods to assist in imparting knowledge to students.	Professors have been trained as experts in their particular areas of research.
Teachers provide you with information you missed when you were absent.	Professors expect you to get from classmates any notes from classes you missed.
Teachers present material to help you understand the material in the textbook.	Professors may not follow the textbook. Instead, to amplify the text, they may give illustrations, provide background information, or discuss research about the topic you are studying. Or they may expect you to relate the classes to the textbook readings.
Teachers often write information on the board to be copied in your notes.	Professors may lecture nonstop, expecting you to identify the important points in your notes. When professors write on the board, it may be to amplify the lecture, not to summarize it. Good notes are a must.
Teachers impart knowledge and facts, sometimes drawing direct connections and leading you through the thinking process.	Professors expect you to think about and synthesize seemingly unrelated topics.

Teachers often take time to remind you of assignments and due dates.	Professors expect you to read, save, and consult the course syllabus (outline); the syllabus spells out exactly what is expected of you, when it is due, and how you will be graded.
Teachers carefully monitor class attendance.	Professors may not formally take roll, but they are still likely to know whether or not you attended.
<i>Teachers bear much of the responsibility for your learning.</i>	<i>You bear the responsibility for your learning while your professors serve as guides, mentors, and resources.</i>
Tests in High School	Tests in College
Testing is frequent and covers small amounts of material.	Testing is usually infrequent and may be cumulative, covering large amounts of material. You, not the professor, need to organize the material to prepare for the test. A particular course may have only 2 or 3 tests in a semester.
Makeup tests are often available.	Makeup tests are seldom an option; if they are, you need to request them.
Teachers frequently rearrange test dates to avoid conflict with school events.	Professors in different courses usually schedule tests without regard to the demands of other courses or outside activities.
Teachers frequently conduct review sessions, pointing out the most important concepts.	Professors rarely offer review sessions, and when they do, they expect you to be an active participant, one who comes prepared with questions.
<i>Mastery is usually seen as the ability to reproduce what you were taught in the form in which it was presented to you, or to solve the kinds of problems you were shown how to solve.</i>	<i>Mastery is often seen as the ability to apply what you've learned to new situations or to solve new kinds of problems.</i>

Grades in High School	Grades in College
Grades are given for most assigned work.	Grades may not be provided for all assigned work.
Consistently good homework grades may raise your overall grade when test grades are low.	Grades on tests and major papers usually provide most of the course grade.
Extra credit projects are often available to help you raise your grade.	Extra credit projects cannot, generally speaking, be used to raise a grade in a college course.
Initial test grades, especially when they are low, may not have an adverse effect on your final grade.	Watch out for your <i>first</i> tests. These are usually "wake-up calls" to let you know what is expected—but they also may account for a substantial part of your course grade. You may be shocked when you get your grades.
You may graduate as long as you have passed all required courses with a grade of D or higher.	You may graduate only if your average in classes meets the departmental standard—typically a 2.0 or C.
<i>"Effort counts." Courses are usually structured to reward a "good-faith effort."</i>	<i>"Results count." Though "good-faith effort" is important in regard to the professor's willingness to help you achieve good results, it will not substitute for results in the grading process.</i>

Image 4. Differences between high school and college.

Appendix B: Permission letters for IRB

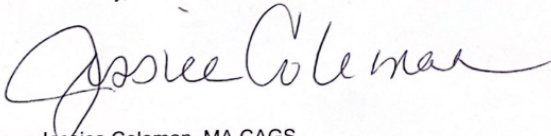


May 25, 2021

To whom it may concern,

I would welcome undergraduate mentors, Olivia Shull and Emily Dorsey to complete their praxis project for Clark University by working with Claremont Academy students to support college readiness through the Clark Claremont College Connection.

Sincerely,



Jessica Coleman, MA CAGS
School Counselor- Dept Head
Claremont Academy
Worcester Public Schools
Google V/T: 401-264-0531
Main Office: 508-799-3077

Image 6. Written permission from Claremont Academy counselor, Jessica Coleman, to the IRB (International Review Board). This letter told the IRB that Claremont Academy recognizes and allows us to conduct the program and research with the students in the program.



Plant, Angela

College Knowledge a.k.a. CSI

To: Kasandra Garcia, Jessica Coleman, lshull@clarku.edu, Dorsey, Emily, Cc: Sarah Michaels

Inbox - Exchange December 4, 2021 at 12:06 PM

[Details](#)

Siri found new contact info Angela Plant planta@worcesterschools.net

[add...](#)

Hi Kasandra and Jessica,

Kassie I am going to ask that you take the lead on this recruitment effort as Jess has still got a lot of work to do to prune our Crimson and Red students in the Class of 2022. I am sending an email out to the Senior teachers telling them to work with you on the recruitment process and get the names to the Clark undergraduate students Olivia and Emily. We ideally should have up to 20 students involved. That would be my target but please find out from Emily and Olivia how many they can actually support. Professor Sarah Michaels is their advisor you can reach out to her as well but the Clark students will be your POC (point of contact).

Hello!

Our names

are Olivia Shull and Emily Dorsey and we are undergraduate seniors at Clark University. Since our freshman year, we have been helping run a program called Clark Claremont College Connection which teaches Claremont juniors and seniors about the college application process, how to apply to college, what schools to apply to, and other topics related to college readiness. Normally, the program starts in the spring semester of the Claremont student's junior year and they learn all about college. In the fall semester of their senior year, we help them apply to college. Given the nature of COVID, we have changed the program a little bit and will be offering sessions to seniors on Clark's campus about preparing for college. We thought it would be helpful for seniors who are planning on attending college who may feel overwhelmed about the next steps to adequately prepare for college.

This program

will be focused on college knowledge, which we define as, "information, formal and informal, stated and unstated, necessary for both gaining admission to and navigating within the post-secondary system" (Holland, 2015). We will be running sessions that deal with relevant topics for students to help them navigate college and set them up for success. Many times, students graduate from high school and think they are prepared to go to college. They have certain expectations and perceptions of what college is and what it entails. Part of this program will be about going through some common expectations and discussing how they may have similar and different experiences to their expectations.

We also hope to include faculty at Clark and current Clark students from Worcester within our sessions.

We were

wondering if you would be willing to spend a few minutes at the beginning or end of your classes that have seniors in them to explain this program to them. We are starting to recruit students for next semester so as soon as Clark's spring semester starts,

we can start the program. Students will be required to sign a permission slip to come to Clark's campus. For our learning, we will also be taking notes and documenting parts of our sessions which will require parental consent (or consent of the students if they are 18 years old). Below are some topics that we plan on discussing during these sessions:

-

-

College 101: getting ready for college: what to bring, what to expect

- Academic Success

- Campus Engagement: clubs, extracurriculars, etc.

-

Wellness

As of now,

we are planning on having this program run from late January 2022/early February 2022 through early April 2022. We are planning on meeting Tuesday afternoon, right after school ends at Claremont until about 4pm. We will be meeting once a week.

We are also

attaching a flyer and can bring them to you/your mailbox at Claremont so students can bring it home with them.

Please let

us know if you have any questions about this program. Students who are interested in the program or who have questions can email

LShull@clarku.edu
or EDorsey@clarku.edu
for more information.

Thank you,

Olivia Shull
and Emily Dorsey

Jess will fill you in on the program if you are not familiar.

Thank you!

Angela Plant, M. Ed
Principal Claremont Academy
planta@worcesterschools.net
508-799-3077 Fax: 508-799-8202
Twitter: @ClaremontUbuntu

"Even on your worst day, you can be a student's best hope." -Manny Scott

Image 7. Permission from Angela Plant, Claremont Academy Principal, to run this program and conduct research with Claremont students.

CCCC College Knowledge Contract

_____ has been invited to participate in the **Clark-Claremont College Connection – College Knowledge** Program. Sessions will be held at **Clark University in Jonas Clark room TBD** on Tuesday afternoons from 2:15/right after school to 4:15 p.m., beginning **Tuesday, January 25** and ending on **Tuesday, April 5**.

In order to participate in this program and receive the benefits (\$25 gift card) students and their parent/guardian must sign and submit this contract to their guidance counselor, confirming their understanding of the following terms and conditions:

- Attendance is mandatory. We expect communication prior to the sessions letting us know if you will not be able to attend.
- Failure of any WPS class while in the CCCC College Knowledge program will result in a need to re-evaluate the student's eligibility to remain in the program.
- Students must actively participate in all program activities and session discussions, demonstrating respect for their fellow students and College Knowledge mentors.

Signature of Student

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Claremont Guidance Staff

Date

Image 8. Kasandra Garcia, a counselor for Claremont Academy and UPCS, sent out this permission slip/contract to all students who signed up for the program. They and their parent/guardian were expected to sign the contract and give it back to Kasandra.

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