



National Association for
College Admission Counseling

STATEMENT ON

Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor

Approved by the Executive Board, June 1990

Introduction

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) has had a long-standing interest in meeting the educational needs of all students and improving the quality of American education. We believe that education is an investment in the future, the future of each individual student, and society at large. A strong democracy requires an educated citizenry, and we believe it is incumbent upon this nation to educate each child to his/her potential for self-fulfillment, while insuring our strength as a people able to compete in the international community.

Assisting students in reaching their full potential requires the cooperative efforts of school administrators, teachers, community representatives, government officials, parents, and the students themselves, as well as a trained staff of school counselors who are able to facilitate student development and achievement. Of particular importance to student success is access to a strong precollege guidance and counseling program that begins early in the student's school career. Early planning (e.g., secondary school course selection and precollege enrichment programs) can insure that students pursue the most challenging curriculum that results in enhanced postsecondary educational options.

The vast array of postsecondary opportunities and the attendant requirements for access, coupled with rising college costs and the complexity of the financial aid system, call for a guidance support system to assist students and their parents. Critical to the success of such a support system is the strength of the articulation process between the school counselor and college admission personnel. When the role of each is understood by the other and when communication between them has been effective, counselors and admission personnel are in a position to help students and parents by providing accurate, up-to-date information which will assist them in making sound educational decisions.

Demographic surveys indicate that our student population is changing. Our schools are now enrolling larger numbers of students from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds, and these students will constitute a majority of school-age populations in ten states by the year 2000. These students are less likely to come from families with role models who have experienced or had access to postsecondary opportunities and, as a result, there will be greater reliance on the school system to provide appropriate precollege guidance and counseling experiences.

In recent years, The College Board Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling, the NACAC sponsored National College Counseling Project, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report on secondary education in America, have each called for the improvement and extension of precollege guidance and counseling programs that assist students as they consider and plan for a full range of postsecondary opportunities. Also recognizing the need for improved precollege counseling, the National Association of Secondary School Principals in 1990 adopted a resolution that:

...encourages collaborative efforts by principals and school counselors to develop and implement precollege counseling initiatives within comprehensive school guidance programs...

Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor

...supports the continuing education of secondary school counselors, encourages the development of exemplary precollege guidance and counseling programs, and promotes school counselor articulation with college admission counselors.

Clearly, it is time to translate these calls into reality. Toward that end, the National Association for College Admission Counseling presents the following guidelines for what we believe constitutes an effective precollege guidance and counseling program and the role that counselors should play in implementing such a program at various educational levels.

Components of an Effective Precollege Guidance and Counseling Program

NACAC believes that precollege guidance and counseling represents a developmental process that must begin at the middle or junior high school level. Such a program takes into account that students have different needs at various educational levels and counselors must intervene as necessary with the delivery of services and activities appropriate to each level. We have observed that counselors have often been less involved with precollege guidance and counseling concerns because counseling time and energy have been directed toward a myriad of personal, social, and mental health concerns that could be more effectively addressed if shared with other school and community agencies.

An effective guidance and counseling program should include the following components at all levels:

- A written statement of philosophy that is consistent with the school's overall philosophy.
- A written comprehensive plan of action that outlines student needs and sets forth goals and objectives for meeting those needs.
- An evaluation process that measures progress toward meeting stated goals and objectives.
- A focus on precollege guidance and counseling that enables students to prepare themselves academically for a wide range of educational and career opportunities.
- Differentiated staffing that includes a sufficient number of counselors with counseling loads that enable them to accomplish program goals and objectives, the provision of appropriate administrative and supervisory support, and support personnel adequate to meet program needs. First, precollege guidance and counseling should be known, understood, and implemented by all counselors. Further, we see benefit in identifying counselors who specialize in precollege guidance and counseling as distinct from other counselors who are concerned with a wider range of student needs.
- Effective communication with a variety of constituencies, including students, parents, all educators, and the larger community.
- Counselors and other educators committed to the principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action. This assumes the presence of positive attitudes that promote student development regardless of race, sex, or disability, and encourages the inclusion of role models among the staff who reflect these characteristics.
- A supportive instructional and administrative staff who work cooperatively with counselors to assist students in achieving educational goals consistent with their aptitudes, abilities, and interests.
- An environment that recognizes each person's worth in a complex multicultural, changing society, one that supports and encourages each student to reach his/her potential.

Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor

- Respect for student privacy and the need for confidentiality of records.
- Delivery of services according to ethical practices developed by NACAC and other similar education groups.
- Assurance to students and parents that counseling professionals have been properly trained to carry out the precollege guidance and counseling responsibilities. Further provisions should be made for release time and financial support for counselors to attend professional meetings, workshops, and other professional development activities where they can learn skills, exchange ideas, network with other professionals, and keep up-to-date on changes in the college admission and financial aid processes.
- Adequate facilities, resources, and equipment to accomplish the goals of the program.

Role of the School Counselor in Precollege Guidance and Counseling

An effective precollege guidance and counseling component in a school guidance program will insure that certain functions are performed by school counselors. These include:

Middle or Junior High School Level

The role of the counselor in precollege guidance and counseling at the middle or junior high school level is to:

- Implement the goals and objectives of the counseling program by serving students, parents, and staff.
- Assist students in the development of effective study skills and learning habits that promote academic excellence.
- Promote the development of student self-awareness including an understanding of their individual abilities, interests, values, and personal attitudes.
- Guide students in their awareness and planning of their secondary school curriculum, including the selection of a course of study that will enable them to maximize their educational and career options.
- Assist students and parents in understanding the techniques and strategies of educational exploration in the college admission process.
- Broaden student's horizons by introducing them to the variety of postsecondary educational opportunities available and the educational routes to each.
- Assist students and parents in understanding the role of testing in education and the individual interpretation of all standardized test results.
- Assist students in the development of career awareness, exploration, and life-planning skills.
- Assist parents in understanding the cost of postsecondary education, the need for financial planning, and the financial aid process.

Secondary School Level

The role of the counselor in precollege guidance and counseling at various stages of the secondary school level is,

Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor

first, to continue all appropriate middle/junior high school functions to insure comprehensiveness and articulation and, in addition, to:

- Meet with students and parents regularly to review academic progress and select appropriate courses.
- Assist students in relating their abilities, aptitudes, and interests to current and future educational and occupational choices.
- Assist students in setting realistic goals, developing decision-making skills, and accepting responsibility for the decisions they make.
- Address special needs of underrepresented students, (e.g., minority students, women, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, or other populations) by keeping up-to-date on programs and resources designed specifically for these students and insuring that the students are aware of them.
- Assist students and parents in understanding the college admission and financial aid processes by providing access to current, clear, and concise information concerning the wide range of postsecondary educational opportunities available, entrance requirements, financial aid, curricular offering, costs, admission and financial aid deadlines, and the variety of early admission and early decision programs available.
- Assist students in the acquisition, evaluation, and appropriate use of information, including college guidebooks and catalogs, computer-based guidance systems, and college videos.
- Encourage student and parent participation in college fair programs, admission and financial aid workshops, and related programs.
- Assist students in selecting and registering for appropriate college admission tests, and in interpreting resulting test scores and their influence in the admission process.
- Assist students with developing a personal timeline or calendar for completing the tasks associated with the college admission process.
- Work with students and teachers in developing students' essay-writing skills.
- Encourage students to visit college campuses, if possible, to gain first-hand information from admission and financial aid representatives, observe classes, and interact with faculty and students.
- Assist students in developing appropriate interviewing skills and in understanding the purpose of the college admission interview and their role in the process.
- Encourage student participation in on-campus precollege enrichment programs.
- Develop productive relationships with colleges to assist them in understanding the nature of the school curriculum and the quality of their students' preparation.
- Develop and disseminate a school profile for use by colleges and universities.
- Work with college admission representatives to schedule visits to the school so that students will have opportunities to explore a variety of options.

Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor

- Advocate on behalf of students via letters of recommendation and personal communication with college representatives.
- Work with the school instructional staff in understanding their role in supporting students as they make important educational and career choices.
- Provide a supportive environment for students and parents and work to eliminate or reduce unnecessary anxiety too often associated with the college admission process.
- Assist students in dealing with difficult situations such as college admission and/or financial aid denials and in developing alternative strategies should this occur.
- Assist students and parents with preparation for the separation process that will occur in the school to college transition.

Counselor/Student Ratio

The National Association for College Admission Counseling believes that the implementation of a precollege guidance and counseling initiative must take into consideration factors such as concern for student growth and development needs, program scope, role of the counselor, and the number of support staff available. We acknowledge the published report *High School* by Ernest Boyer, with its recommended ideal counselor/student ratio of 1/100, and the position statement of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) with its recommendation that the ratio be between 1/100 (ideal) and 1/300 (maximum). We agree with ASCA that the implementation of a guidance and counseling program should be determined primarily by concern for meeting students' developmental needs.

NACAC believes an effective precollege guidance and counseling process requires that adequate time and resources be available for counselors to work with students and parents individually and in group settings. To accomplish this and to enable counselors to work productively with other school and community representatives, we support a counselor/student ratio of 1/100 (ideal) or 1/300 (maximum).