

**Assessing the Need for College and Career Readiness Programs for Students from the
Point of View of the School Counselors Who Work in Urban, Low Income Public Schools**

Ben Persky

Monmouth University, Department of Educational Counseling & Leadership

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Dr. Bobbitt

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Introduction

There is an increase of students who attend urban schools that are in low income areas that aren't receiving college and career readiness help here in the United States of America (Yavuz et al., 2019). There is an overarching question to ask, how do we as school counselors or future school counselors address college and career readiness of our students so they are the best prepared to take on whatever comes their way after they graduate high school. Everyone, no matter who you are or where you come from deserves the same opportunities and at this moment that is not the case for college and career readiness for students who attend low income public schools in an urban setting. Most of the time students that are living in poverty have only one source of information when it comes to learning about the opportunities that exist for going to college and their future careers (Franklin, 2021). As having my own experience so far in school counseling offices and understanding how the whole college and career readiness process goes, in order to best prepare your students for this, they need to start hearing and learning about this early in their life starting in elementary school. It is imperative that all schools, everywhere give students the support they need for college and career readiness otherwise these students will never have a way to learn about what is out there for them. These disadvantaged students will have no path if the schools don't provide the necessary information and resources that these students need to be successful after they graduate (Franklin, 2021). Some might say that these students can only be prepared for college and career if these schools have vast resources and money which sadly most urban, low income public schools do not have. However, there are some ways that school counselors can prepare themselves in order to get their students ready for college and career planning without having many resources and money from the school system. There are two major approaches that school counselors can use to help prepare their students for

college and career readiness. The first one is using the School Counseling for College and Career Readiness Using Existential Theory (S3CRET) model which allows you to ponder what your own identity means while at the same time having a proponent of self-determination which you can relate to college and career decision making (Challenger et al., 2022). The second approach that school counselors who work in urban, low income public schools could use is by using the CARE model. The CARE model has one major intended original use which is that counselors should use this in counseling strategies that are effective for helping people that live in poverty (Johnson, 2017). School counselors can use these two approaches along with other methods that will be discussed to prepare their students in the best possible way for college and career readiness.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to assess the need for college and career readiness programs for students from the point of view of the school counselors who work in urban, low income public schools. This study will address the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions and the need for college and career readiness programs of school counselors working in urban, low-income schools?
2. How do school counselors working in urban, low-income schools address college and career readiness of their students?

Definitions

There are several terms used in this study that are defined below:

- *College Readiness*: A topic that is important for school counselors to cover with their students so they can learn about the college process, determine where they want to go, and what they want to study (Gilfillan, 2018).

- *Career Development*: A major topic that school counselors need to go over with their students so they can understand what skills and knowledge they need for their potential future jobs throughout their entire life (ASCA, 2004).
- *Urban School*: An area that has over 50,000 people living in it (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Urban schools usually have a very diverse student population which consists of more students who are from low-income households and where crime rates are high (Challenger et al., 2022).
- *Low-Income*: If your taxable income for the previous year did not go over 150% above the poverty line then you are considered low-income (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).
- *School Counselor*: A professional helper who is always there to support their students whether it is their social, emotional, or well-being (Challenger et al., 2022).
- *Existential Theory*: A technique that can help school counselors help their students understand how to live a meaningful life and explore questions about existence (Challenger et al., 2022).
- *S3CRET Model*: Allows you to ponder what your own identity means while at the same time having a proponent of self-determination which school counselors can relate to college and career decision making for their students (Challenger et al., 2022).
- *CARE Model*: Counselors should use this in counseling strategies that are effective for helping people that live in poverty. You should follow the steps of cultivating relationships, acknowledging what your realities are, removing

obstacles in your way, and working towards expanding your clients strengths (Johnson, 2017).

Needs of the Students

Most urban school students are among the most underserved and opportunity ridden in the country. These schools don't have enough resources which doesn't allow them to build up their students in a way that can provide them with the opportunities they deserve so they can make a true difference in this world once they graduate (Yavuz et al., 2019). Students who attend urban, low income schools here in the United States don't receive enough resources and capital to prepare them for their college and career readiness. Everyone should get the same opportunities and receive the same resources but unfortunately that is not the case as of now. Around forty percent of people who graduate high school are not prepared by their schools to do well when it comes to college work. On top of the forty percent, students of color, with disabilities, students who come from low-income households are not only unlikely to get into a college, but they are most unlikely to graduate even if they do get in (Yavuz et al., 2019). It is up to the school counselors, teachers, and administrators to know what the needs of these students are so that the school counselors can properly prepare their students that attend urban, low income schools for college and their future careers.

Yavuz and colleagues (2019) ran a study to find out what the college and career readiness program needs are of students who attend urban, low income schools, the participants of this study were told to score certain programs like college and career lessons, mentoring programs, financial aid counseling, etc. in order of what they believe is the most needed in their school programs. In the end, 16 out of the 17 programs were scored high and considered as a very important high need. The students can let everyone know what their needs are, but it is up to the

school counselors, teachers, and school administration to provide those very necessary needs to the students.

Franklin (2021) wrote that students of color wanted to take classes that would provide them with skills that would help them be very successful in college like problem solving strategies but instead they were given a limited course choice that was mainly about doing better on standardized exams. Moore and peers (2016) stated that their research suggested it was very hard for most African American males in school to think about what their academic and social identities are when it comes to relating it to people in their family as well as people they know in their schools and their communities. It all falls to the school counselors to help these students best prepare for college and their future careers. The school counselors need to be there to provide these students who attend urban, low income schools with a safe place to come and express how they feel and what they want to pursue in life.

College and Career Readiness Programs and Strategies For School Counselors

There are many ways that school counselors who work in urban, low income schools can help their students with college and career readiness. School counselors should know that even if your school doesn't have the resources or money to fund programs to help your students prepare for college and their future careers, there are many things you can do as the school counselor to help your students in the best possible way still. Yavuz and colleagues (2019) stated that almost fifty percent of people who graduate high school are not ready to do well in college. In order to improve this, high school curriculums must change and get better which will only improve college and career readiness of students who attend urban, low income schools. You need to build academic capital for low income students and Yavuz and peers (2019) also suggests that urban schools need to offer more college preparedness classes, build up their students behavior

as well as their academic skills, offer entrance exam prep courses, and to teach their students how to best prepare for their lives after they graduate high school no matter what they pursue in life. School counselors that work in urban, low income schools can learn from this and apply this to the work they do with their students.

Not many school counselors use an existential approach when it comes to working with their students. However, it has the chance to spark self-examining conversations and questions with your students that can greatly benefit them when thinking about college and their future careers (Challenger et al., 2022). School counselors can use the School Counseling for College and Career Readiness Using Existential Theory (S3CRET) which will help students foster their identities which will allow the school counselors to prepare their students for college and their future careers. Challenger et al. (2022) stated in their study that they think if school counselors add an existential approach when working with their students of color it can provide many benefits like the students of color gaining a better sense of self for all topics like personal and academic thoughts and goals. As the school counselor you want to create a safe place for your students to come and talk to you about anything. By creating this safe place your students can explore their existential views with you which can help you prepare them for college and their future careers.

Counselors should use the CARE model in counseling strategies that are effective for helping people that live in poverty. The counselor should follow the steps of cultivating relationships, acknowledging what your realities are, removing obstacles in your way, and working towards expanding your clients strengths (Johnson, 2017). It is so imperative that school counselors use a social justice lens when they work with their students. The CARE model provides that all in one to help prepare your students for college and their future careers.

Summary of Literature Review

Students who attend urban, low income public schools are faced with many challenges. One of the biggest challenges they face is getting prepared for possibly going to college after graduation and what their future careers are going to be. It is up to the school counselors to best prepare these students in every way possible so they can be ready for what comes after graduation. In order for that to happen it is very important that you know what the needs of the students are for when it comes to college and career readiness. This can be achieved by assessing the students and their parents/guardians to find out what is needed. Once you know what these needs are you can plan out programs and find new strategies to best prepare them for college and their future careers. Two great ways school counselors can do this is by using the School Counseling for College and Career Readiness Using Existential Theory (S3CRET) and the CARE Model. Always keeping a social justice lens in mind is key to successfully helping students who attend an urban, low income public school for college and career readiness.

Method Overview

The purpose of this study is to assess the need for college and career readiness programs for students from the point of view of the school counselors who work in urban, low income public schools. This study will address the following questions: 1. What are the perceptions and the need for college and career readiness programs of school counselors working in urban, low-income schools? 2. How do school counselors working in urban, low-income schools address college and career readiness of their students? In order for these questions to be answered, a qualitative study will take place in order to obtain the answers to the questions in the best possible manner. Qualitative research has a main focus on transferability and to make sure that the study is intuitive to other people. Qualitative studies will also be heightened if the study

is well put together, educational, and favorable to the people who are going to read it. (Balkin & Kleist, 2017). In order for these questions to get the best possible answers or outcomes, students and school counselors will be given surveys and asked many different questions that regard college and career readiness.

Potential Participants

Purposeful sampling will be used in this qualitative study in order to recruit the best participants possible for the best possible outcomes for this study. Purposeful sampling is used because this is where the researcher selects certain participants on purpose, hence purposeful sampling. You intentionally seek these participants out because they could have gone through a certain event that pertains to your study or they have been involved with what you are trying to study, so you pick them deliberately to help out your study participant pool (Balkin & Kleist, 2017). In order for this study to be conducted, first the researcher and his team will need to get permission from the school's administration. Once permission has been received, the researcher and his team will send out a google form to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The study will accept these students because these are the students that are focusing on their college and career readiness at the time. The study will accept five sophomores, ten juniors, and fifteen seniors. The google form will explain what the study is and ask for permission to interview the student. On top of the students, the researcher and his team will also interview the five school counselors in the school to obtain the right amount of data for that side of the study. Ideally, the thirty-five participants in this study will be from one high school in Newark, New Jersey. Newark, New Jersey was chosen because it is an urban district with most of its students living in low-income areas and it is in close proximity to the researcher. Due to the larger sample size, this will let the researcher and his team gain more of a bigger outlook into the needs of the students for college

and career readiness as well as how do the school counselors address the readiness for all of their students. All in all, this will lead to more concrete findings by the researcher and his team (Balkin & Kleist, 2017).

Data Collection

Before any concrete data can be collected, the researcher and his team will have to do some observations of the school counselors interacting with their students about college and career readiness so they can get a baseline of what is done to prepare these students for their futures. Observations will allow the researcher to see first-hand information and during that time the researcher will write down notes and questions that might come up during these observations. The notes and questions that the researcher keeps on the participants helps with the collection of data (Balkin & Kleist, 2017).

First, the researcher and his team will conduct interviews with the selected participants from each grade and to build rapport, the researcher and his team will first establish confidentiality with everyone. Each interview will last about 20 minutes and they will be asked about what they believe are the perceptions and the need for college and career readiness programs of school counselors that work in their school. Every interview will be recorded and then listened to after the day is over so the researcher and his team could see if they missed anything important from these interviews. Following the interviews, the participants being the students will take a survey which asks them to rank certain topics from most important to least important. Some of the items in the survey will be financial aid, application process, college visits, job findings, entrance exam prep, etc. Secondly, the school counselors will be interviewed by the researcher and his team. The five school counselors in this high school in Newark, New Jersey will be asked a series of questions in order to see their preparedness to get their students

ready for college and their future careers. Just like the first set of interviews, these will be recorded as well so the researcher and his team can go back and take more notes and to see if they missed anything important.

Data Analysis

Once all the interviews have been completed and the researcher and his team have the data from the survey that was given to each student as well as their parent/guardian, the researcher and his team will start to analyze all the data they have collected from the thirty-five participants. The researcher and his team will first transcribe all the data by using a computer software which will allow the researcher and his team to convert their audio data and notes which were taken during the observation and interview process into text data (Balkin & Kleist, 2017). After this is completed, the researcher and his team will engage in coding to develop themes to explain why these students who attend an urban, low income high school aren't getting the proper preparedness they need for planning for college and their future careers. Also, how that can all be fixed and what steps the school counselors at this certain school can do to best prepare their students from here on out for college and their future careers. Following the first part of the data analysis, the researcher and his team will show that trustworthiness was established through sharing their data with other experts in their field after the study has been completed. The researcher and his team will also use an external audit to make sure their findings are trustworthy through someone else reviewing their findings (Balkin & Kleist, 2017).

Positionality of the Researcher

As the main researcher in this study, I relate to this topic because I have seen first-hand how students who attend an urban low income public high school do not get the proper preparedness from their school counselors about college and their future careers. For a little bit I

was a high school history teacher at an urban, low income high school and during that time maybe once or twice I saw my students get asked about where they wanted to go to college or what they wanted to do for a future career by their school counselors. I took it into my own hands to go over certain things with them so they can start to get an idea of where they potentially want to go and what they want to do after they graduate from high school. Something needs to change for these students when it comes to college and career readiness because everyone deserves the same opportunity no matter where you live, who you are, or what you look like.

Limitations

One limitation from this study is that there are only plans to use participants from one high school in Newark, New Jersey. If this study was to be redone, it could be a study on the entire school district which would take a lot of time to complete and analyze the data from that. If this study was conducted throughout the whole entire district, then students from all different high schools in the city could possibly have all different answers as to what the needs are for them to get college and career readiness from their school counselors. That leads into the next limitation which is the duration of the study. This study doesn't have much time to be completed so if there was anything that would change, the length of completion would be more beneficial to collecting more data and being more thorough in the findings. Another limitation would be that during the observational portion of this study, the participants and the school counselors could act differently since they know that someone is watching them.

The last limitation is researcher bias. As stated above in the "Positionality of the Researcher" section, the researcher has a history of seeing these students who attend an urban, low income public high school not get the help they need to prepare for college and their future

careers. So possibly when spending time with the participants, the researcher might be able to relate and feel empathetic towards these students which could possibly lead to the researcher saying something to these students when he needs to stay neutral and let the study just take place naturally with everyone having their own answers and not influenced by anyone or anything.

Implications

This study relates to everyone that works in a school from the students, teachers, administrators, and especially the school counselors. In order to prepare these students for possibly going to college and what their future careers are going to be after they graduate from high school, it takes a whole team to get them ready for this. However, it starts with the school counselors. If the school counselors aren't properly prepared themselves, then the students will most definitely not be the best prepared they can be to go off to college and decide what they want to do for a job after they graduate. The results of this study will show us how the school can prepare their students for going to college and their future careers by listening to what the students say their own personal needs are. The school counselors can then take the information and data that was collected from this study and apply it to create programs for college and career readiness for their students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the goal of this study is to assess the need for college and career readiness programs for students from the point of view of the school counselors who work in urban, low income public schools. This study which was conducted by the researcher and his team went into how school counselors that work in urban, low income public schools can best prepare themselves in order to best prepare their students for going to college and what their students future careers are going to be. It comes down to the school counselors who are on the front lines

with their students to prepare them in the best possible way so they can succeed after they graduate and hopefully, they go on to make an impact in this world due to the preparedness their school counselors provided them. The researcher and his team used purposeful sampling to recruit the students that will participate in this study as well as all five of the school counselors from this one public high school in Newark, New Jersey. The research data will be collected through observations, interviews, and lastly a short survey the students will take in the end. All in all, understanding what the perceptions and the need for college and career readiness programs of these school counselors are and how the school counselors that are working in these urban, low income schools address the college and career readiness of their students. It all starts with the school counselors who are there to best prepare their students and provide equal opportunity for everyone.

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