

Action Commitments

We have developed seven action commitments that we hope everyone in the admissions, financial aid and counseling communities can support.

We ask you to join us in using these commitments to turn the statement of values into reality.

We believe these action steps help define what our profession can become in the 21st century.

The action commitments are:

1. **The task force, with the support of the College Board, will develop at least 10 training modules to advance the broad agenda laid out in this document.** The training modules will be made up of monographs on specific topics, each designed to explicate these issues and describe best practice. These monographs will be tied to training opportunities that introduce the topics to the admissions, financial aid and school counseling community, particularly to its newest members. These modules will be deep and rich, going to the core of what admissions, financial aid and school counselors need to know and do: how to reach out to low-income and first-generation students; how to simplify the processes of admissions and student aid; how to communicate earlier and effectively with counselors, students and parents; and how to accurately and reliably assess academic readiness for college.

Training may be provided during the College Board's annual Forum, its annual regional meetings or both. In making these opportunities available, the task force is particularly eager to make sure that incoming professionals (admissions, financial aid and counseling) in the community have full access to them. The task force is also eager to collaborate with other professional organizations in making the monographs and training sessions more widely available. The modules contemplated include:

- **Advocacy.** At the state and national levels, training will help the community understand how best to advocate for the changes it seeks in school curricula, staffing standards for counselors, and financial aid and the like so

that students are better prepared by public policy and better served by our schools, colleges and universities.

- **Communications.** This module will explore how to improve communication, which is understood as a three-way intersection involving students and families, as well as schools and colleges and universities. We want to make sure that all students have a clear and accurate picture of the opportunities available to them and understand how to take advantage of those opportunities. The messages parents and students need to hear are: There is a place for everyone. There are resources to support you. We are here to help you find a good fit.
- **Complexity.** The emphasis will be on the complexity of the school-to-college transition and the transfer between two- and four-year institutions, and in finding ways to simplify this complexity. How can we help anxious students and parents navigate this difficult process?
- **Demographics.** The wave of demographic change, already evident in K-12 programs, will soon arrive at the doors of the nation's colleges and universities. This module will explore how to respond to and benefit from the diversity the new demographics promise. In particular, we will want to improve how we serve growing numbers of low-income, minority and first-generation students, most of whom have very little information or experience with the process.
- **Educating institutional leaders.** Speaking truth to power can be a risky business, but the best traditions of our community have always insisted that student needs trump those of institutions. As a united community, we can remind school principals, superintendents, school boards, provosts, chancellors, presidents and boards of trustees of that important truth.

- **Price and aid policy.** This is an area of compelling public and legislative interest. All of us must understand the complexities of these issues, the challenges accompanying them, and the possible solutions in areas in which collectively or individually our institutions can improve their performance. In the end, students and families deserve the assurance that they can afford to pursue their educational dreams.
 - **Professional standards.** This module will cover expectations and professional norms and standards for school counselors, financial aid officers, and admissions recruiters and counselors. An implicit aspect of this module will be the expectation that each school counselor and admissions professional will know enough about financial aid to be able to discuss it in a useful way with prospective students and that each financial aid officer will understand admissions procedures in a similar way.
 - **Rankings and assessments.** We commit to a public dialogue that explores the commercial underpinnings of rankings in higher education. Here the task force contemplates educating the community about rankings, how they are developed, and their weaknesses and strengths. The goal will be to arm the community with the ability to deal with the industry that has grown up around rankings, and to find more meaningful measures of educational quality.
 - **System alignment.** This module will address the imperative to align the system, from prekindergarten through college graduation, including pre-school programming in distressed areas, a college-preparatory program as the high school “default” curriculum and seamless transitions from two- to four-year institutions.
 - **Testing and its use and abuse.** Our community must insist that tests be used during admissions and institutional marketing efforts in a responsible, ethical and professional manner. This module will remind the profession of best practice in this area.
2. **As signers of this document, we commit our individual institutions to reviewing their practices, policies, statements and messages against the 10-part statement of values outlined above.** We ask every school and every college and university in the United States to join us in this effort. The intent should be to make sure that schools and campuses are as transparent as possible in their counseling, admissions and financial aid processes, and that they pursue the principles of best practice ethically and professionally.
 3. **We commit to making our practices as inclusive as possible, recognizing the many ways in which this generation of students represents an entirely new demographic in the school-to-college transition.** Several consequences flow from this new reality:
 - **We should ensure that outreach from institutions of higher education touches students, parents and counselors at EVERY high school throughout the country.** Many affluent high schools are overwhelmed with admissions visitors, while schools in low-income areas rarely see higher education representatives. The admissions community has an obligation to develop and implement strategies that will reach every high school with programs that inspire and inform students, their families and counselors regarding the importance of higher education and the pathways to admissions, financial aid and college success. This effort will require creativity and greater collaboration and cooperation among our institutions. Community receptions, joint presentations by several institutions, and evening and weekend programming that include parents are among the strategies that can be implemented. It is also imperative that admissions staff members who visit schools be trained not just to “recruit” for their own institutions, but also to provide encouraging, consistent and inclusive messages regarding preparation for college success and the variety of higher education opportunities available. Admissions representatives should serve as agents for college access by demystifying the college admissions and financial aid processes. Their role is broader than that of a recruiter — it is that of an educator.

- **We must develop bilingual approaches.**

The number of Hispanic and Latino students attending high school is likely to more than double in the next 10 years. The community should immediately begin to develop bilingual materials and recruiters to make it easier for these students and their families to access the information they need.

- **We should aim to reduce complexity and demystify the process.** For all applicants, but particularly for first-generation applicants, there is a compelling need to reduce the complexity of the admissions and financial aid processes. Some of that is beyond our control, but the profession can do a great deal to simplify the transition. All institutions could do more to employ a common application and adhere to common deadline dates. Colleges and universities that practice open admission or guaranteed admission for students meeting specific requirements should clearly and widely communicate the criteria and the ease of admission to their institutions.

4. **We ask the community to engage leadership at the institutional level (schools and colleges and universities) in discussions about these issues.** School principals and superintendents need to understand the limitations of tests and rankings every bit as much as faculty, deans, provosts and chancellors. The community needs to engage leadership in this discussion and bring the statement of values contained in this document before advisory boards, admissions committees, school boards and boards of trustees.
5. **We ask counselors to commit to genuine college counseling while the task force, for its part, will highlight the need for additional resources to bolster counseling in K-12 education.** Anecdotally, we understand that some counselors are not committed to the essential concept that all students need to be prepared for college. This must change. We challenge counselors to initiate discussions in

their schools about the new reality that all students need to be prepared for college and about what that implies for the professional standing of counselors in the school and how their time is used.

At the same time, school counseling loads are extremely high in many districts, which frequently are those districts that enroll students with the greatest needs. The task force intends to push for professionally defensible staffing levels, for the elimination of administrative busywork for school counselors, and for the elevation of lead counselors in the administrative hierarchy of schools.

6. **The task force looks forward to reviewing the recommendations for improving student aid processes recently delivered to the College Board by the Rethinking Student Aid study group.** It is clear that the Rethinking Student Aid project offers recommendations that are designed to simplify the process and make it more predictable and grounded in student need. We support the approach and hope the final recommendations advance these goals.
7. **The task force will bring the recommendations in this letter** to the attention of the College Board's Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education, asking the commission to endorse the principles in this document as a first step to encouraging provosts, chancellors and presidents to adopt a new way of thinking about institutional excellence and the school-to-college transition.