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Moving Beyond the College-Preparatory High School Model to a College-Going Culture in Urban Catholic High Schools

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A college-going culture has been found to improve academic outcomes for under-represented high school students (Allen, Kimura-Walsh, & Griffin, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The research on Catholic high schools shows that their college-preparatory environments support successful outcomes for African-American and Latino students (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). This study examines two urban Catholic high schools and how they construct opportunities for low-income Latino and Africa-American male students. The year-long study draws from (a) ethnographic field notes, (b) interviews with students and staff, (c) survey data, and (d) student data. Data suggest that although both schools focused on preparing students for college, only one maintained a college-going culture through its college-going discourse, which better served the needs of its underrepresented students.

Introduction

Generally, the U.S. educational system fails poor students of color, but males of color are at greater risk to suffer at the hands of under resourced and underperforming schools. African American and Latino male youth are especially vulnerable to the "school-to-prison-pipeline," which affects one in three African American boys and one in six Latino boys, and predicts these male youth of color will be incarcerated at least once in their lives (Children's Defense Fund, 2007). In terms of high school graduation, 52% of African American males and 58% of Latino males graduate from high school in comparison to 78% of White males (Holzman, Jackson, & Beaudry, 2012).

As a result, Latino and African American males are underrepresented in college within their own ethnic and racial groups (NCES, 2005). Only 46% of Latino and 45% of African American high school graduates who are eligible to matriculate to college do so, while 51% and 67% of White and Asian high school graduates enter college, respectively (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Gender gaps also persist at the college level, where Latina females enroll in college at higher rates than Latino males (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). Research suggests

that despite some increase in the number of students of color who graduate from high school, Latino and African American males graduate the least "college ready" of all students, impeding their successful college completion (Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013). Studies point to the role of poverty, gender expectations, school discipline policies, language and cultural barriers, as well as poorer access to rigorous courses in high school as contributing to the imperfect course of schooling for Latino and African American males. These uneven schooling opportunities have resulted in a higher number of Latina and African American females earning college degrees (associates and bachelors) in comparison to their male counterparts (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

In contrast, the literature on minority students in Catholic high schools indicates that these students benefit from the communal structure and college preparatory curriculum characteristic of Catholic high schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). However, research also points to trends of alienation and tension among high school students of color who attend majority White Catholic schools (Lightfoot, 1983; Simmons, 2012). Relatively little research has been done on majority-minority[1] Catholic high schools, although there has been some research that points to positive outcomes for majority-minority Catholic middle schools (Fenzel & Domingues, 2009; Sheehan & Rall, 2011). In an effort to fill that void, this research examines two all-male urban Catholic high schools that primarily serve Latino and African American students. In particular, the research seeks to understand how urban Catholic high schools engage students within a college preparatory environment. This study analyzes the experiences of low-income African American and Latino male students in two college preparatory, urban Catholic high schools as well as school staff's perceptions of students' college readiness.

A College-going Culture

The study of school culture reveals the specific practices, interactions, or organizational structures that can facilitate positive student development. While contexts and organizational structures of schools can vary, successful secondary schools adopt and promote a college-going culture. A college-going culture facilitates student learning, college readiness, and college matriculation for all of its students (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). In a college-going culture,

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1   I use the term "majority-minority" to describe schools with a student body that is mostly comprised of students from historically underrepresented ethnic/racial groups.

adults and students hold the values, beliefs, and expectations that college readiness requires effort and persistence (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2000). A school's college-going culture must also be equitable and accessible to all of its students and promoted by all members of the school community such that teachers, parents, students, and administrators see college as an expected and obtainable goal for everyone. Key studies in education have found the following five elements to be central to the establishment of a successful college-going culture: (a) academic momentum, (b) an understanding of how college plans develop, (c) a clear mission statement, (d) comprehensive college services, and (e) coordinated and systemic college support (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). All schools, but urban schools in particular, must carefully create a college-going culture that is inclusive of students from all cultural backgrounds, so that historically disadvantaged students do not feel alienated (Oakes, 2003; Oakes et al., 2000).

In order for a college-going culture to flourish with the above-mentioned characteristics, a school must be able to provide a number of resources to its students. Patricia McDonough (1998) found that well-resourced schools were better able to focus on preparing their students for college, which resulted in higher rates of college matriculation. It is no surprise that a college-going culture can be easily established and maintained at well-resourced schools; however, these schools need be careful that they do not consistently alienate historically underserved groups (i.e. ethnic and racial minorities or English language learners) in the college preparation process (Allen, Kimura-Walsh, & Griffin, 2009).

The study of college preparatory resources in urban schools and majority-minority schools is important given the increased segregation of Latino and African American students in schools (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Unfortunately, urban and majority-minority public schools have been largely unsuccessful in establishing a college-going culture for all of their students (Allen et al., 2009; Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Corwin and Tierney (2007) identify two major obstacles to building and maintaining a college-going culture: (a) lack of school-wide support for college, such as relationships with colleges or even a college-centered counselor; and (b) isolated college preparation services. Isolated college services provide college services to a select number of students such as a track of higher performing students or support only at one grade level. In effect, this arrangement can result in an unstructured college preparatory program that leaves many students without access to a college-going program.

Research on majority-minority and urban high schools demonstrates that these schools often focus their college preparatory efforts (in the form of college preparatory programs and clubs, AP classes, and college counseling) on a small number of students, alienating others in the process (Brown, Brown, & Jayakumar, 2009; Gibson, Bejinez, Hidalgo, & Rolon, 2004; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

Two key obstacles emerge in the quest for equity within college-going cultures in urban and majority-minority high schools: Under-resourced schools lack the resources to effectively support large populations of students who need more resources and careful advising; and, as a result, a two tiered system re-emerges where only the most resilient students will benefit from the meager resources these schools can provide.

Catholic High Schools and Minority Students

Research suggests that Catholic schools produce positive outcomes for African American and Latino students at the high school level (Greeley, 1982). In an analysis of 31 Catholic high schools serving predominantly African American students in urban areas, Vernon Polite (2000) found that 81% of all students went on to attend a four-year college and 13 of these schools boasted 96% to 100% college matriculation rates. Polite's interviews of the principals of these high schools, nicknamed "Cornerstones" emphasized that a lack of tracking and strong communal environments led to these successful schools. Similarly, Anthony Bryk and his colleagues conducted an empirical study on the effectiveness of secondary Catholic schools and highlight how these schools foster a sense of community (Bryk et al., 1993). Both studies emphasize the merits of a social community as well as the de-tracking of the academic program for preparing Latino and African American students for post-secondary success.

However, recent news reports reveal that Catholic schools also experience issues similar to those confronting public high schools. Urban Catholic high schools, like segregated urban public high schools, are met with the challenges of shifting cultural norms and providing ample resources to students in underserved communities in an effort to prepare them for college (Kearney, 2008; Whitman, 2008). Robert Simmon's work on the African American student experience in Jesuit high schools points to the prevalence of racial tension at these Catholic high schools (2012). Simmon's work is in line with multiple studies of education that reify the need for a better understanding

of the marginalization, resilience, and contribution of students of color who attend predominantly White institutions. Recent inquiry into Latino parents whose children did not attend Catholic schools revealed a power dynamic within a parish community that favored the wealthier parishioners (Suhy, 2012). Like low-income of parents of public school students, these parents voiced how their social class weakened their influence on the parish, resulting in feelings of disfranchisement. In light of this research, the culture and community of urban Catholic schools warrants a focus on how issues of racial, ethnic and social stratification might affect the college preparatory environment of Catholic high schools.

Historically, one of the primary missions of Catholic high schools is to prepare students for college; many are still well known as college preparatory schools (Bryk et al., 1993). This article investigates whether urban Catholic high schools that serve a majority-minority student population are able to provide equitable access to a college-going culture. The study compares the college preparatory programs of two urban Catholic high schools, focusing on the experiences of students. Both schools primarily serve Latino and African American male youth, but one is distinct in its approach, implementing a work-study program for all of its students.

Methods and Data Collection

This article reports selected findings from a larger research project examining the culture of two urban Catholic schools with an emphasis on the mechanisms that provide a college-going culture for low income Latino and African American male students through their coursework and a communal organization. In an effort to understand how young men of color engaged or disengaged in Catholic schools, I used an ethnographic study, grounded in sociology and anthropology, to analyze how social contexts and interactions with other people mediated the academic experience of students. Over the course of one calendar year, I employed ethnographic fieldwork methods to best capture of the culture of these two schools (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I reviewed school documents, observed school activities, interviewed key informants, and reviewed student data at each school site to create a portrait of each school (Lightfoot, 1983). I also surveyed ninth and eleventh grade students at each school to learn about students' perceptions of the school as well as post-secondary goals. In so doing, the study revealed the critical social support structures of each school aimed at creating college preparatory environment for historically underserved students and their families.

I used a multi-level mixed design where qualitative and quantitative data were "analyzed and integrated to answer aspects of the same question or related questions" at various stages of the data collection process (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). The qualitative data, which includes the bulk of the data presented in this article, was "used to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same subjects or sites" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 41; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

School Sites

A study of two sites allowed me to draw conclusions situated within a macro perspective of the Catholic educational system, highlight the historical and social contexts of each school, and show how these contexts influence the micro level of individual experiences positioned within classrooms and schools. The study focused on St. Peter High School and Divinity High School[2], two urban Catholic high schools offering college preparatory programs located in a large southwestern city in the United States. Both schools have historically served Latino and African American students. Divinity High School is an all-male, urban Catholic high school with a mission to provide a college preparatory program to students from immigrant and working class families. St. Peter High School has a similar college preparatory mission but also incorporates a unique innovation—a corporate work study program—to augment tuition costs, which allows the school to exclusively enroll low-income students.

Divinity High School. Divinity High School, founded in 1925, prides itself on being one of the city's oldest private Catholic high schools continuously serving working-class immigrant families[3]. The school's enrollment stands at over 600 students, 98% of whom identify as students of color. Latino students are the majority of the student body. Historically, Divinity High School's mission has been to educate young men from

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2   All names of schools and school personnel have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the identities of the research subjects.

3   For a more thorough history on Divinity High School or St. Peter High School, please see: Aldana, U. S. (2012). *College Dreams, Corporate Work Study, Brotherhood and Belonging: How Urban Catholic High Schools Structure Opportunity for Low-Income Latino and African American Male Youth*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles).

economically disadvantaged families. The school's leadership works to provide more than 80% of students with financial aid and/or an academic scholarship. However, the school reports that alumni have recently started to send their children to Divinity, resulting in a student population that is more socioeconomically mixed.

St. Peter High School. St. Peter's High School is an all boys Catholic high school located in the southern portion of the same large southwestern metropolitan city as Divinity High School. The school's enrollment includes 340 male students, 65% of whom identify as Latino and 35% who identify as African American.

In 2003, under new Jesuit school administration, St. Peter became a Cristo Rey, which established a work study program for all students. As a result of the Cristo Rey partnership, students must come from low-income families. The students work in corporate work settings that range from the financial sector to non-profits and law offices where they perform typical entry level office work such as filing and answering telephones. Students are required to work five days a month at a work site in exchange for payment towards their tuition. More than 60% of students receive financial aid from the school and no student is turned away if his family cannot pay the tuition.

Students' College-going Aspirations

A comparison of students' aspirations at Divinity High School and St. Peter High School revealed that students at both schools maintained college-going goals. Overwhelming majorities at both schools (97%) indicated that they planned to go to college. Accordingly, students interviewed shared not only their desire to go to college, but which colleges they wanted to attend. Of the 32 students interviewed, only one student from each campus expressed not being sure about college, but still included it as a viable option. With respect to college going goals, a small difference between students at Divinity and St. Peter could be seen in students' beliefs about their peers (not close friends). Eighty-nine percent of students at Divinity viewed their peers as college going, while only 82% of St. Peter students believed this of their peers.

In general, the post-secondary goals of students at both campuses did not appear to be affected by the segregation of mostly low-income and minority students. However, students at St. Peter consistently shared that they had more friends in public schools who did not share their college-going goals. For example:

> It's different. They go to public school. That's about it. It's really different. The whole campus life is different. You have more freedom in public school than private school, especially if you don't want to do this, you don't want to do that. (Ivan, ninth grader, St. Peter HS)

While the literature indicates that segregating students can negatively impact the school experience for underrepresented minority youth, the experience of Latino and African American youth in these urban Catholic schools suggested that college going aspirations were not affected. Students at both Divinity and St. Peter shared a desire to go to college.

College Preparatory Programs Facilitating a College-going Culture

The goal of preparing their students for post-secondary success was evident in both schools' mission statements and values. Divinity's guiding principles: Lasallian, Integrity, Focused, and Educated (LIFE) were cornerstones to the type of pro-academic and pro-social norms the school encouraged. Lasallian and Integrity facilitated students spiritual, social, and aesthetic development by asking them to see God in others, respond to the needs of the poor, work well with others and develop an appreciation for music, art, drama, and their own physical abilities. Focused and Educated facilitated academic and personal development by asking students to set personal goals, practice mature decision making and develop a critical thinking skills prepare them for college and life. During interviews, Divinity teachers and staff echoed their goal of getting students accepted into college. Similarly, St. Peter developed a set of goals for its students which they called the "Grad at Graduation." A focus on a core set of values—open to growth, intellectually motivated, spiritual, loving, committed to doing justice, and work experience—encompassed the social and academic goals of the school. Additionally, teachers and students at St. Peter operated with a clear goal of preparing students for college by the fall of their senior year.

Findings from both schools suggest that St. Peter and Divinity High School maintained the rigor commonly associated with college-preparatory program of Catholic high schools. A review of ninth and eleventh grade student transcripts revealed that all 539 students at both schools enrolled in college preparatory classes that placed him on a college-going track. The students benefitted from a college-preparatory curriculum that satisfied graduation requirements and application requirements of the state college systems.

Observations in classrooms demonstrated a focus on academic momentum. Both schools also had provisions for students who did not pass coursework to ensure they remained college-eligible and on a path toward high school completion. Students were often counseled consistently to ensure they passed coursework or provided options to retake coursework, therefore, ensuring they would graduate in four years. In some extreme cases, students who failed opted to retake an entire year of study or were asked to leave the school if they could not maintain significant academic progress.

School	Clear Mission Statement	Academic Momentum	Comprehensive College Services	Understanding of How College Plans Develop (for your demographic groups)	Coordinated and Systemic College Support
Divinity High School	LIFE Values: academic and social norms aimed at preparing students for postsecondary life and college	College preparatory curriculum for all students	College counseling office and counselor, fieldtrips to college campuses, parent workshops and SAT/ACT assistance	Use of multistranded relationships to deliver information and counseling to students who need this information focused on college requirements, financial aid information and collegiate sports	Counselor check ins for students in academic trouble, counselor sessions with students in classroom setting to select coursework, receive college information
St. Peter High School	The academic program is designed so students will be college-ready by their senior year, developing in them the desire for post-secondary education	College preparatory curriculum for all students	College counseling office (open door policy); two ful time counselors, college campus fieldtrips and weekend visits, alumni speakers, college days	Use of insitutional agents to deliver information about college especially in the areas of require-ments, financial aid, and social issues such as first genera-tion college goers or unrealistic goals.	One counselor assign-ed to each student for four years, yearly check ins, counselor sessions with stud-ents in classroom setting to select coursework, receive college information, college essay appli-cation support from English teachers

Figure 1 Divinity and St. Peter High School's elements of a college-going culture

In terms of a college-going culture, Divinity and St. Peter maintained similar academic and social goals and provided similar academic programs. However, the college-preparatory program at each high school differed in its approach to supporting students with their post-secondary plans. Figure 1 summarizes the elements of each high school's college preparatory program that facilitates a college-going culture. For example, both schools had college guidance offices for students and a counseling system to distribute college resources; however, there were differences in the way students accessed these resources. Most notably, the students at Divinity underutilized counselors when making important school related decisions. Given that each school had similar student populations and college preparatory goals, I further investigated why a percentage of students at Divinity did not use their counselor as a resource. In the next section I use the voices of students from each school to explain how they participated in college-counseling portion of the college-going culture at each school.

Role of Counselors

Divinity High School provided a variety of resources to their students and families in the area of college guidance. In particular, the school provided students with academic counseling, college-themed assemblies, a college guidance office, workshops and tutorials for the SAT/ACT. Each year, students also went on a college visit which varied across the four years so students would be sure to visit a cross range of universities (private, public, state school). Divinity also provided information to parents about the college preparation process in the form of yearly grade level meeting/workshops where parents (sometimes accompanied with students). I attended a parent workshop for English speaking parents of eleventh graders which was simultaneously being offered in Spanish. The meeting provided the 50 parents in attendance with a cursory view of the resources the school would provide students as well as the various kinds of college requirements that exist.

The college guidance workshop served to orient the parents with the steps towards applying to a four year college which comprised of admissions tests, application process, choosing colleges/universities, searching for college funds and preparation for senior year. The academic advisor spoke about the many options the students have when they apply to college and in particular emphasized the types of requirements for state universities versus those of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This collection of

resources was meant to support all families and students towards their college endeavors, but the generalized nature of this information seemed to have little impact for those families who were new to the college application process. Furthermore, the distribution and activation of these resources varied across student groups.

At Divinity High School, there was one counselor per grade level, which also meant that the senior year counselor was also known as the college counselor. These grade-level counselors also served as teachers. Each counselor received two periods to "counsel" students, but was still responsible for teaching classes. According to my observations and student interview, counselors often sought to counsel students who were struggling (academically or socially). Mr. Encino, the senior college counselor, explained that his colleagues were expected to inform him if they saw a student struggling and particularly if they were in the ninth or tenth grade. Those students would be then recommended to the peer tutoring program or the school psychologist/caseworker.

The teacher/counselor role allowed students to develop *multistranded* relationships with their teacher/counselor that could facilitate interactions with the counselor during an unscheduled counselor meeting (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Indicative of this, one student, Miguel, a ninth grader at Divinity, shared with me how he was able to ask his freshman year counselor some questions related to academics and life trajectories during an unscheduled meeting. He shared,

> Researcher: And what do you talk to him [counselor] about?
> Miguel: With him? I haven't really talked to him, I just asked him questions about, like what's a good, great GPA for the, for like where I wanna go, or where I'd be, try to end in life.
> Researcher: Did you make a meeting with him or did he make a meeting with you?
> Miguel: I really just saw him in my class after school and went to go talk to him. It really wasn't my idea, I just saw him.

In this case, Miguel was able to seek advice from his freshman counselor mainly because the counselor was also his teacher. He highlights how this wasn't really *his* idea, but rather it just happened because he was there after school. Miguel also serves as an important example of a student who was ready and willing to seek assistance and/or guidance from his teacher/coun-

selor, rather than wait for his counselor to make an appointment with him. Students are more likely to enact help-seeking with adults on campus when they have already developed a positive relationship with the adult (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

While Miguel was comfortable with the act of *help-seeking*, research demonstrates that there are various institutional limitations and prejudice that can prompt students to limit their help seeking towards *institutional agents* (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Indicative of this, interview data yielded a very different picture of counseling for other students. Only two of the eight ninth grade students I interviewed had actually met and sought advice from their counselor. In both cases, the students were able to speak about academics and their post-secondary plans. However, the other students I interviewed either did not know who the ninth grade counselor was or only knew them by name. None of these students had checked-in with the counselor the middle of the second semester of their freshman year. Darnell, a ninth grader, rationalized that he did not need to meet with his counselor because he was doing well in school. He explained, "Usually, the counselors are for people with bad grades and so, they try to help them figure out ways to get their grades up. Since I have decent grades, I don't need to seek counseling." Even though Divinity aimed to lessen the tension between counselor and students by utilizing a teacher as a grade level counselor, there were many limitations to this type of set up. The teacher who also wore the "hat" of ninth grade counselor was limited in their time and resources, given there was only one counselor/ teacher for 158 students and they were also responsible for teaching four classes. Furthermore, this sort of *multistranded* relationship relied on students initiating the help-seeking if they were students who were performing well. In effect, students came to understand that meeting with your teacher was in fact a negative experience arranged for only those students who were struggling thereby limiting the chance of students initiating help-seeking (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Generally, the students at Divinity experienced limited opportunities to seek advice or assistance from counselors. In interviews, students in the eleventh grade seemed to know who their counselor was but still reported not having met with them one-on-one or neither having solicited advice from them. I questioned students about why they had not actively sought to speak to their counselor and determined that students either viewed the counseling system as confusing or not helpful. Lewis indicated that he still felt counsel-

ors only focused on students who were performing inadequately (as they did in ninth grade) but also felt he needed help with college planning. He shared

> Freshman year I met with my counselor. …I've been here 2 years and I really don't know the system of counseling. I think it's more for, like I said, people who are like border line and down, who are 2.5 and below… I'd like to know what college is like. I'm interested. I need to know like background information because I can't do it all myself. (Lewis, eleventh grader, Divinity)

Like many other first generation college-going students, Lewis wanted to go to college but lacked the information to fully understand what that application process looked like or what college planning looked like before senior year.

Interviews with students revealed that even though students may have met with counselors, the quality of this meeting was often not as fruitful as students wanted. Andy, an eleventh grader, described how he received information in a group setting to discuss class schedules. He explained,

> The other thing is that there are registrations like classes yesterday. They don't really give you a choice so [the counselor] said, "You're going to take Religion, you're going to take English." Those are all fine but what I did not like it when he said, "Your first elective has to be Math." They made us choose Statistics. (Andy, eleventh grader, Divinity)

Andy later explained to me that he had already taken four years of math by the time he was a junior and did not want to take another math class but he felt like he could not talk to anyone about it. His counselor just told the entire class to pick the same classes. Andy admitted to me that he knew he had to meet with his counselor about college especially because his father asked him to do so.

Although students had equal access to counselors on campus, there are still issues with the counseling model they have employed. Andy served an example of a student performing well (3.64 GPA) who knew he had to meet with his counselor, but did not know when or where to actively seek his assistance. Like the majority of students at Divinity, Andy's parents had not gone to college, so and he could have benefitted from a more structured college counseling approach that emphasized more than coursework. While the *multistranded* approach could be useful for forging relationships, using

teachers as counselors seems to have weakened the emphasis on individual college guidance for students not in the twelfth grade. As noted, the various elements of applying to college, such as financial aid, were simply not explicit talking points when students met with counselors. Students in eleventh grade shared that their meetings with counselors were primarily focused on course schedule planning and not college plans.

School Activities

St. Peter offered a college preparatory program for all of its students and in turn established multiple forums on campus to facilitate a college-going culture. Like Divinity, St. Peter offered student meetings, assemblies, and parent workshops to educate the students and their families about college and scholarships. However, the college counseling program at St. Peter, whose central hub was in the college guidance office, provided students with a seemingly endless calendar of activities that promoted college. Week after week, I noted university representatives from a variety of colleges arriving on campus to speak at workshops and connecting with students following the workshops. The college guidance office also provided information about college campus visits and maintained an open door policy allowing students to use the office space to work on personal essays, homework, or other school work. College pennants and literature decorated the walls of the college guidance office, where students could sit on the couch or work on computers or at a conference table set up in the middle of the room. On the door of the college guidance office, I often saw sign-up sheets for students to attend college weekend visits and applications for summer or extracurricular activities and would subsequently hear students' names being called to the college counseling office to remind them about fieldtrips and permission slips.

College visits, decorative pennants and presentations are not unique to college preparatory schools. However, St. Peter's college counselors ensured that these resources found their way into the hands of students. While students had to apply or sign up for college visits, the college guidance counselors also tried to match students with opportunities of interest. Many students told me about extracurricular activities, summer programs, trips, and excursions during the year that they heard about through the college guidance office. These trips, while not directly related to college, exposed students to new places and served as a form of cultural capital. Even though participation was limited for some activities, all students went on yearly trips to colleges beginning in the summer before they started school their freshman year.

At the core of St. Peter's mission was college preparation for all of its students. The principal, Dr. Jones described how the campus facilitated a college going culture:

> From day one and even before day one, you know, we were talking about, to students that they will be going to college. You know, you see the acceptance letters in the hallway, college sweat shirts or t-shirt Fridays once a month, investing in two full time people in college guidance.

Dr. Jones recognized that St. Peter's students needed a great deal of support in preparing for college and, in turn, hired two full time college counselors for a school that enrolled fewer than 400 students. Each student was assigned a counselor who was able to develop a personal relationship with him over the course of four years. The counselors provided individual attention to students by meeting at least once a year for the underclassmen, and multiple times for the seniors. During these meetings, the counselors learned as much as they could about their students to best provide them with the support they needed to become college-eligible and ready to engage in the college application process.

Ms. Nichols, one of the college counselors, indicated that most of her students would be the first in their families to go to college; this fact seemed to make the students doubt themselves—even those with near perfect GPAs. She found herself reassuring students and helping them to see they were indeed college bound. Working with struggling students required special attention to identifying colleges that would be good fits for the student. She shared with me how convincing students that they would get into college was a large part of her counseling duties. She explained,

> A lot of the kids think they're in a worse academic position than what they are because they don't know what you need to do. So, a lot of them are like, "Oh, I'm not gonna be able to get in. I already know, I'm just going to go to a JC [junior college]." And I'm like, "just make JC the last option." You know what I mean? "You don't know that that's the only place you can get in to. Let's wait. Let's see what we can do first."…I mean, don't get me wrong, I think JCs are great but I think for our students …it will be so hard for them to maneuver through the crowd there. First, they're used to coming to a place like this where it's extremely small and supportive and [a JC] may not necessarily do that.

The college counselors worked tirelessly to help all of their students find a college in which they would thrive. Ms. Nichols discouraged her students from limiting their college searches to community colleges because of more attainable admissions requirements; instead, she encouraged students to seek out colleges that would provide an environment and support to ensure their success. Furthermore, Ms. Nichols held high expectations for all of her students, never favoring students with higher GPAs over those who were struggling. Instead, she understood that her students who struggled at St. Peter were also college bound, but that they needed to find a school that would support them in a small school environment such as St. Peter. While she admitted that her seniors did receive more of her time, she explained it was because of the multiple questions they often had about time-sensitive scholarship and college applications. She revealed that she gave the seniors her cell phone number and allowed them to text questions to her, which she answered even when she was not at work.

Ms. Nichols's efforts demonstrated how the college counseling program at St. Peter went beyond the college activities provided. Her focus on individual students and their needs facilitated a college-going identity for students who had previously struggled with creating an academic identity. The college preparation program at St. Peter elevated the norms of the school and staff served as *institutional agents* to students through their assistance with college preparation and holding students to the expectation they would go to college (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). In this manner, Ms. Nichols and the staff at St. Peter developed social capital for students, which was critical for the students at St. Peter whose parents lacked the knowledge about college application process.

For some students, college was just a possibility before enrolling in St. Peter's; the staff at St. Peter, however, affirmed that college was, in fact, the expectation for all students. Jared, a student who returned to St. Peter for his eleventh grade year explained how the counselors preached the same message to students about going to college but tailored the message depending on the student. He explained,

> College guidance counselors are really supportive. They tell you what you need to do like if you're not on top of your stuff, they'll come in there and they'll tell you. They'll schedule like something you want to achieve [during] our break or lunch or something. They'll tell you, 'You're messing up. You need to hop on it if you're going to go to college.' I believe like they adjust to who it is. If it was like a quiet soft

> spoken kid, they'll probably say it like in a cool kind of gentle way. But if it's like another kind of kid, they say, 'Stop [messing] up!' (Jared, eleventh grader, St. Peter)

The counselors at St. Peter engaged in a range of counseling services based upon what students needed to help situate them in the college-going path. Indicative of this, Maurice was an eleventh grader with a very low GPA and who had been released (i.e. fired) from three work study jobs. I sat next to him during his English class and, over time, worked with him on his writing assignments. One day during class, he shared a poem he wrote describing how difficult his experience had been at St. Peter. The poem clearly related how Maurice had trouble living up to the norms set forth by St. Peter and how difficult the transition had been for him. Still, Maurice made it clear that he was college bound. I asked Maurice to explain how he decided to change for the better. He offered his teachers and Ms. Nichols, in particular, had never stopped believing that he could go to college. To Maurice, this kind of support allowed him to fully invest in his dream and finally move toward his dream of going to college.

   The students at St. Peter shared how the counselors, staff, and teachers all actively worked to help them understand that they could go to college. The school provided one-on-one support to ensure that students did not just hear they were college bound—but that in reality they would be college ready. Over the year, the college counseling office realized students would need extra writing support to successfully write a personal statement during the college application process. To this end, English teachers were asked to work with students to improve their writing skills in order to perform at the collegiate level. All students were divided and assigned to an English teacher, so that every junior and senior had an English teacher to review his work and provide resources. Teachers were also asked to assist students with essays for scholarships, college applications, and to write as many recommendations as they could.

   Data suggest that at the core of St. Peter's mission was college preparation for all of its students. Interviews with staff reified this mission. More importantly, however, observations revealed that all staff consistently worked to prepare students for college. Counselors in particular shared valuable information that could prepare students for college and developed multiple systems to ensure the information and resources were accessed by students. To summarize, students at St. Peter benefitted from: (a) college guidance in the

form of one assigned college counselor, (b) an awareness of the kind of college guidance support low-income minority youth need, and (c) a college advising support system that attempted to meet the various needs of students.

The Importance of College-going Discourse

In terms of a college-going culture, data suggest that Divinity's college guidance program lacked attention to how first-generation students made choices about college, which resulted in an uneven distribution and activation of college guidance resources. Although the college guidance program at Divinity offered students general access to college-preparatory resources, the system relied on students to actively seek help. At Divinity, one counselor, who also served as a teacher, was assigned to each grade level to assist students with course selection. In students' junior and senior years, the teacher/counselor's role expanded to include guiding students in college selection. Although the teacher/counselor role allowed students to develop *multistranded* relationships with their teacher/counselor, facilitating interactions during a non-scheduled counseling meeting (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), it came at a cost. Students noted how busy teacher/counselors were and felt that they only focused on students who were in academic trouble. In effect, Divinity provided isolated college-preparation services to a select number of very motivated students, while the rest of students received very little guidance.

As in many schools with a scarcity of resources for college advising, Divinity students were expected seek help from teachers and teachers were expected to share information and resources with students. However, interview data with school staff revealed a prejudice towards a significant group of students, the non-honors students. Half of the teachers interviewed revealed their belief that many students would not matriculate or graduate from college, but felt that the school met its obligation of getting students accepted *into* college.

My observations of teacher and student interactions at Divinity showed that teachers' beliefs about students' abilities influenced their expectations (or lack thereof) for students and their families. For example, Ms. Grange, an English teacher, regularly allowed certain students to disengage from her class (as demonstrated by students putting their heads on the desk for the whole period) because they were either about to fail or already failing the class. When I asked her about these students, she stated her belief that these students did not care about school and, as a result, were not going to put forth any effort. However, my data suggested that a clear majority of stu-

dents wanted to go to college and certainly cared about their studies. Relying on teacher/counselors to guide students' paths to college created a situation in which teachers' prejudices were a powerful factor in determining which students gained access to the school's college-going culture.

Both Divinity and St. Peter both maintained a college guidance office where counselors provided students with resources that promoted college. However, there were differences in the way St. Peter delivered college guidance and shared resources with students. These differences were, in part, influenced by a tacit understanding of how minority youth make college decisions and facilitated by something I call a *college-going discourse*. I define college-going discourse as language used by staff and students to proclaim (a) the importance of college and (b) the belief all students can go to college.

In effect, the college-going discourse emphasized to the whole school community the belief that students would go to college. The staff at St. Peter utilized a college-going discourse that was evident across campus; although teachers shared some concerns about students' college-readiness, they still held the highest of expectations for students. College-going discourse was purposeful; staff utilized it during general assemblies, parent workshops, announcements, and in classes. In these public forums, the staff shared information on a variety of topics related to college-going behaviors and expectations. The staff also engaged in a college-going discourse with students in private conversations where students could discuss their questions and concerns about college. The staff's use of a college-going discourse allowed students to hear individually and in group settings that they too were expected to go to college and thus always needed to work on their schoolwork. Even students who were lower performing experienced teachers who told them they could go to college—provided they improved their grades.

As a result of the college-going programs at both schools, the majority of students from Divinity and St. Peter were accepted into four-year colleges and universities. According to each school, recent graduating classes had close to 80% of Divinity students continued to four-year universities, while 70% of St. Peter students went on to four-year universities. In comparison to national data, these numbers demonstrate (albeit on a small scale) that urban Catholic schools can graduate and enroll in college larger numbers of male students of color than their public and private school counterparts. Further research should examine how the college-going culture of Catholic schools in fact prepares students for college by looking at student college retention and graduation rates.

Conclusion

There is a need for schools that can meet the needs of low-income, Latino and African-American youth, including providing a college-going culture to prepare them for post-secondary school success (Oakes et al., 2000). The findings presented in this article demonstrate how two urban Catholic high schools utilized similar structures to establish and sustain a college-going culture. Each school built a college-going culture through its college preparatory curriculum and a college counseling program that provided a series of college oriented activities. Additionally, each school provided academic support and access to a college counselor. There were, however, differences in implementation between the two schools. Notably, the students at St. Peter benefitted from two counselors who assisted students in accessing information about college as well as a school-wide college-going discourse, which emphasized the shared belief that all students would continue to post-secondary education. In doing so, staff became key institutional agents to students through their assistance with college-preparation and holding students to the expectation they would go to college.

The data gleaned from this project can serve to improve the college preparatory programs of Catholic high schools that serve low-income, Latino and African-American students. For urban Catholic schools, it is imperative to establish a college-going culture rooted in an understanding of how historically marginalized students make decisions about college. Underrepresented youth, especially those without parents who attended college, need scaffolds to help them create a college-going identity and receive a high school experience that will adequately prepare them for college. Urban Catholic schools need to do more than establish a college guidance office that offers information on colleges; they must ensure that students are exposed information and resources that can help them develop a college-going academic identity. In particular, a college-going discourse characterized by high expectations for students' secondary and post-secondary educational success, embraced and enacted throughout the school community, can assist schools in building an intentional college-going culture.

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