

## Cultural Design Intervention - Education

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HDCC105

### Short Abstract:

Our design intervention project, focused on education, aims to reduce the gap between college preparatory opportunities of students in different socioeconomic classes. Many high school students of lower socioeconomic status do not have access to the same resources as students of higher socioeconomic standing, such as standardized test tutoring, FAFSA assistance, essay editing, assistance with application questions and fees, and general guidance on the topic. Our design intervention proposes a non-profit website that will serve as a guidance tool for students applying to college that may not have the same opportunities as their fellow students. Students with access to the website would receive guidance from counselors on the website regarding every step in the college process, and would be rewarded if they followed through with their preparation. The website would additionally have information regarding affordable education plans and alternative options. The goal of our design intervention is to make higher education more accessible to people from all backgrounds.

### Project Description:

Our program simplifies the college readiness process by making resources like tutoring, SAT prep, and application help accessible online. We plan to integrate an application timeline, which helps students keep track of their progress in the college application process. For those that are unaware of what the application process consists of, the timeline breaks down every aspect, from searching for the right school, to applying for financial aid, and even making the decision of which college is best for you. Each task on the timeline has its own link, where users can learn more about how to complete each milestone, and it provides general deadlines to ensure that students are completing the process in a timely manner. As an incentive, when each task on the timeline is completed, the user unlocks various prizes. Our interface will be easy to navigate, and will reiterate the idea of simplification of the application process.

### Mockup of Example Timeline:

See below

# BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY

This timeline will help you have the most productive and easy college application experience possible! Scroll down to begin.

[Learn More](#)

## Begin Preparation for Standardized Testing

It's never too early to begin studying for the SAT or ACT! Resources such as our online tutors, practice tests, and study guides will not only show you how to take the test, but help you make sure you ace it!



[Begin Task](#)



## Which Colleges are The Right Fit for You?

There are thousands of schools in the nation, and they vary in size, course offerings, and other characteristics. One of the key aspects in the college application process is deciding which school is the best fit for you. This task can help you narrow down your search.

[Find Out More](#)

### Significance and Distinction:

Access to free academic services for students from lower socioeconomic classes matters because the entire college application/preparation process is not affordable for a significant number of high school students. Students from lower socioeconomic classes deserve a chance to compete with students who can afford paid collegiate preparatory services. The majority of colleges in the United States accept SAT or ACT scores. The SAT costs \$47.50 to take. Similarly, the ACT costs \$49.50 for domestic students, excluding the writing portion. These numbers may already be intimidating to low-income families, and this is even to exclude subject tests and the essay portion that many elite schools encourage or even require students to take. In addition to taking standardized tests, there is the issue of application and score sending fees. Students from low-income homes are then discouraged from applying to top-tier or more academically rigorous schools (“Impacts of Lower Socioeconomic Status on College Admissions”).

Our design intervention is different from what already exists because money will no longer be a barrier to the resources that students can afford. All services provided on the website will be free. A lot of existing free services, like Khan Academy, encompass only parts of the college application and test preparation processes. Furthermore, with the addition of incentives, not only does our program provide students with all the resources they will need during their college search and application period, but it will reward them for taking initiative and encourage them to engage in the process. Our product is designed to encompass all pertinent parts and additional resources and connections, free of charge for certain students.

### Approach:

In order to create our website, we would have to use a website building platform like WordPress, or build our website from scratch, most likely with HTML—the most common coding language used for the internet. Afterwards, we would have to allocate a domain and web hosting service, such as bluehost.com, to ensure that our website will be accessible at all times. Since our website will be used by counselors to provide real-time aid to prospective college students, we must create a separate interface for counselors to speak with and provide assistance to students. Additionally, if we incorporate a system that rewards students for time spent and activities completed on the website, we may want to consider partnerships with restaurants or retailers. Overall, we would require a diverse range of skill sets for this proposal. We would need individuals comfortable with website creation to generate and maintain the site, and to fix any complications that may become apparent through usability testing. Furthermore, we would need individuals familiar with each aspect of the college process, including counselors skilled at teaching each section of the SAT/ACT, counselors able to guide students through the entire Common or Coalition Application, individuals competent in financial areas to help with the FAFSA and other financial paperwork, and English majors or teachers able to review and explain points of weakness in a college essay.

In order to start off with our website we would have to either use a website builder or we would have to build our website from scratch. This would require using a website like WordPress or learning a coding language called Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) which serves as the basis for a majority of the websites on the internet. After creating our website we would have to allocate a domain and a web hosting service such as bluehost.com. This will ensure that our website is up and running at all times. On the website we would have different tabs each pertaining to a separate part of the college application process such as filling out the CommonApp or the Coalition applications, other tabs would include writing the college essay, filling out the FAFSA, a general questions tab, and the rewards points section. Each tab would provide insightful details for helping to complete the college process which would accumulate points for the students which they could in turn exchange for small prizes. Since we also want to provide real time help for the students using the website we would incorporate an interface where the students have one view of the website while the guidance officers, those people who are providing the help with the various processes, would see a different interface where they could speak with and provide

the needed assistance. The skills needed to put our whole process together will be a large variety. We need to have persons who are proficient with computers or website building in order to put together the website, fix and problems that should arrive in the usability testing and maintain the site. Next we would require people with a familiarity with the college process to provide the help needed to the students using it. We would need a group of people familiar with math and english for the section of the site where we help people with SAT/ACT preparation, people of either financial backgrounds or just familiarity with the FAFSA to help students fill out their financial paperwork, people who understand the college application process well enough to be able to convey what they know in order to help those who are having trouble understanding the college application process, and english majors or teachers who would be able to review and explain points of weakness in a college essay.

#### Timeline:

We approximate the development of the website to take around half a year. The first phase of development would consist of planning out the website, and we approximate this process to take around 1-2 months. Next, the web designers would create the website, and conduct usability testing to fix any problems with the user interface, and we estimate this process to take 2-3 months. After this, we would be able to open the program up to the general public, where it would begin as an independent non-profit tool for underprivileged students. Over time, we plan to integrate the program into the school system in order to maximize accessibility. The program has specified end date, as to benefit the maximum amount of people.

#### Audience:

\_\_\_\_\_This project, while it is accessible by all students of any status, is much more specifically designed for students of lower socioeconomic statuses, whose underfunded school systems and struggling communities do not have the proper resources to adequately prepare them for college. Without experienced counselors and teachers and access to beneficial test-prep, these students often get left behind and do not know what to do. We hope to help such students across the nation who experience this problem become much more prepared for a secondary education by providing such resources, increasing education attendance and retention rates in their communities while bridging the socioeconomic divide that currently plagues our nation.

#### Budget and Funding:

For our project we anticipate that we will be awarded \$25,000 from the Future of Information Alliance seed grant and another \$5,000 from the Do Good Challenge competition. This \$30,000 budget will be more than sufficient to fund the setup and launch of our website, allowing us to conduct usability testing, and to improve our site after initial user feedback. Some of the money we collect will also go towards funding our incentives program and helping provide vouchers to qualifying students of families of low socio-economic status. Leftover funds from our grants will be used to maintain and keep the website running, and will be put towards creating more public awareness about our platform. Due to the fact that our medium is a website, we won't need a large staff to maintain our project, thus reducing projected costs. As another source of funding, we could accept donations from the public to help us with our non-profit efforts. We could also include relevant education-related advertisements on our website and use the ad-revenue as another source of funding to sustain our project.

#### Citations

“Impacts of Lower Socioeconomic Status on College Admissions.” *Wharton Public Policy Initiative*, <https://publicpolicy.wharton.upenn.edu/live/news/2302-impacts-of-lower-socioeconomic-status-on-college>.