Synthesis Snapshot
OPPORTUNITIES FOR DESIGN

Expanding College Pathways
Overview

Over the past two weeks, we collected insights from a national network of educators and students about the college-going journey within our Collaboration: **How might we create programs, processes, and tools to provide ongoing support to all students on their journey to and through college.** These insights were generated from educator-led interviews with students, personal reflections from the community about their own challenges to and through college, follow up surveys with select-influencers in the community, and other educator-created stories on The Teachers Guild. After synthesizing these contributions, The Guild team developed five key themes which present opportunities for design in better supporting all students to and through college. Use this Synthesis Snapshot for inspiration in our next phase of the design journey - Ideate - where we’ll begin creating new and better solutions for college-success.
Key Themes:

COLLEGE JOURNEY

1. **Demystify the Process**

2. **Develop College-Success Character Traits**

3. **Cultivate Student Passion Areas**

4. **Activate School Communities**

5. **Stay Connected After High School**
Demystify the Process
The college application and enrollment process is a critical moment in the K16 journey and it presents significant logistical and informational barriers. Additionally, despite the fact that we message how important “fit” is in the college-application process, the tools and systems we provide to support students in understanding that fit are either too little, too late - or non-existent. The result? Students get trapped in details, and sometimes never make it to day one of college. Or, they arrive at a postsecondary institution and don’t really know why they chose it in the first place.

**How Might We**

**CLARIFY THE APPLICATION AND ENROLLMENT JOURNEY FOR STUDENTS SO THAT THEY DON’T GET TRAPPED IN UNNECESSARY BARRIERS?**

**CREATE BETTER TOOLS AND RESOURCES THAT COMMUNICATE HOW “MATCH-MAKING” REALLY HAPPENS IN THE COLLEGE-GOING JOURNEY?**
I had no idea what I was looking for when researching schools. I didn’t know what I could afford. I was aware there were scholarships and financial aid out there, but I didn’t really know how much I could get or what that really meant.

—Mina, College Advisor

While the forms could be simplified, the main challenges I see are that there are hidden steps to take in the process and lack of clear directions. Different deadlines for different schools also make the process extremely confusing. I know students who have missed the deadline by a day and had significantly different financial aid packages.

—Margaret, College Advisor, Boston

Coming from a low-income family, I didn’t really have the privilege to go visit colleges as my peers did. So most of my information that I got from colleges were from brochures. And basically, I had to find what my fit was through that.

—Cristian, High School Senior, heading to Brown in the Fall
Develop College-Success Character Traits
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College systems are based on self-regulation, autonomy and choice. But, today’s high schools are highly structured and regulated. Once students arrive in post-secondary institutions, they often face challenges in taking ownership over their learning, knowing how to bounce back after a hardship, or learning how to be independent.

How Might We

DEVELOP IMPORTANT CHARACTER SKILLS EARLIER IN STUDENTS SO THEY ARE PREPARED TO DRIVE THEIR COLLEGE LEARNING EXPERIENCES FROM DAY-ONE?

SET UP STUDENTS TO BE INDEPENDENT, BETTER SELF-REGULATE AND SELF-MOTIVATE FROM DAY ONE OF COLLEGE?
PREPARE

Develop College-Success Character Traits

“I am finding that most of my students are not able to find/figure out their own self value. Many of my students think that they are not good enough or smart enough to go to college.”

–Andre, College Advisor, Lancaster Pennsylvania

“You really have to take control of your own learning. The first year of college is really about “learning how to learn” - it’s hard to break bad habits from high school. You can’t afford to procrastinate in university and it’s not enough to just attend class.”

–Isabella, High School Student, Vancouver
Cultivate Student Passion Areas
**PREPARATION**

**Cultivate Student Passion Areas**

In college, you’re expected to know what you want to do and why. And, as you’re applying to college, you’re expected to have answers about why a certain school will better meet your interests and needs more than another. But so many students have no idea what their passions are by the 11th grade. This introduces a lot of doubt about the college-journey all-together. Many students struggle with these types of challenges: “Is college worth it? - I don’t even know what my career goals are.” “This application asks me to describe what I want to do once in college - but I don’t know what I want to study.” “I’m supposed to describe my interests - but I’m not sure what I really care about.” These are just a few of the big-leaps that students are often suddenly faced with starting in the 11th grade.

**How Might We**

HELP STUDENTS TO CULTIVATE THEIR PASSIONS AREAS AND BUILD A BETTER SENSE OF SELF?

CONTEXTUALIZE CORE ACADEMIC STUDIES IN THE REAL-WORLD MORE OFTEN SO STUDENTS SEE THOSE LINKS?

PROVIDE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO EXPERIENCE AND GROW THEIR PASSIONS OUTSIDE OF THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM CONTEXT?
Cultivate Student Passion Areas

As I got further along in my education, and the expectation to attend a prestigious university intensified, the wonder of discovery that had permeated my elementary school experience disappeared. My only motivation to complete homework, and cram for tests was the grade, which seemed to be the only apparent purpose and outcome of learning.

–Rachel, College Student, Chicago

Doing well in school alone will not get students to college or make them want to stay; but being a part of groups that they are passionate about can make a world of difference.

–Rodolfo, College Advisor, Milwaukee

The uncertainty of not knowing what you want to do with your life, yet having to commit to one path is overwhelming for a young person.

–Peter Kale, Adjunct Professor, D.C.
Activate School Communities
Activate School Communities

Mentors who build rapport with and support students through their college journey make ALL the difference. In this Collaboration, we’re partnering with outstanding organizations who are innovating on the advisor role so that more students receive the personalized support they need for college-success. And yet, college advising is a luxury in the U.S.. The national student-to-counselor ratio is 478:1. For first-generation college students, that ratio is especially damaging since their families have less generational knowledge built up around college journeys. What if we could activate whole communities so that more students could get the mentorship they need?

How Might We

ACTIVATE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES SO THAT MORE STUDENTS GET THE MENTORSHIP THEY NEED?

BUILD-UP MORE KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE PARENTS AND FAMILIES OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS SO THEY CAN BE MORE INFORMED SUPPORTERS FOR THEIR CHILDREN’S COLLEGE-COMPLETION?

MAKE COLLEGE-ADVISING AN EVERY-DAY PART OF THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE, STARTING FROM DAY ONE?
Activate School Communities

Students need strong role models from an early age that will make college seem like just another step, rather than an unattainable goal.

–Edwin, Elementary Teacher, Singapore

Personal relationships are everything. When a young adult has the support of another adult, they will be more successful. This adult mentor does not need to be a parent. They can be teachers, counselors, coaches, or anyone with credibility.

–Norka, ELL Specialist, Maryland

In high school, we had the same homeroom teacher for 4 years. I ended up going to the same college he went to. When I got there the professor already knew my name, because my homeroom teacher sent an email to him to look out for me and my time there.

–Trever Reeh, High School Teacher, Nebraska
Staying Connected After High School
Once students graduate high school, they leave a lot of what they’ve spent the last four years building up behind: relationships with teachers and friends, academic profiles, routines and rituals. This can feel freeing and exciting for students. But, it also means students are navigating a lot of newness in the transition - especially initially. And students are without their old systems of support to fall back on. What if there were better bridges between the K12 journey and the college one?

**How Might We**

**STAY BETTER CONNECTED TO STUDENTS AFTER THEY GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL?**

**BETTER LINK UP THE LEARNING PROFILES OF STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL TO THEIR ACADEMIC JOURNEYS ONCE IN COLLEGE SO STUDENTS CAN MAKE MORE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR ACADEMIC NEEDS ONCE IN COLLEGE?**

**BUILD-IN SUPPORT SCAFFOLDS FOR STUDENTS DURING THAT INTENSE TRANSITIONARY PERIOD FROM GRADE 12 TO FRESHMEN YEAR?**
It is important for schools and organizations focused on students getting to and through college to set up intentional processes to support students so that they thrive.

–Jessica Lura,

Having attended a prestigious university as a low-income student, I know that culture shock can deeply affect a student’s engagement on campus. Small challenges build up over time and can even cause students to give up on college.

–Margaret Eichner, College advisor

I did not feel connected to my campus until the end of my second semester when I became more involved in clubs. If I could re-design one thing to make the to-and-through college journey better for students, I would ensure that every college campus has some form of support for students outside of just their academic advisor.

–Zachary Sheppard, Tech-Connected College Coach
Project Ideas

Below are some project ideas that align to each of the themes that the community may be inspired to pick up and take through a design process.

**Demystify the Process**
- Reminders through social media
- Make the application process visual
- Mobile community tracking of student progress

**Develop College-Success Character Traits**
- Character building activities in school
- Peer to peer mentorship

**Cultivate Student Passion Areas**
- Real life experiences - job, volunteer, externships, sports, etc.
- Pop ups — experience the first day of college

**Activate School Communities**
- Programs for parents of first generation students
- Locally focused pay it forward mentorship/scholarship programs
- Teachers as school counselors

**Stay Connected After High School**
- Student portfolios
- Make better use of Clearninghouse data