

BEATING THE ODDS:  
A CASE STUDY OF A LOW-INCOME, MINORITY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL WITH  
HIGHER THAN EXPECTED FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE-GOING AND THE PARTNERSHIP  
THAT HELPED MAKE IT POSSIBLE

By

Leah E. Beasley-Wojick

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education - Doctor of Philosophy

2015

## **ABSTRACT**

### **BEATING THE ODDS: A CASE STUDY OF A LOW-INCOME, MINORITY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS WITH HIGHER THAN EXPECTED FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE-GOING AND THE PARTNERSHIP THAT HELPED MAKE IT POSSIBLE**

By

Leah E. Beasley-Wojick

Low-socioeconomic status (SES) and minority high school students aspire to attend four-year higher education institutions at similar rates as their White and high-SES peers, yet, their college-going and persistence rates still lag far behind. Research suggests that partnerships between K-12 and higher education institutions might help address the problem of college access for low-SES, first-generation and underrepresented students.

The purpose of this single case study was two-fold: (a) to provide an in-depth examination of one predominantly African American, low-SES, public high school that is sending higher than expected numbers of students on to four-year institutions and (b) to examine the effects of the institutional and personal relationships between this high school and local four-year institutions on this successful college-going rate.

One-on-one interviews, document analysis, and observations revealed that one informal relationship between a guidance counselor and four-year college financial aid director was significant in providing information to students about college cost and financial aid. Most importantly, a formal partnership between the case study high school's district and nearby four-year technological institution was crucial to the high school's success in two ways: by developing the structure of the high school in a manner that enabled a strong college-going culture and by collaborating with one another to offer an on-campus experience for seniors.

Finally, being a school of choice of modest size assisted school leaders in implementing their vision of a college-oriented culture. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers and practitioners interested in developing and sustaining successful partnerships between high schools and four-year colleges.

Copyright by  
LEAH E. BEASLEY-WOJICK  
2015

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I am deeply grateful to the entire staff of my case study high school—the former principal, current administration, counselors and teachers—they all welcomed me into the school with open arms and I am indebted to them all for allowing me to tell their story.

To my dissertation chair, Dr. James Fairweather, I could not have completed this dissertation without your continual support and encouragement. You pushed me to follow my own path, to stand up for my own ideas, and to work hard to be a better scholar. I can't thank you enough for your keen insights and commentary throughout this process.

To my dissertation committee members, Dr. Kristen Renn, Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski, and Dr. Barbara Schneider—you have all provided me with so many wonderful opportunities in class, in work and in friendship to develop as a person and scholar—I thank you all for your continual support and for your dedication to helping me throughout this journey.

To my dear friends, Amy and Michael, I thank you for your love, support and many pep talks. To Amy, your friendship throughout our doctoral program has been a constant and one of the best unexpected bonuses of returning to school. To my mother-in-law, Anne, I'm sincerely grateful for your continuous support and encouragement to work toward my goals and help me to see them through.

To my wonderful parents, Jerry and Jean, and sisters, Heather and Sarah—your love, support, and constant encouragement throughout my life have given me the motivation to continue on through the many ups and downs. If not for you all, and the wonderful example you set for me, I would not have persisted.

To my best friend and partner in life, Joshua, you've stuck with me through every step of this long journey, always encouraging and never wavering in your support and unconditional love—I'm forever grateful for all that you do for me and our family.

And finally, to Maxwell, I dedicate this to you—you are, and always will be, my sunshine.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	7
Rationale and Significance.....	8
Conceptual Framework.....	11
Union High School Description.....	14
School of Choice.....	15
Demographic Information.....	17
Definition of Terms.....	18
Organization of the Study.....	20
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	21
Layer 2: High School Context and College-Going.....	21
High School Quality.....	22
Aggregate Student/High School Demographics.....	23
Social and Cultural Capital.....	24
School Culture/Climate.....	27
High School Counselors.....	29
Layer 3: Higher Education Context and College-Going.....	32
College Personnel.....	32
Layer 4: Social, Economic, and Policy Context and College-Going.....	33
Schools of Choice.....	33
Types of School Choice.....	33
History and Prevalence.....	34
Research on School Choice.....	35
Relationship between Layers 2, 3, and 4.....	36
High School and University Partnerships.....	36
Dual Enrollment.....	40
Dual Enrollment Participation.....	40
Student Benefits of Dual Enrollment Participation.....	42
Summary.....	43
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	45
Research Design.....	45
Sampling.....	47
Definition of High-Performing Low-Socioeconomic Status High School.....	47
Data Sources.....	47

Sample Selection.....	48
Phase 1 of Sample Selection.....	49
Phase 2 of Sample Selection.....	50
Phase 3 of Sample Selection.....	52
Instrumentation.....	55
Data Collection.....	56
One-on-One Semi-Structured Interviews.....	57
Documents and Audio-Visual Materials.....	63
Observations.....	64
Data Analysis.....	65
Pseudonyms.....	67
Validity.....	67
Participant Profiles.....	68
Union High School Participants.....	68
Gene Thomas.....	68
Jude Bareman.....	69
Kelly James.....	69
Andrew Wilson.....	69
June Hanover.....	70
Marlon Johnson.....	70
Sam King.....	70
Middle Technological University Participants.....	71
Amber Vale.....	71
Mary Lazio.....	71
Johnson State University Participant.....	71
Rose Antonio.....	71
Michigan First, Inc. Participant.....	72
Larry Garver.....	72
Limitations.....	72
CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY DESCRIPTION.....	74
Staff.....	74
Principal.....	74
Teachers.....	76
Counselors.....	77
Students.....	78
Extracurricular Activities.....	80
Union High School College-Going Patterns.....	81
Summary.....	85
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS—WHAT WORKED?.....	87
Successful School-University Relationships and Partnerships.....	87
Informal Relationships.....	87
June and Rose.....	88
Difficulties in Forming Informal Relationships.....	95
Formal Partnership—Union High School and Middle Technological University.....	99



Formation and Funding.....	99
Successful Components.....	102
Focus on Creating a Strong College-Going Culture.....	103
Academic Momentum.....	104
Curriculum.....	105
Understanding of How College Plans Develop.....	108
Cultivation of Expectation that Every Student Will Attend College.....	109
School Environment and College Branding.....	115
College Preparatory Courses.....	117
Clear Mission Statement.....	123
Comprehensive College Services.....	130
Marlon Johnson—College Transition Specialist.....	131
Sam King—College Success Advisor.....	135
College Visits.....	142
Coordinated and Systemic College Support.....	143
Social and Emotional Growth of Students through College Exposure.....	144
Academic Growth through Dual Enrollment Exposure...	149
What Else Matters in the Success of Union High School?.....	151
School of Choice—Self-Selecting Population.....	151
Small School Size.....	152
Summary.....	153

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS—WHAT DID NOT WORK IN THE FORMAL

PARTNERSHIP?.....	154
The Problem of High Tuition for Low-SES Students.....	154
Assimilation Issues—A Clash of Cultures.....	157
Sustainability—What Happens When the Well Runs Dry?.....	161
Institutional Leadership Buy-In.....	164

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....

What Contributed to the Success of Union High School?.....	166
Strong Informal Relationship—June and Rose.....	167
Formal Partnership between Union High School and Middle Technological University.....	169
Formation of a Strong College-Going Culture.....	168
Academic Momentum.....	169
Understanding of How College Plans Develop.....	170
Clear Mission Statement.....	171
Comprehensive College Services.....	172
Coordinated and Systemic Support.....	173
Additional Factors.....	174
Implications for Theory.....	175
Implications for Policy.....	175
Implications for Practice.....	177

Recommendations for Future Research.....	180
Final Thoughts.....	181
APPENDICES.....	183
Appendix A Phone Survey Protocol for High School Counselors.....	184
Appendix B Memo to Superintendent of Midvale Public Schools.....	185
Appendix C Institutional Research Board Approval.....	189
Appendix D Interview Protocol for High School Personnel.....	190
Appendix E Interview Protocol for Middle Technological University Personnel.....	192
Appendix F Interview Protocol for Johnson State University Admissions.....	194
Appendix G Interview Protocol for Johnson State University Financial Aid.....	195
Appendix H Interview Protocol for Michigan First, Inc. President/Co-Founder.....	196
Appendix I Research Participant Informed Consent.....	197
REFERENCES.....	200

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Final Eight Michigan High-Performing Low-SES Public High Schools Class of 2009.....	53
Table 3.2	Data Collection Matrix—Type of Information by Source.....	57
Table 4.1	Higher Education Institutions where More than Five UHS Graduates Enrolled Graduating Classes of 2008-2013 Fall Immediately Following High School Graduation.....	83
Table 4.2	Average ACT Composite Score of African American Students Class of 2012....	84
Table 4.3	UHS Graduates Choice of College Major Classes 2008-2010.....	85
Table 5.1	ACT National Test Score Average UHS Class of 2008.....	122
Table 5.2	ACT Writing Score Data January 2007.....	122
Table 6.1	Average Net Price for Middle Technological University First-Year Freshmen by Income.....	155

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Percent of All Students Enrolled in a Four-Year College, 0-24 Months after High School Graduation.....	3
Figure 1.2	Percent of African American Students Enrolled in a Four-Year College, 0-24 Months after High School Graduation.....	4
Figure 1.3	Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students Enrolled in a Four-Year College, 0-24 Months after High School Graduation.....	5
Figure 1.4	Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students at Four-Year Colleges Completing 24 Credits Following High School Graduation.....	6
Figure 1.5	Layers of Perna's (2006) Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment Decisions.....	13
Figure 1.6	Magnet/Charter Schools in Detroit Region Percent of Class of 2014 Enrolled in a Four-Year College.....	17
Figure 2.1	Layers of Perna's (2006) Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment Decisions.....	21
Figure 3.1	Phase 1: Sample Selection to Determine All Michigan Public, Low-SES High Schools.....	50
Figure 3.2	Normal Distribution Curve of College Enrollment Rates (2008-2009) Low-SES Public Michigan High Schools.....	51

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

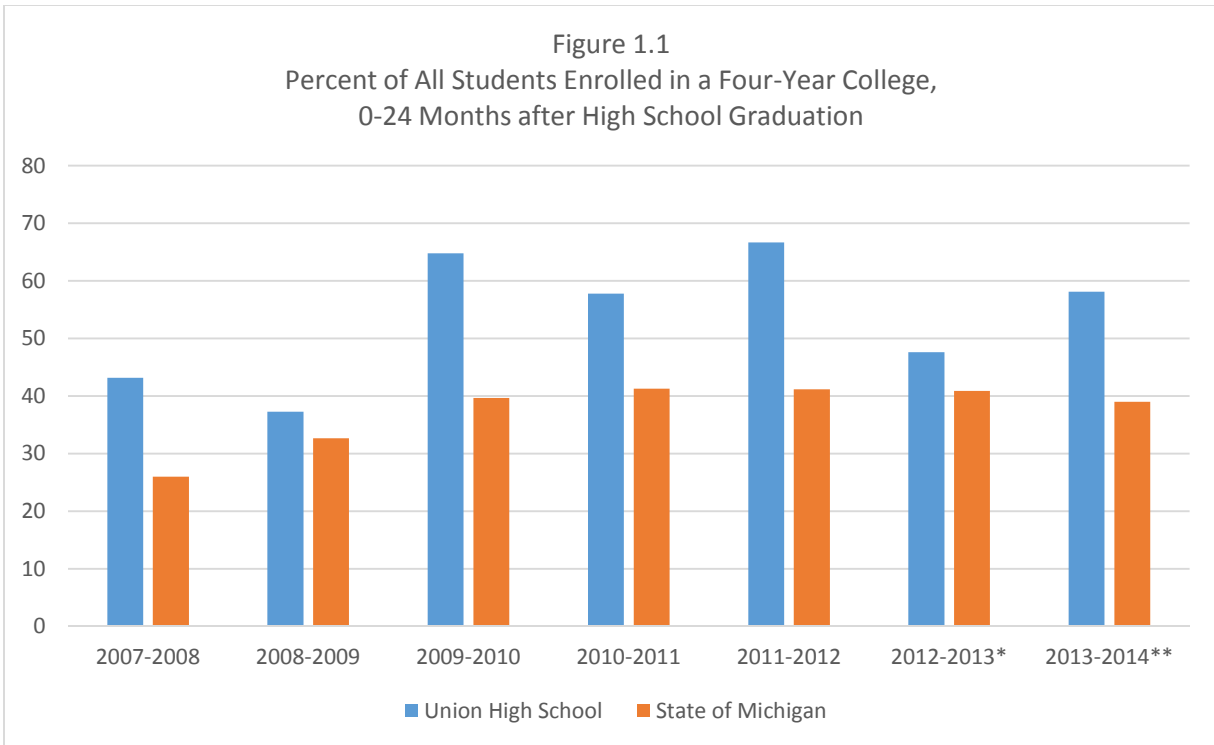
On the corner of College Ave. and University St. stands an older brick one-story building, flanked on all four sides by neat rows of small suburban bungalows with manicured lawns and screened in porches. It is a crisp fall morning and as the sun shines down onto the sidewalk next to the small roundabout at the entrance to the high school, a long line of cars snakes halfway down the block. Teenagers begin streaming out of the cars as goodbyes are shouted and doors are slammed. Students are dressed in khaki pants and many sport college sweatshirts emblazoned with logos from neighboring universities. As students enter the high school, they are greeted by the jovial security guard who smiles and chit chats with them. As they make their way down one of the long hallways lined with beige linoleum, they are surrounded by brightly colored signs made of construction paper that line the wall above the rows of lockers. The signs written in bubbly letters with permanent marker have sayings like “you’ve gotta fall before you fly” and “keep moving, never throw in the towel”. As the students walk into their first period classroom, they pass through the doorway that is painted with large purple letters that read, “I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character”. They enter the classroom and are greeted by their teacher who enthusiastically talks with them about the previous night’s ball game. College pennants hang from the wall, as do framed copies of the teacher’s college diplomas. The bell rings and students slowly settle into their desks. The day begins at this high school, just like most high schools across the nation. Yet this high school is different - very different.

Union High School<sup>1</sup> (UHS) sits only a stone's throw from the border of Detroit. A city long suffering from under-performing public schools. UHS is a public school of choice where students from neighboring school districts can opt out of attending their local public school in order to attend here. Many inner-city Detroit students choose to leave these urban schools; 99 percent of students at UHS are African American and almost two-thirds of the students come from low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) households. For African American students in Detroit, only 59 percent will graduate from high school (Detroit Public Schools Report, 2014). However, at UHS, 99 percent of students graduate from high school. Moreover, a disproportionate percentage of UHS graduates—most of them from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups and low-SES—apply to, attend and persist at four-year colleges.

When compared with all graduates from public high schools in the state of Michigan, UHS places a higher percentage of its graduates in four-year colleges and universities regardless of the socioeconomic or racial makeup of the high school (see Figure 1.1). For example, for the UHS graduating classes of 2010, 2011, and 2012, graduates were approximately 20 percent more likely to enroll in a four-year college than students from other public high schools in the state.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a pseudonym. For the confidentiality of the study, the names of the high school, partner colleges, and all participants, pseudonyms were used.

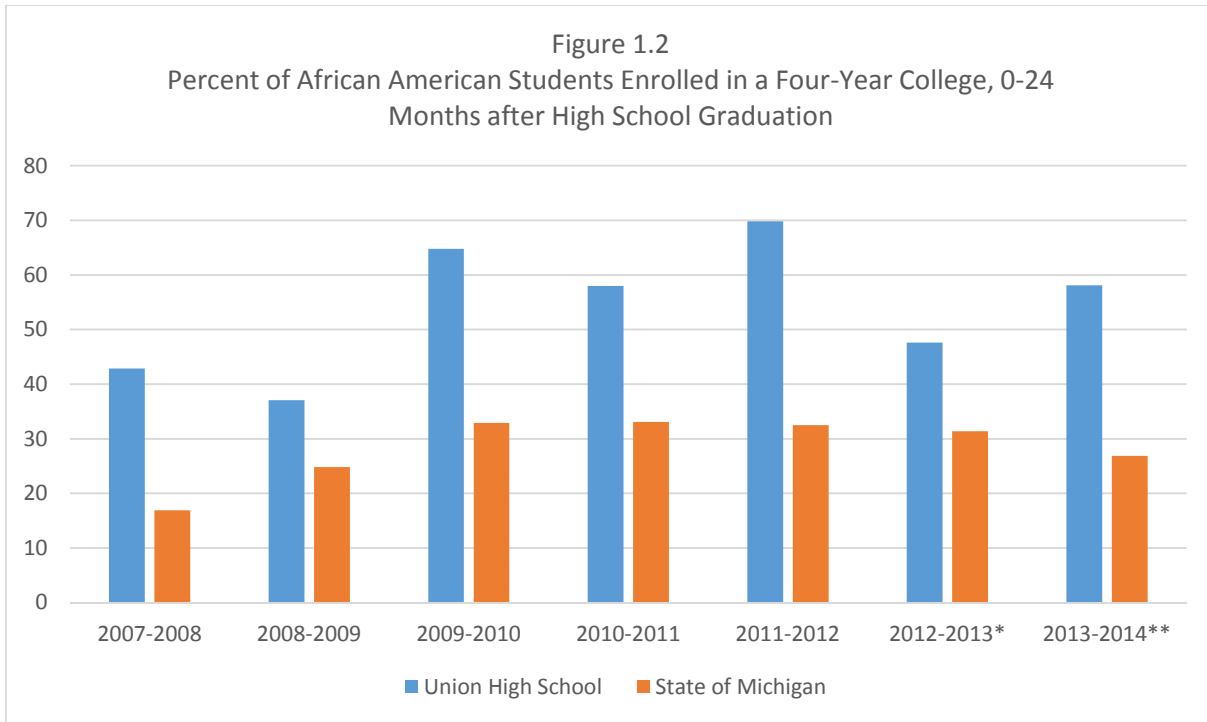


\*Data collected 0-12 months after high school graduation

\*\*Data collected 0-6 months after high school graduation

Source: Michigan School Data. [www.mischooldata.org](http://www.mischooldata.org).

The success of UHS graduates becomes even more compelling when comparing the four-year college-going rates of students based on race. African American UHS graduates (99 percent of all graduates) are much more likely to enroll in a four-year college than their African American peers graduating from other public high schools in the state (see Figure 1.2). For the Union graduating class of 2012, 69.7 percent of the class enrolled in a four-year college. The comparable percentage state-wide for African Americans was 32.5.



\*Data collected 0-12 months after high school graduation

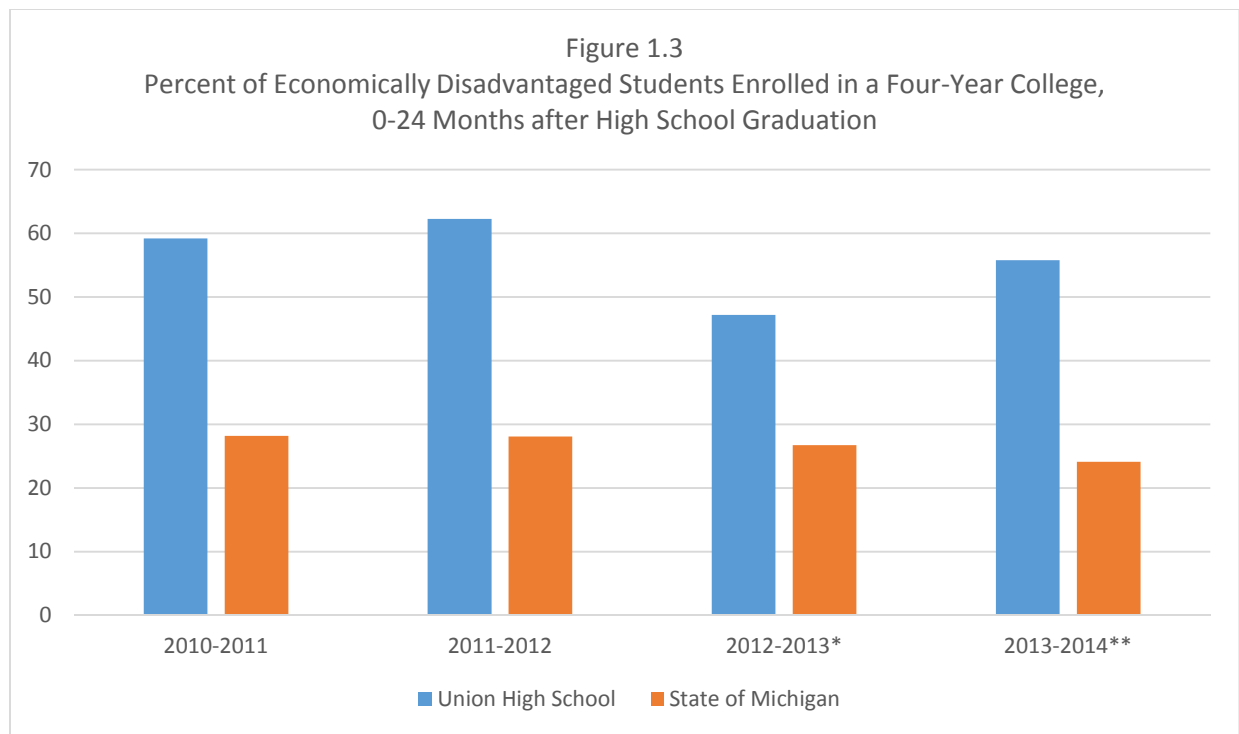
\*\*Data collected 0-6 months after high school graduation

Source: Michigan School Data. [www.mischooldata.org](http://www.mischooldata.org)

Moreover, low SES UHS graduates are similarly more likely than their peers state-wide to attend a four-year postsecondary institution.<sup>2</sup> Over the last four graduating classes, UHS graduates from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were between 20 to 34 percent more likely to enroll in a four-year college (see Figure 1.3).

<sup>2</sup> Data regarding four-year college-going rates for economically disadvantaged students in the state is only available starting with the 2010-2011 academic year.



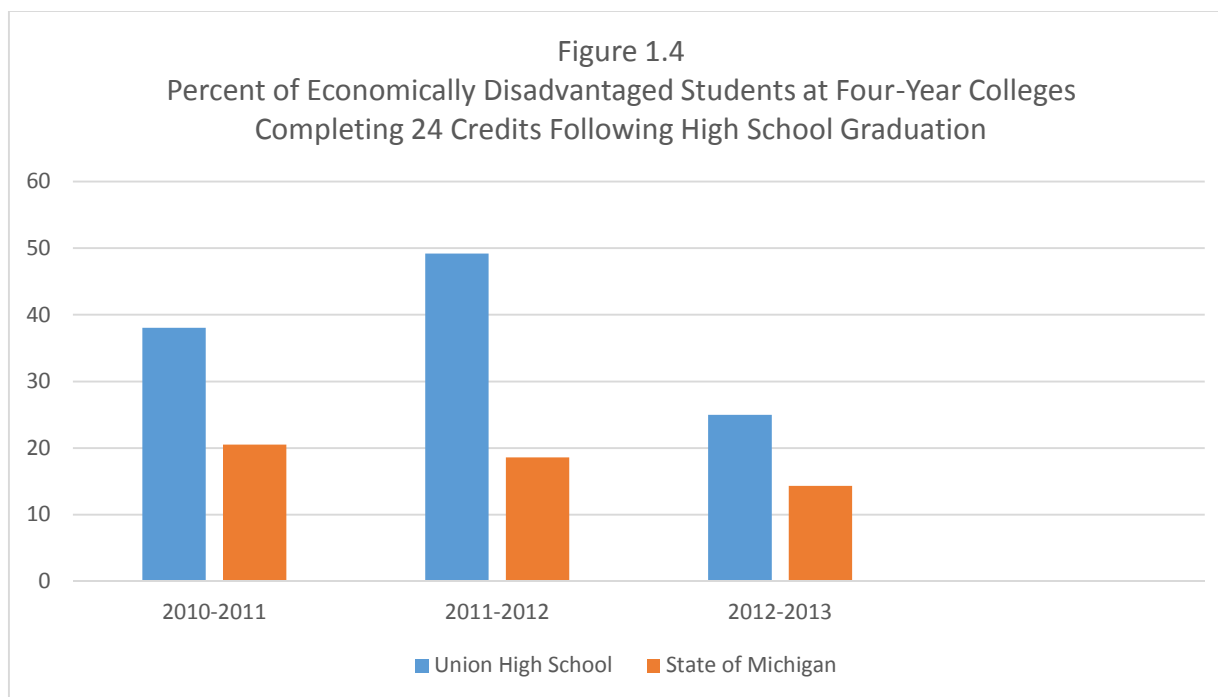


\*Data collected 0-12 months after high school graduation

\*\*Data collected 0-6 months after high school graduation

Source: Michigan School Data. [www.mischooldata.org](http://www.mischooldata.org).

Finally, gauging the success of UHS can also be found when examining the unusually high persistence rates of graduates at four-year colleges. As compared to their economically disadvantaged peers across the state, UHS students are between 11 to 30 percent more likely to have completed 24 credits at a four-year college than their low-SES peers at all other four-year colleges across the state (see Figure 1.4). Therefore, the unusual success story of UHS is not simply about graduates enrolling in four-year colleges at higher than expected rates, it is also about them persisting once there.



Source: Michigan School Data. [www.mischooldata.org](http://www.mischooldata.org)

In addition to its outperformance, UHS has developed unique relationships between the high school and local four-year colleges. Of particular interest is the formal partnership between the Midvale Public School District and nearby private four-year higher education institution, Middle Technological University (MTU). MTU was responsible for the formation of UHS. The president of MTU was looking for a way to shape the curriculum of a high school to help increase the numbers of low-income and minority students who pursue a college degree—particularly in STEM related fields. After a failed partnership with another magnet high school on their campus, MTU received funding from a Michigan non-profit think tank to form a new high school. This new high school would not be located on the campus; however, they would provide many opportunities for the high school students to experience the campus.

Research suggests that partnerships between K-12 and higher education institutions might help address the problem of college access for low-SES, first-generation, and underrepresented

students (Bodilly et al., 2004; Collins et al., 2009; Jarsky et al., 2009; LaPoint & Jackson, 2004; Nunez & Oliva, 2009; Weerts, 2007). These studies imply that collaboration across educational levels is "both valuable and manageable" and that "partnership programs have positive impacts on student achievement, and this includes low-income students of color in low-performing schools" (LaPoint & Jackson, 2004, p. 26).

Union High School is an unusual success story. What might account for its success? In this study, I posit that the high school's relationships with nearby colleges played a significant role in this success. In addition, several other factors were found to play a role in this success story.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is two-fold: (a) to provide an in-depth examination of one predominantly African American, low-SES, public high school that is sending higher than expected numbers of students on to four-year institutions and (b) to examine the effects of the institutional and personal relationships between this high school and local four-year institutions on this successful college-going rate. The study will look at how these relationships, especially the formal partnership, were established, funded, organized, and executed (and in one case, dissolved). In addition to describing the informal relationships and formal partnership, I also analyze the importance of both on the success of the high school and offer recommendations for ways to improve partnerships between high schools and colleges.

### **Research Questions**

I examined three research questions. The questions reflect the relationships from both college and high school perspectives, as well as those who play a role in these relationships.

1. What kinds of formal and informal partnerships and relationships exist between the case study high school and four-year institutions?
2. From both the college and high school perspectives, which formal and informal partnerships and relationships are most important and why?
3. What additional factors play a role in the case study high school's higher than expected four-year college-going and college persistence rates?

I conducted a case study utilizing one-on-one interviews, site observations and document/audiovisual analysis in order to answer these questions. A narrative approach was used to tell this unusual success story.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Despite the increase in high school and university partnerships over the last decade, little research has examined these partnerships in a deep and meaningful way. Researchers on both the higher education and K-12 sides, as well as policymakers, have posited the need for more thoughtful research on these partnerships. Nunez and Oliva (2009) call for a new way of "addressing entrenched community problems, such as those about college access," which will require:

...new approaches to collaboration that involve creating cultural norms that are neither K-12 nor higher education, but something else—some sort of third perspective and organizational culture that is co-created by multiple stakeholders in multiple and disparate contexts...to learn more about how the cultures of K-12, higher education, the federal and state governments, businesses, foundations, and nonprofit community

organizations actually influence P-20 partnerships and how these norms might need to be addressed or changed for P-20 collaborations to succeed" (p. 334).

In particular, researchers have called for qualitative research, which includes in-depth case studies of partnerships, to understand the day-to-day workings of successful partnerships (Jarsky et al., 2009).

In spite of the scarcity of empirical evidence on effective K-12 and higher education partnerships, there are reasons to believe that they may enhance students' college preparation, particularly for low-SES, minority, and first-generation students (Epstein, 2001, 2002; Jarsky et al., 2009; Sanders, 2005). A report by the American Association of Higher Education (Brumbach & Ridenour, 2003) posits several benefits from school-college collaborations, including: better preparing students for college, exposing students (especially first-generation) to new and different resources beyond the reach of their public school, providing students with a jump start on earning college credits, and the ability to access college personnel to answer questions and seek out new educational and career opportunities. In a more recent (2010) study of 10 school districts and their collaboration with a state university system, researchers found that the “gains over the poverty of learning are numerically and descriptively clear as the collaboration improved access for more students, enabling them to more effectively utilize their first year in college in more complete ways” (Labas & Minaya-Rowe, p. 13). The researchers also report that for first-year, first-time-in-college students, the collaboration also improved their first and second year retention rates.

There is also ample evidence of misalignment between high schools and colleges both in academic expectations and requirements of students and in student's knowledge of financial, social, and emotional components of college-going (Kirst & Venezia, 2004, Labas & Minaya-

Rowe, 2010; Martinez & Klopott, 2005). This misalignment is often blamed for the underrepresentation of low-SES, minority, and first-generation students in higher education and their lack of persistence while in college (Oliva, 2008). Several studies have suggested that one of the most promising practices for remedying the problem of misalignment is by creating effective collaborations between high schools and higher education institutions (Harvey, 2008; Kirst & Venezia 2004; Martinez & Klopott, 2003; McDonough, 2004). Martinez and Klopott (2003) compiled research from four seminal studies on improving college access for minority, low-income, and first-generation students. They assert that one way to create a more seamless P-16 pipeline is to develop partnerships between higher education and schools that provide “timely, support-focused interventions”, such as how and when to fill out financial aid forms, what courses are needed to enroll in college, as well as having adults available to help guide students through the college search and application process (p. 9). Harvey’s (2008) research on increasing the college enrollment and persistence rates of African American males echoes Martinez and Klopott’s findings and supports the use of “interactive partnerships between higher education institutions and K-12 partners...[especially for] students from households and communities where the residents do not have a history and pattern of college attendance.” (p. 974). Finally, the National Center for Postsecondary Research (2012) found that high school and university partnerships "can result in long and fruitful relationships between participating institutions that serve as the foundation for increased alignment and collaborative programming that can benefit students" (p. v).

Based on this research, high school and university partnerships show promise in helping to increase the college-going rates of low-SES, minority, and first-generation students. However, the research is in its infancy and while many P-16 reform efforts have spurred a great deal of

policymaking activity over the last 15 years, little empirical research has been conducted to ascertain their effectiveness (Domina & Ruzek, 2010). Moreover, almost wholly missing from the literature is a more nuanced understanding of these high school and university partnerships through in-depth analysis using qualitative methods. Researchers have called for such analysis in several recent studies. The Director of the National Postsecondary Research Center, Thomas Baily, in a recent report (2012) encouraged future research to “enhance high schools’ and colleges’ ability to make sound decisions about which potential program models to implement” (p. iii). Jarksy et al. (2009) second this recommendation for future research.

The current case study adds the kind of in-depth examination called for by researchers and policymakers regarding high school and university partnership to provide valuable information about efficacy. Importantly, this research studies this high school/college partnership while taking into account a variety of other possible influences on college going by low SES minority students including the impact of macro-level factors on micro-level environments (Nunez & Oliva, 2009).

It is my hope that the information presented in this study will be utilized by both educators and policymakers to inform future relationships between high schools and colleges.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Research shows that a variety of social, economic, cultural, and academic factors contribute at both the individual and high school levels to unequal college participation rates for students from various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups (e.g., McDonough, 1997; Nunez & Oliva, 2009; Perna, 2006; St. John, 2003; Walpole, 2007). I use Perna’s (2006) conceptualization of multiple layers of context and how these have an effect on the college-going

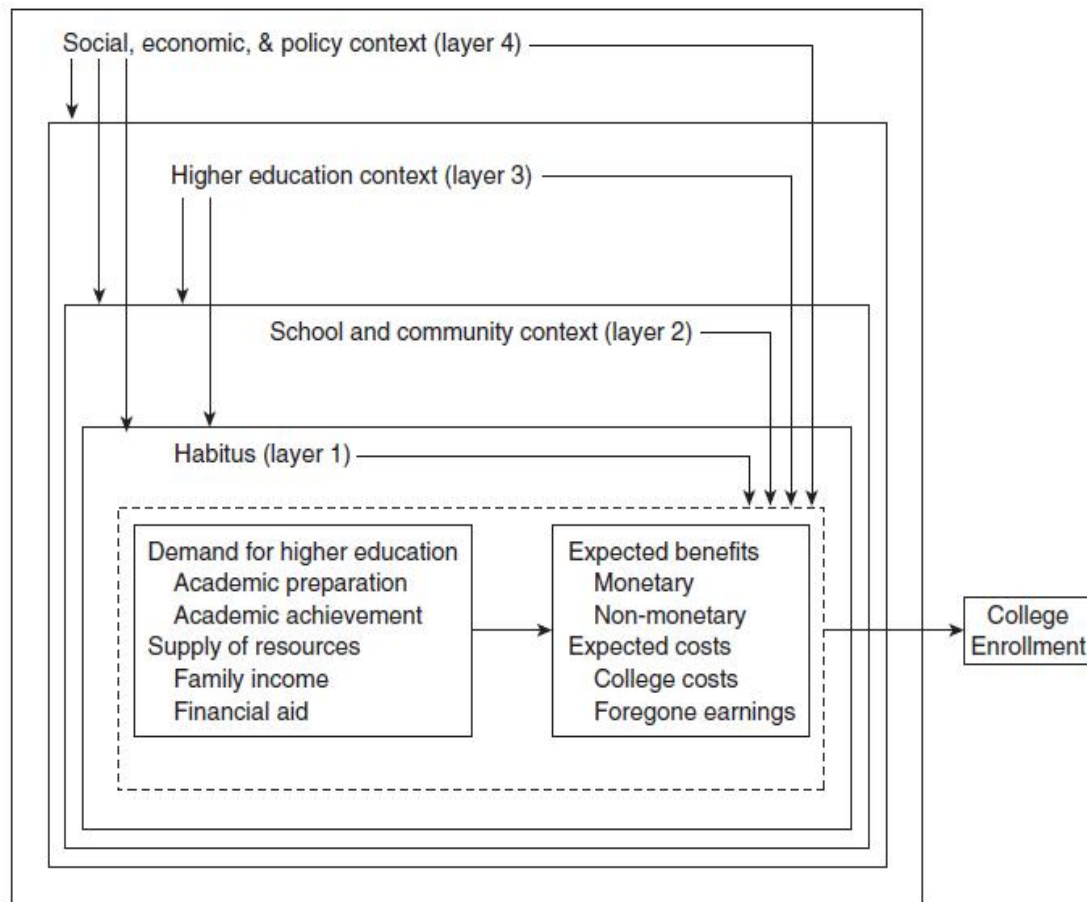
rates of the case study high school as a lens to organize and examine the high college-going rates and the factors that may contribute to this success.

Perna's (2006) model situates students' decisions to enroll in college within four nested layers of context:

1. habitus—a system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs about the social world;
2. the school and community context—relates to school and community factors which involve resource availability and structural supports and barriers;
3. the higher education context—is utilized to explain how college choice is influenced by higher education institutions through mechanisms like location, recruitment, marketing, and relationships with high schools; and
4. the broader social, economic, and policy context—which denotes all of the economic, social, and political factors such as public policy and demographics that might play a role in college choice (see Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.5  
Layers of Perna's (2006) Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment Decisions



Source: Perna (2006). Understanding the Relationship between Information and Financial Aid and Students' College-Related Behaviors. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49 (12), p. 1624.

Although her work focused on how students acquire and use information about college prices and financial aid, her model is useful for understanding student college decision-making more generally. Perna also stresses that college choice is a small part of individual students' enrollment decisions. More importantly, she finds that college-going behavior is embedded in micro-, macro-, and meso-level structural contexts. Although Perna recognizes the importance of the high school in students' college choices, she also stresses the importance of other institutions and factors that can play a central role.

Perna's (2006) framework allows for the examination of high school factors as well as the relationships and collaboration between high schools and postsecondary institutions. This model also takes into account factors well established in other research literature (i.e., student/high school demographics, high school quality, social/cultural capital, and school culture). High school and university partnerships include "multiple institutional contexts and representatives of these contexts" (Nunez & Oliva, 2009, p. 325). Understanding these roles and interactions among these multiple contexts can provide information on how institutions can work together (or against one another) to enhance college access (Nunez & Oliva). This model incorporates a dynamic and holistic picture of the high-performing low-SES high school including the relationships between the high school and higher education institutions.

### **Union High School Description**

Union High School is a four-year public, high school founded in 2005 as a 105/105C or "school of choice". UHS is part of the Midvale Public School District. There are seven K-12 schools in the district, including two high schools. The school was formed in partnership with a local, four-year private college, Middle Technological University (MTU), with the funding and support of a local, non-partisan, non-profit organization, Michigan First, Inc. In the first years of operation, there were only students in grades nine and ten. The school's website describes the high school as a "co-educational college-prep public high school experience for students committed to success in high school and beyond. College success is goal #1 for its students". The vision parallels and expands this description, which is found on the high school's website, and reads:

We are a rigorous, innovative college preparatory school, with a curriculum organized around college preparedness and careers for the 21st century. UHS offers students a

dynamic learning environment where multiple modes of instructional strategies are used to prepare students to meet the ever-growing challenges of college and the professional world. UHS has a 9-16 vision, where we measure our success by the percentage of students we graduate from college. The UHS staff strives to create a culture where students learn to be self-motivated learners and are respectful, professional, and invested in their education. Students and teachers work together to create a safe and caring learning environment (Course Catalog, 2014-2015).

### **School of Choice**

Detroit and the inner-ring suburbs have become “Ground Zero” for school choice (Derringer, 2013, June 18). In 1999, 80 percent of Detroit students attended a traditional public school in their own district. As of 2012, only 46 percent of students remained—with the majority of the students now choosing to leave the district to enroll in charter and schools of choice (Derringer, 2013, June 18). The city of Midvale abuts the infamous Eight Mile Road and the city of Detroit. Many of Detroit’s students choose to attend one of the three public high schools in Midvale, including UHS. Some have posited that school choice has led to a mass exodus of Detroit’s best and brightest to inner-ring suburban schools, like UHS (Derringer, 2013, June 18). Others argue that schools of choice that attract low-SES and minority Detroit students are causing a domino effect—where White students who would typically attend the local public schools are now choosing to go out of district (Derringer, 2013, June 18).

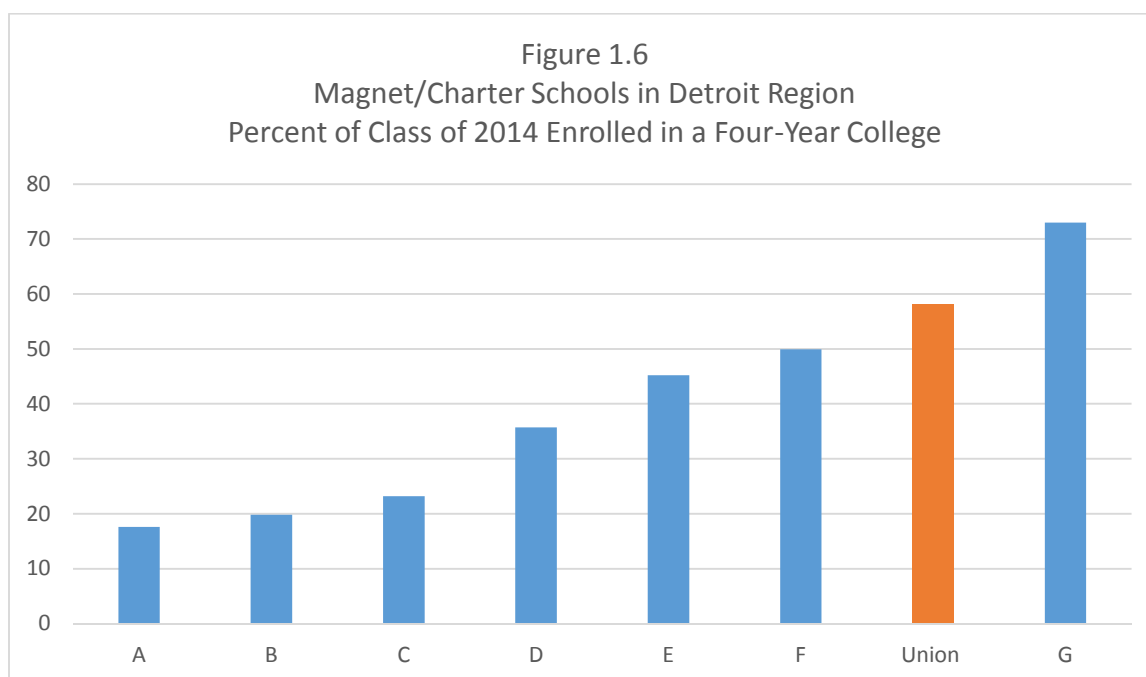
The state of Michigan defines a 105C school, or “school of choice”, as one that may enroll “students who reside in school districts located in contiguous intermediate school districts...without having to obtain approval from the district of residence” ([https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Revised\\_\\_Schools\\_of\\_Choice\\_Definitions\\_272415\\_](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Revised__Schools_of_Choice_Definitions_272415_)

7.pdf). Similarly, a 105 school “allows enrollment of students who reside in school districts located in contiguous intermediate school districts” ([https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Revised\\_\\_Schools\\_of\\_Choice\\_Definitions\\_272415\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Revised__Schools_of_Choice_Definitions_272415_7.pdf)). The number of schools of choice in the state of Michigan has increased dramatically, 144 percent since the passing of the State School Aid Act by the Michigan legislature in 1996 (<http://www.mackinac.org/> 17968). In addition, school districts in the state can accept students from surrounding districts to their own public schools. Since 1996, over 80 percent of school districts in the state have chosen to become districts of choice (Derringer, June 16, 2013). This adoption of schools of choice legislation has dramatically changed the landscape of education in Detroit and its suburbs. This policy change has turned Detroit into, “a distinctive city nationwide for the very, very high degree of school choice it offers parents,” says David Arsen, Professor of Education at Michigan State University (Cwiek, 2014).

The primary reasons schools of choice are located in the inner ring suburbs of Detroit is to counter the decline in academic performance, economic support, and staffing needs for Detroit public schools. Schools of choice have allowed families who reside in Detroit and other struggling socioeconomic areas to choose a high school that may better fit the needs of the student. These families are also typically low-SES and minority families that would have no other options to local public schools if not for schools of choice (Arsen, Plank, & Sykes, 1999) see Chapter 2 for more details).

While many Detroit students are choosing to enroll in magnet, charter, and schools of choice, when comparing the four-year college going rates of UHS graduates to these peer schools in the region, they are still outpacing all but one of them (see Figure 1.6). The only

exception, high school “G”, has a higher four-year college-going rate; however, this is a test-in magnet school where admission for students is highly competitive.



Source: Michigan School Data. [www.mischooldata.org](http://www.mischooldata.org)

## Demographic Information

As of the 2013-2014 school year, there were 425 students in grades 9 through 12 at UHS. The school has a cap on student enrollment of 500 but has not yet met this cap since the formation of the school. The majority of students—76 percent—come from Detroit. The remainder of the students come from surrounding districts. UHS only accepts applications from students who will be entering their freshmen or sophomore years. Although an application is required to be admitted, all applicants are admitted unless there is a major disciplinary infraction in the student’s record.

Throughout the brief history of UHS, the demographics of the student population have remained relatively static—99 percent African American students, and anywhere from 45 to 67

percent of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (mischooldata.org). In the 2013-2014 school years the State of Michigan Department of Education categorized 76 percent of UHS students as “economically disadvantaged”. In addition, over 80 percent of students would be the first in their families to attend college. Overall, UHS has a higher than average student population that is African American, economically disadvantaged, and first-generation when compared to other public high schools in the state of Michigan.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study the terms are defined as follows:

*First-generation college student.* I use this term to mean any high school student who would be the first in their family to attend and graduate from a higher education institution.

*College-going.* I use this term to include three distinct pieces of the college search and application process for students: (1) applying to college, (2) gaining admission to college, and (3) enrolling in college.

*High-performing low-socioeconomic (low-SES) high school.* This term relates to a high school that meets all of the following conditions:

- Must be located in the state of Michigan
- The high school's college-going rate is one standard deviation above the state mean for all low-SES, public high schools.
- The high school's four-year college-going rate is above the state average for all other low-SES, public high schools.
- The high school must have higher than the state average for students who qualify for free and/or reduced lunch.

*High school-university partnership.* This term describes a more formal, localized effort between an individual high school and university which are working together to achieve goals. These goals include efforts such as raising academic preparation for college, aligning expectations for high school level work with the skills and demand in higher education courses, providing exposure to the college environment/culture and providing necessary information about the college application process and financial aid.

*Informal relationship.* I use this term to infer more generally to all of the relations between and among individuals and entities (e.g., high schools, colleges, organizations), including those that are more informal in nature. This could include reading the materials of a particular institution or general discussions in person/phone/email. In comparison, the term partnership infers a more formal relationship between two entities whereby there are contractual obligations between the entities.

*Low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) or low-income or economically disadvantaged.* I use these terms interchangeably. In order to qualify as a low-SES or low-income high school, a school must have higher than the state average for those students who qualify for free and/or reduced lunch.

*School of choice (105 and 105c).* I use the definition for this term provided by the Michigan Department of Education. Which states that broadly, that the provision in Section 105 and 105c of the State School Aid Act "allow local school districts to enroll non-resident students and count them in membership without having to obtain approval from the district of residence". Further, "Section 105 permits local school districts to enroll students who reside in other local school districts within the same intermediate school district." And, "Section 105c allows enrollment of students who reside in school districts located in contiguous intermediate school districts". For

the purpose of this study and University High School, they participate in school of choice under both Section 105 and 105c.

### **Organization of the Study**

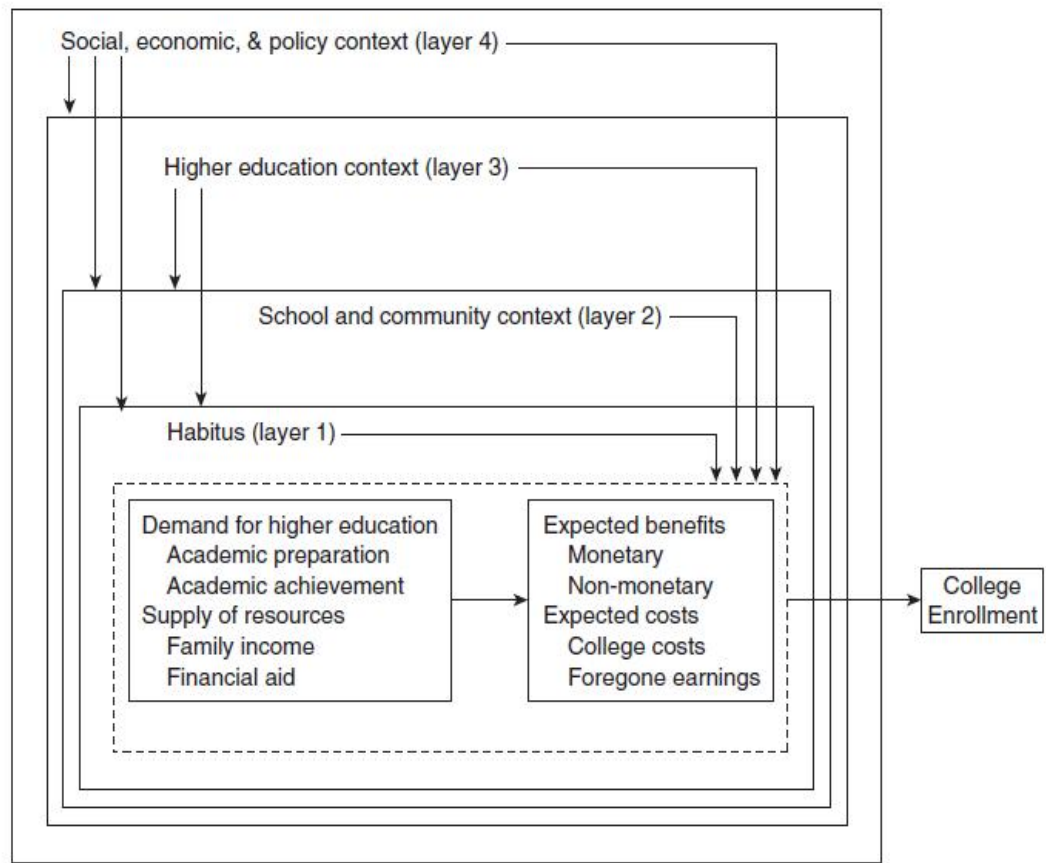
Chapter One provides an overview of the case study, including the background and statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the rationale/significance, the conceptual framework and general demographic information about UHS. Chapter Two describes a review of the relevant literature organized according to Perna's (2006) model of student college decision-making. After a brief review of the literature on high schools and college-going writ large, I then focus on studies that explore the effect of high school and university relationships on college choice. I also discuss relevant research on the policy context in relation to schools of choice. Chapter Three provides a description of the research design and methods utilized. Chapter Four presents a description of the case study high school including the staff, administrators, students, extracurricular activities and college-going patterns of UHS graduates. In Chapter Five a presentation of the findings in relation to what informal relationship and formal partnerships were most successful between UHS and four-year colleges is explored. Chapter Six explores the findings of the case study research regarding the components of the formal partnership between UHS and MTU that were not as successful. Finally, in Chapter Seven, a discussion of the findings is presented along with implications for theory, policy and practice as well as recommendations for future research.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents a review of the literature about high schools and college-going rates. The literature is organized according to Perna's (2006) conceptual model (see Figure 2.1)—with the main focus on her second (high school and community context), third (higher education context), and fourth (social, economic and policy context) layers and the interplay between them.

Figure 2.1  
Layers of Perna's (2006) Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment Decisions



### Layer 2: High School Context and College-Going

What follows is a discussion of the four factors that are well established in the literature in contributing to the college enrollment of low-SES and minority students, including high school quality, high school demographics, social and cultural capital, and school culture. In

addition, one factor in Layer 2 of Perna's model, the role of the high school counselor, in the literature is less established and therefore, the small body of literature will be examined as well.

### **High School Quality**

Alexander et al. (1978), Elsworth et al. (1982), and Falsey and Heyns (1984) reported that the quality of the high school affects a student's predisposition toward college enrollment. Alexander et al. found that the social status of the high school is directly related to attendance at a postsecondary institution. The higher social status of the high school, the more likely students were to enroll in college. However, Falsey and Heyns' study only examined private high schools and may not be applicable to public high schools. Elsworth et al.'s study was based on Australian high schools, which also may not be applicable to American high schools. In contrast, Kolstad (1979), using multiple regression analysis from a sample from the National Longitudinal Study, found a negative relationship between the social status of a high school and enrollment in a postsecondary institution. Thus, research is mixed in terms of how the quality of a high school can affect college-going rates of its students—warranting a closer examination in the current study.

In the last decade, research has focused on studying the relationship between the rigor of the high school curriculum and types of courses offered with college-going rates. In some schools the lack of advanced-level courses decreases their competitiveness when applying for college (Matthews, 1999; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). Adelman (2006) posited that students who take advanced courses in mathematics and science have higher grades and standardized test scores, and have a greater range of college choices. Finally, taking Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses positively affect the college-going rates of students. Although it seems likely that the higher ratio of students taking these advanced courses would

increase the overall college-going rate of the high school (Geiser & Santelices, 2004), because the data are typically collected at the student level it is difficult to assess school-level effects.

### **Aggregate Student/High School Demographics**

Much research on the college-going rates of high school students focuses on individual student demographic characteristics (e.g. race, gender, ethnicity, SES, parents' level of education, academic achievement). Several studies have examined the racial and socioeconomic makeup of high schools to determine how these factors affect college-going rates (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; Hill, 2008; Hossler & Stage, 1992; McDonough, 1997; Meyer, 1970). Both race and socioeconomic status significantly impact college-going rates; more affluent, low minority high schools send more students to college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Choy, 2002; Engberg & Wolniak, 2009; McDonough, 1997). In a seminal study of the academic pathways of 1,000 eighth grades students through young adulthood, Cabrera and La Nasa found that only 21 percent of low-SES students, compared to 76 percent of high-SES students, applied to four-year institutions. Engberg and Wolniak (2009) also report that "the average socioeconomic level of a high school's student body...significantly contribute to both 2-year and 4-year college enrollment" (p. 149). In sum, the higher-SES the high school, the more apt students are to enroll in college. In addition, high schools that primarily serve urban and rural students are also more apt to have lower college-going rates than those that serve suburban youth (Schneider, 2007). Finally, when high schools with large percentages of minority and low-SES students send their graduates to postsecondary education it is most often to 2-year institutions (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007).

Research shows that individual student achievement (GPA, test scores, etc.) affects college-going behavior (i.e., the higher the GPAs and test scores the more likely students are to

attend college) (Ellwood & Kane, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005; Perna, 2000). Unfortunately, the relationship between high school aggregate grades and college-going has only been addressed in one study. Engberg and Wolniak (2009) studied school-level effects of GPA and found the average grades from a particular high school “exert a significant influence on 2-year enrollment above and beyond the student-level effects” (p.149). Few qualitative studies have examined how aggregate student achievement might play a role in college-going rates for low-SES students.

### **Social and Cultural Capital**

Access to social and cultural capital has been found to predict the college-going rates of high school students in several studies (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009, 2011; Paulsen, 2001; Perna, 2000, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Previous research mainly focuses on students’ background characteristics and socioeconomic status to explain the college decision process (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hearn, 1984; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1998; Hossler & Stage, 1992). However, little research has attempted to examine both social and cultural capital simultaneously, measured at the high school level, to determine the effects on low-SES student college enrollment. Most research on social and cultural capital in high school is based on large-scale datasets that do not contain nuanced measures to accurately represent the concepts of social and cultural capital (Engberg & Wolniak, 2009, 2011).

Social capital is defined as “the capacity of the members of social networks to share encouragement or provide useful information about the college preparation and application process” (Nunez & Kim, 2008, p. 10). Recent research has found that access to teachers, counselors and other “institutional agents” can have a significant influence on the college access of high school students, including low-SES students (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002; McDonough, 2004; NPEC, 2007). Perez-Felkner, McDonald, and Schneider (2010), in a study

of high-achieving females and their postsecondary education plans in STEM fields, found that “adults in the school community (including teachers, counselors, and coaches) are powerful influencers of student expectations” (p.9). The researchers also posit that students at many urban, disadvantaged high schools have limited resources to help learn about careers and postsecondary education, which can be partly attributable to the low numbers of STEM-trained teachers (Perez-Felkner, McDonald, & Schneider).

Perna (2005) found that “regardless of an individual student’s social, economic, cultural, and human capital...the likelihood of enrolling in a 2-year or 4-year college after graduating from high school appears to be related to the volume of resources that may be accessed through social networks at the school attended” (p. 509). Perna’s findings support the need for research to focus on the high school as the unit of analysis in determining what can be done to increase college-going rates of low-SES and minority students.

Finally, Engberg and Wolniak (2009), in their quantitative multi-level study of the effects of high school contexts on postsecondary enrollment, found that “at the school level, students’ abilities to develop college-linking networks with a range of individuals (e.g., teachers, counselors, peers, parents, and college representatives) universally increase enrollment at two- and four-year colleges” (p. 149). However, what is not yet known are the ways in which high schools promote, encourage, and support these college-linking networks and whether or not they make a difference at high schools that primarily serve low-SES students.

Cultural capital in the current study is defined as having access to information about the college search and application process (McDonough, 1997). In their three stage college choice model (predisposition, search and choice), Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999), make clear that the availability of accurate and up-to-date information is crucial at each stage of the college

choice process for students to make informed decisions about their educational futures. Students must have available information that will help them “first develop plans for college, then raise their awareness of the range of possible options, and finally choose among those options” (McLafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002, p. 14). This process includes information on the various types of institutions, their admissions requirements, and their costs (McLafferty, McDonough, & Nunez). Low-SES students, in particular, rely heavily on their high schools, mainly through contact with guidance counselors, to provide them with information about the college choice process (McLafferty, McDonough, & Nunez). Hotchkiss and Vetter (1987) also assert that purposeful sharing of information, along with more subtle messages, which are communicated through the presence of vital resources, is crucial to encouraging enrollment in postsecondary education. However, the availability of information about colleges is more than the range of options; it also includes the actual cost of attendance.

There is substantial empirical research that examines the ways in which low-SES students view the cost of college in terms of the decision of whether, and where, to enroll. Luna De La Rosa (2006) found that students who attend large, under-resourced high schools lack “systematic communication about college, career planning, and financial aid” (NPEC, 2007). Further, Luna De La Rosa posits that low-SES students “believe that college is too expensive for them to attend, suggesting that this perception alone keeps them from even considering the idea” (p. 1683). Student perceptions of college cost and the effect on enrollment is well researched (Avery & Kane, 2004; Fairweather, 2006; Heller, 2006; 2012; Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003; Immerwahr, 2002; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2010). Avery and Kane (2004), Heller (2012) and Horn, Chen and Chapman (2003) found that the majority of students substantially overestimate the cost of college. Research also shows that low-income and minority students were more apt to

overestimate college costs than their middle- and higher-income peers (Avery & Kane; Heller, 2006). Fairweather (2006) reported that parents and children are “especially likely to overestimate the cost of attending public institutions” with “parents overestimate[ing] the cost of attending public 2-year colleges by 82 percent; the cost for public 4-year institutions by 53 percent, and the cost of private 4-year institutions by 25 percent” (p. 27). In sum, the literature shows that low-SES students and their families overestimate the cost of college, particularly for public institutions, and this can have an effect on their enrollment rates (Avery & Kane; Heller; 2012; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2010).

However, little research examines where and how information regarding the college admissions process is gathered and disseminated to students by actors at the high school level, as well as those at the institutional level, which can help or hinder students to pursue a college education.

### **School Culture/Climate**

A relatively new vein of research on the effects of high schools on college going examines the importance of school climate in creating a “college-going culture” or “college-going community” (Roderick et al., 2008; Schneider, 2007).

Schneider (2007) and other researchers (Roderick et al., 2008; Tierney & Corwin, 2007) have posited that increasing college-going rates requires high schools to foster an environment whereby attitudes and practices in schools and communities encourage students and their families to obtain the information, tools, and perspective to enhance access to and success in postsecondary education. In a 2008 study by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research studying students attending Chicago public high schools, researchers found that the:

single most consistent predictor of whether students took steps toward college enrollment was whether their teachers reported that their high school had a strong college climate, that is, they and their colleagues pushed students to go to college, worked to ensure that students would be prepared, and were involved in supporting students in completing their college applications (p. 4).

A college-going culture “involves key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrators, parents, students) who expect students to go to college and provide the experiences and caring relationships to support that end” (Nunez & Kim, 2008, p.9). Part of creating a college-going culture requires that students feel supported and encouraged by their teachers, counselors, peers and administrators, and that there is strong “relational trust” among all community members (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Bryk and Schneider define “relational trust” as “strong social ties among all members of the school community that support and place the academic and social well-being of the students as their highest priority” (p. 3). A college-going culture is inextricably tied to measures of social and cultural capital, as it relates to the networks, relationships, and encouragement that key stakeholders at the high school level (particularly counselors and teachers) share with one another and students to encourage college-going. However, while there is overlap between the concepts of social and cultural capital in these respects, other parts of the school climate/culture are not directly related to the concepts of social and cultural capital.

The climate of a school also includes negative forces that can adversely affect college-going. The effects of truancy, suspension rates, violence, and levels of drug and alcohol use for high school students on college-going recently have been studied. Fogg and Harrington (2010) found that high schools with high dropout rates and high rates of turnover in the student body have “considerably lower college attendance rates” (para. 5). They also found only a modest



connection between students who use illegal drugs and enrollment in postsecondary education. They found that incidents of student suspension “are not related to college attendance” (para. 5).

Many researchers have found that any in-depth study of the role of the high school context in college-going must pay careful attention to the unique climate/culture of that particular high school (Roderick et al., 2008; Schneider, 2007; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). In addition, more information must be gathered to ascertain what it means to foster a college-going culture and if this might look different at different schools.

### **High School Counselors**

A small, but growing, body of research exists on the role guidance counselors play in helping students navigate the college search and application process. There is conflicting information on the importance of the guidance counselor in increasing college-going rates for low-SES students (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Hossler & Stage, 1987, Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; McDonough, 2005; Lewis & Morrison, 1975). Although Lee and Ekstrom (1987), Hossler and Stage (1987); and Lewis and Morrison (1975) found that low-income and minority students were more likely to consult with counselors in making college plans, Hossler and Stage (1992) later reported that less than 50 percent of students rely on counselors for help. They found that high school counselors “have very little influence upon the predisposition stage of most high school students” (p. 433). Moreover, empirical studies by both Gandara (2002) and Oakes (1985) found that minority and low-income students often resisted using high school counselors because they had a reputation for advising these underserved students to take less rigorous or vocational classes. Finally, in a pivotal study that reviewed empirical evidence and new analyses of a nationally representative database, Cabrera and LaNasa (2000) found that there were many important influences on students’ college aspirations and enrollment, but high school counselors

were not among these influencers. However, these data came from the National Center for Educational Statistics, which hasn't collected data on school counselors, except a simple head count in full-time equivalents. This means that the way in which counselors function and operate on a daily basis are overlooked. In addition, most national studies conducted since this one, have also drawn on the same national database and, thus, we haven't yet fully empirically explored the function and relevance of the role of the high school counselor—particularly in a holistic way through qualitative means like a case study.

In contrast, other empirical studies have contradicted these findings, showing that high school counselors do play a pivotal role in the college-going rates of low-income and minority students. McDonough (1997, 2002, 2005) and Perna et al. (2008) reported that a high school guidance counselor is often the first person to whom students/families (especially low-SES and first generation) turn to for information regarding the college search and application process. McDonough (1997) also found that “meeting frequently with counselors increase students’ chances of enrolling in a four-year college” (p.1). Moreover, Plank and Jordan (2001) investigated the influences on students’ college plans and found that communication among students, parents, and school personnel significantly increased the likelihood of enrolling in college. Furthermore, Avery and Kane (2004) found that many well-qualified low-income students did not complete applications because they were daunted by the application process, especially to selective institutions. This phenomenon is common among low-SES students. Many are first-generation students whose parents do not have the necessary knowledge regarding the college application process. As a consequence, many low-SES students turn to their school counselor for advice (McDonough 1997; 2005). However, research shows that many counselors who serve in low-SES schools are “structurally constrained from doing the job they know and do

the best” (McDonough, 2005, p.2). They do not have the time, training, or information to help the students who are most in need (McDonough; NPEC, 2007). In a recent study by the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative’s for Student Decisions about Postsecondary Education project (NPEC), researchers conducted focus groups with low-income, first-generation students and parents as well as guidance counselors. Although only a few students and parents mentioned guidance counselors as being helpful, “they emphasized the importance of needing a good high school counselor to help them through the overwhelmingly complicated and time-consuming process” (p. 20). This finding reiterates the importance of the guidance counselor and suggests that they may be a major factor in high-performing low-SES schools.

In addition to recent empirical studies that support the role of counselors in increasing the college-going of students, there have been several high-profile policy statements and reports that have suggested that improving counseling in schools, especially those who serve low-income and minority students, could increase college-going (Dounay, 2008; National Association of College Counselors, 2011; Michelle Obama, 2015). In a recent op-ed piece to *USA Today*, first lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, talked about the crucial job that public high school counselors play in achieving the goal of increasing four-year college-going rates in the United States:

Our school counselors are the key to achieving that goal, but only if we give them the support, recognition and resources they need to do their jobs. That's why last year, the White House issued a challenge to universities, foundations, school districts, non-profits and others to step up — and already they have answered with tens of millions of dollars of new efforts on behalf of school counselors and the students they serve.

In addition to such a public call to increase support for high school counselors, several other policy reports have called for more support for public school counselors. A recent policy brief by the Education Commission of the States (Dounay, 2008), recommends preparing counselors more effectively to work with low-SES students in preparing for college. Finally, the National Association of College Admission Counselor's 2011 State of College Admissions report found that public high school counselors on average spend only 23 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling. This report cited the need for additional empirical evidence about the role of counselors in helping low-SES and minority students prepare for college.

While empirical research on the role of counselors is mixed in relation to whether or not they play a role in the college-going rates of students, it is clear that policy related efforts call for more support of counselors to help them increase college-going rates for their students. Therefore, this case study will add to the empirical research base that examines whether or not counselors do play a role in the college-going rates of students.

### **Layer 3: Higher Education Context and College-Going**

#### **College Personnel**

Admissions counselors and other key institutional personnel from postsecondary institutions also may play important roles in low-SES students' decisions to attend college. Admissions counselors provide crucial information about institutions, their costs, and application procedures. Recent research (NPEC, 2007) found that low-SES students often turn to admissions counselors for information regarding college when they make school visits or attend college fairs. Little research exists to examine and understand the ways in which these institutional agents' relationships with high school counselors and other stakeholders in the high school (e.g., administrators, teachers and parents) play a role in the college-going rates of students. NPEC's

(2007) study found that counselors reported that a primary college-related activity which helped students was “building relationships with postsecondary admissions counselors, locally and across the country, whom they call upon to relax the admissions requirements for worthy students who either missed the deadline or whose paper credentials do not reflect their potential and ability to succeed” (p. 21). It follows that if students and counselors are regularly interacting with admissions counselors and other key institutional personnel (e.g., financial aid and outreach personnel) then students should be receiving more accurate information regarding the college application process and college costs—both important factors that could explain why some low-SES high schools are high-performing.

#### **Layer 4: Social, Economic, and Policy Context and College-Going**

##### **Schools of Choice**

In this study I examine more fully the concept of schools of choice as a macro-level policy issue and how it may influence college attendance. Although UHS is a public school, and operates under the umbrella of the district’s leadership and purview, it is also different in many ways from other public high schools as a 105/105c school of choice. A discussion of the history and missions of schools of choice follows.

##### **Types of School Choice.**

Although models of school choice across the nation vary. The principle is similar—that parents should have the right to choose where their child attends school and that schools will improve if families have increased options in where to send their children (Saultz & Summers, State Legislative Notes, 2009). According to the National Center on School Choice at Vanderbilt University, options for school choice can be categorized into two main types. The first type includes schools that are non-traditional, such as magnet, private, charter, and home schools.

This type of school accounts for over a third of all types of high schools in the United States (Saultz & Summers). The second type, which is far less prevalent, includes schools that allow students to attend more traditional public schools in a district in which they do not live, which includes open enrollment, school transfers, vouchers, and tax credits (Saultz & Summers). UHS falls into the second category of schools of choice and is often labeled as an inter-district transfer school due to its 105/105c status with the state of Michigan.

### **History and Prevalence.**

School choice policies have been utilized, both voluntary and mandatory, for over four decades in the American educational system to address issues of segregation and school failure (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). These policies have taken many forms, from the creation of magnet and charter schools, to a voucher system of enrollment, to inter-district transfers. However, all policies within the umbrella term of school choice have one thing in common—that parents should have the choice to select where their child will attend public school. These school choice policies have been hotly debated and argued in both the political and educational realms—especially in relation to charter schools. Even with the controversy surrounding many types of schools of choice, the numbers are rapidly rising. In 2009, over 500,000 students nationwide participated in schools of choice that are considered to be inter-district—or allowing students in the same district or surrounding districts to enroll in the school (Finnigan & Stewart).

In Michigan, this educational reform strategy began to expand rapidly after the legislature adopted Section 105, also known as the “school of choice” law, of the State School Aid Act in 1996. As of 2011, over 100,000, or 20 percent of all public high school students, in Michigan participated in some form of school of choice—nearly a 150 percent increase since 2002 (Mackinac Center). UHS is considered a 105 or 105c school of choice often labeled as an inter-

district transfer school. Sections 105 and 105c of the Act define this type of school choice as allowing “local school districts to enroll non-resident students and count them in membership without having to obtain approval from the district of residence”. Further, “Section 105 permits local school districts to enroll students who reside in other local school districts within the same intermediate school district.” And, “Section 105c allows enrollment of students who reside in school districts located in contiguous intermediate school districts”. In essence, the concept of school choice more wholly “involves allowing parents, regardless of where they live, to decide on which school they should send their children” (Strate & Wilson, 1991, p. 8).

### **Research on School Choice.**

Research conducted on school choice generally focuses on two main areas—the benefits/drawbacks of school choice and arguments for/against school choice. My aim is not to comment on whether schools of choice are a good or bad policy decision for the state, I am most interested in how UHS, as a school choice, either fits the mold of a typical school of choice or deviates from that mold. As part of the literature review, however, I briefly summarize the ongoing debate regarding those in favor, and those against, school choice. A report conducted by researchers at Michigan State University (1999) succinctly summed up the positions of advocates and critics of school choice, stating:

Advocates of school choice see the opportunity to choose as an element of personal freedom. They encourage policies that expand individual liberty and protect citizens against the power of public institutions. Critics of school choice defend the traditional public school system as essential for the development of free and equal citizens. To them, school choice policies widen the inequalities in society. They reduce opportunities for interactions across lines of race, class and religion that are essential to democratic

citizenship. To the extent that supporters and opponents of school choice are driven by disagreements in values, they are unlikely to be persuaded by evidence about the good and bad effects of choice (p. 19).

There is no doubt that the policy issue of school choice brings to the fore strong opinions on both sides of the issue. Relevant to this study is how well UHS fits the traditional model of an inter-district school of choice.

Research by Finnigan and Stewart (2009) on inter-district schools of choice in the Rochester City School District in New York found that parents who chose to send their children to schools of choice are “more actively involved” and “more likely to acquire information about their options”, which could lead to “an underrepresentation of poor and minority families” (Finnigan & Stewart, p. 16). Strate and Wilson’s (1991) also reported that many low-SES parents are “trapped in low-income residential areas where their children become captive clients of the neighborhood school” (p. 4). UHS does not fit easily into this general depiction of schools of choice. Unlike the picture painted by Finnigan and Stewart and by Strate and Wilson, UHS is 99 percent African American students with the majority of them economically disadvantaged. Moreover the school has a high percentage of students who go on to college.

### **Relationship between Layers 2, 3, and 4**

#### **High School and University Partnerships**

Collaborations between K-12 and higher education institutions to address issues of access, retention and persistence issues for underrepresented students have increased rapidly in recent years (Collins et al., 2009; Nunez & Oliva, 2009). Depending on how one defines and understands interactions between K-12 schools and colleges, such activity has existed since the



1800s, with an intensification of the development of these partnerships in the 1990s. (Kezar, 2007; Oliva, 2004; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988).

In a recent report by Barnett et al. (2012) for the National Center for Postsecondary Research, entitled *Preparing High School Students for College: An Exploratory Study of College Readiness Partnership Programs in Texas*, the authors state that there is a “scarcity of empirical evidence on college readiness partnerships” (p. iii) and that “building a stronger evidence base would enhance high schools and colleges’ ability to make sound decisions about which potential program models to implement” (p. v). Domina and Ruzek (2010) parallel this belief, reporting “very little empirical research has been undertaken to assess this movement’s effectiveness” (p. 244). The few empirical studies suggest several components that could contribute to more effective partnerships, including: (a) a university culture that supports research and service to the community, (b) a high level of trust between the university and school stakeholders, (c) personnel at the university whose responsibilities are devoted to furthering the partnership, (d) physical facilities assigned specifically for the partnership, (e) solicitation of perspectives from students, families, faculty, teachers, and staff, and (f) adequate funding (g) clear and consistent communication between stakeholders (Bodilly et al., 2004; Jones, Yonezawa, Ballestros, & Mehan, 2007; Kezar, 2007; Nunez & Olilva, 2009; Valadez & Snyder, 2006; Weerts, 2007; Weerts & Sandman, 2008).

Nunez and Oliva’s (2009) seminal work on P-20 collaborations that promote college access for underrepresented students found that effective partnerships require building trust among stakeholders. Trust is crucial both to form the partnership and to make it work effectively (Valadez & Snyder, 2006).

The most often faced barriers to effective school/college partnerships are (a) lack of funding and resource streams, (b) differences in cultural norms and priorities between the high school and university, (c) complex patterns of enrollment whereby students are attending multiple higher education institutions which makes it more difficult to customize programs to prepare them for college, (d) a lack of conclusive data on the effectiveness of the partnership and, (e) a lack of institutional buy-in from both college and high school stakeholders (Barnett et al., 2012; Kezar, 2007; Nunez & Oliva, 2009; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988; Tierney et al., 2007; Weerts, 2007). Few of these studies delve deeply enough into, or accurately represent, the variety of partnerships between high schools and universities to provide a large enough research base from which to draw sound scientific conclusions. This case study hopes to add more rich detailed descriptions of a high school and university partnership to help contribute to this knowledge base.

There are many types of partnership models between K-12 and universities, the most common being between high schools and universities (Collins et al., 2009). The main goal of these partnerships is to address access, retention and achievement gap issues for underrepresented students—with the higher education institution traditionally acting as the central partner (Collins et al., 2009; Weerts, 2007). However, a relatively small body of research recently has examined the role of a third partner in these relationships—foundations (Collins et al., 2009). These foundations often operate with one another or with other partners in the non-profit sector to take a more active role in the creation and operation of high school/college partnerships. Among others, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and more locally in Michigan, the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Skillman Foundation and Michigan Future, Inc. have funded various long-term partnerships (Collins et al., 2009). These partnerships

can involve a variety of activities, vary in length, and in intensity (Barnett et al., 2012), including: professional development for teachers and counselors, developing curricula for students, and increasing the college preparation and application process among students. (Nunez & Oliva, 2009).

There is conflicting evidence in the literature regarding the effectiveness of these new partnerships among high schools, universities, and foundations. Of particular concern is the replacing of high schools or postsecondary institutions as lead partners with private foundations. Preliminary evidence suggests that these types of partnerships can be effective in increasing access and success for underrepresented students (Bodilly et al., 2004). The 2004 RAND Corporation report on *Challenges and Potential of a Collaborative Approach to Educational Reform* showed mixed findings on the effectiveness of the collaborations created by Ford's Collaborating for Educational Reform Initiative (CERI) (Bodilly et al., 2004). The authors report some promising results in the eight communities across the country given grants, including the "development and implementation of visions of high-quality teaching and support" and the ability to effectively bring in additional grants (Bodilly et al.). On the other hand, a few studies show these partnerships are not as effective in meeting the needs of underrepresented students (Bodilly et al., 2004; Collins et al., 2009; Kirst, Venezia, & Antonio, 2003; Oliva, 2004). Collins et al.'s study on cultivating community-university-school partnerships found that these forms of partnerships "miss the major challenge in addressing the educational needs of underrepresented students" and "the actual collaboration around improving the postsecondary access and success for these underrepresented students has been limited at best" (p. 397-8). The authors also state that these "collaboration models either are incapable of fulfilling this role or were not designed to fulfill them" (p. 398). Overall, the research on K-12/college/foundation partnerships is limited.

## **Dual Enrollment**

Examining existing research on dual enrollment and the possible benefits for low-SES and minority students is important in this study, as part of the formal partnership between UHS and MTU includes a high percentage of high school students who took dual enrollment courses at MTU. Dual enrollment programs, at their simplest, are “collaborative efforts between high schools and colleges that allow high school students (usually juniors and seniors) to enroll in college courses” (Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2008, p. 1). Traditionally, dual enrollment programs have been reserved for high-achieving students; however, recently these programs have been offered to low- and middle-achieving students and underserved students (e.g., low-income, first-generation, and minority) in the hopes of providing a smoother transition from high school to postsecondary education (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). Recent research has begun to examine who participates in dual enrollment as well as the possible benefits for students; however, little research focuses solely on low-SES and minority students.

### **Dual Enrollment Participation.**

Participation in dual enrollment programs has rapidly increased in the past decade (Bailey & Karp, 2003b; Farrell & Seifert, 2007; Hoffman, 2005; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2008). The literature varies greatly in reporting how many states have implemented dual enrollment programs; however, estimates are that between 38 and 47 states have developed and implemented dual enrollment programs (Farrell & Seifert; Karp et al.; Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). In the 2002-2003 school year, 71 percent of high schools and 57 percent of postsecondary institutions permitted high school students to take dual enrollment courses (Karp et al.).

Kleiner and Lewis' (2005) national survey, *Dual enrollment programs and courses for high school students*, provides the most comprehensive overview of national estimates of dual enrollment to date. The researchers concluded that “a greater percentage of public 2-year institutions than public 4-year and private 4-year institutions had high school students taking college-level courses within dual enrollment (93 percent versus 64 percent and 29 percent, respectively)” (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). Furthermore, the survey results show that approximately 813,000 students were enrolled in college-level courses, which represents about 5 percent of all high school students in the United States (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). A scant 5 percent of institutions had dual enrollment programs specifically geared toward at-risk students (e.g. low-income, first-generation, and minority) (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005).

Waits, Setzer, and Lewis (2005) conducted one of the few existing national surveys of dual enrollment and dual credit courses examining public high schools. The researchers examined characteristics of both high schools that offered dual enrollment, and of the students who participated in these programs, and found that dual enrollment courses were more available at larger high schools. In addition, high schools in towns and suburban areas were more likely to offer dual enrollment programs as opposed to those schools located in urban and rural areas. The researchers also found that students in the Central region of the country were most likely to have dual enrollment programs; whereas, students in the Northeast had the least number of programs available. Finally, schools that had the highest minority populations were the least likely to offer dual enrollment programs. This finding is of particular interest, as UHS is 99 percent African American, and yet, offers dual enrollment to all students through the partnership with MTU.

Museus, Lutovsky, and Colbeck (2007) and Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, and Bailey (2008) examined both demographic and economic characteristics of dual enrollment students in

particular states (Pennsylvania; Florida and New York City respectively). Museus et al. (2007) found that White and Asian students participated at disproportionately higher levels in 2003-2004 in dual enrollment programs than their Black and Latino peers. Furthermore, students who attended high school with low poverty levels were much more apt (69 percent), than peers from schools with the highest poverty levels (.8 percent) to participate in dual enrollment programs. Karp et al. (2008) support these findings in their study of Florida and New York City dual enrollment programs where they found that participants were more likely to be female and White. Moreover, non-participants were more likely to be Black or Hispanic, to be labeled as Limited English Proficient, or to be eligible for free or reduced lunch in middle school.

### **Student Benefits of Dual Enrollment Participation.**

Although research on the effects of dual enrollment programs is still in the early stages (Bailey & Karp, 2003a; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2008), many believe that dual enrollment programs provide a variety of advantages for students who participate. Most benefits of participation in dual enrollment in the existing literature relate to three broad areas: academic, psychological/social, and economic. The academic benefits purported for students who participate in dual enrollment programs are many and varied in the literature: providing greater challenges to advanced students, increasing access to a wider array of course options, helping low-achieving students meet high academic standards, preventing high school dropouts, accelerating student progress toward degree completion, reducing the need for college remediation, and increasing likelihood to enroll in and complete college (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002; Boswell, 2001; Hoffman, 2005; Hugo 2001; Karp et al., 2008; Karp & Hughes, 2008). Although the academic advantages are most often cited in the literature, economic advantages of participation are also mentioned. Many dual enrollment programs are free to

students or at a reduced cost, and thus students can receive college credit which allows them to lower the overall cost of a college degree. Finally, there are also psychological and social advantages that students obtain from participation in dual enrollment programs. Often times the transition from high school to college can be overwhelming for students (Hurtado, Laird & Perorazio, 2010; McDonough, 2005; McDonough, McClafferty & Nunez, 2002); however, for students who have participated in dual enrollment programs this transition can be eased. Many students have taken dual enrollment courses on college campuses and have been exposed to the non-academic side of college which helps to acclimatize them to college. In addition, dual enrollment can help demystify the college experience and can help allay their fears that college is too challenging or unwelcoming (Hoffman, 2005). Overall, the literature suggests that there are numerous academic, social, and economic advantages accrue to students who participate in dual enrollment programs.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a review of the research literature that served to guide the direction of this study in terms of the interview questions asked and the types of information that is still lacking in relation to relationships and partnerships between high schools and colleges. The research literature in relation to the role of high school quality, student demographics, social/cultural capital and school culture/climate, on the whole, has provided a solid base from which to study high-performing low-SES high schools. However, the literature on the efficacy and importance of relationships and partnerships between high schools and colleges is still in its infancy—particularly in relation to our understanding of formal partnerships between public high schools and private universities and how this might play a role in low-SES and minority four-year college-going rates. In addition, while there are many policy pieces that assert that

increasing college counseling in public high schools is important, there is a dearth of empirical research that examines whether or not they play a role in contributing to high four-year college-going rates. Thus, existing literature supports the way in which this study is conducted—to explore factors that are well-established in the literature that can contribute to college-going. However, more importantly, the literature supports the need to further study factors that are not well-established in the literature—whether the relationships and partnerships between the high school and four-year colleges as well as the role of high school counselors might make a difference in its unusual success.



## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter begins with a discussion of the research design for the study. Second, an explanation of the sampling approach is presented. Third, the data collection and data analysis procedures are discussed. Fourth, the validity of the data is discussed. Next, brief profiles of all interview participants are presented. Finally, the role of the researcher in the analysis is examined.

### **Research Design**

I conducted a qualitative case study of one minority, low-SES public high school in Michigan to examine the factors and relationships that played a role in the high college-going rate. A qualitative approach fits this study since qualitative research is “especially strong in describing and exploring phenomena and generating tentative explanations” and is “very helpful in adding new dimensions of understanding (e.g., understanding groups from the insider’s perspective, understanding the importance of local context, studying complicated processes that occur over time, etc.)” (Patton, 1990). The focus of the case study is twofold: (a) to provide an in-depth examination of this high school and (b) to examine the effects of the institutional and personal relationships between this high school and two four-year institutions on this successful college going rate. Stake (1994) posits that a case study is most useful when the “opportunity to learn is of primary importance” (p. 244). A case study allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth examination of a particular phenomenon using a variety of data sources. Yin (1989) characterizes case study research as a method of qualitative inquiry that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context
- The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident

- Multiple sources of evidence are used (p. 23)

Yin also states that the need for case studies “arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (p. 14). The higher than expected college-going rates of a particular high school and the relationships that the high school has with colleges is a complex phenomenon—compromising activities, entities, processes, and policies, and their interrelationships—best fit a case study design. The decision to select a single-case design was warranted because of the high school’s higher than expected college-going rate based on the student’s population. An “intrinsic,” or unusually interesting, case is one for which there is the belief that the phenomena of interest is of “exceptional interest” (p. 593). A single case study is not necessarily generalizable to all other low-SES, high minority public high schools. Instead it is meant to provide insights into and understanding of how school factors as well as relationships with colleges may play a role in the phenomena of higher than expected college-going rates.

Utilizing a case study allowed for multiple methods of data collection and analysis. This approach ensures that the case incorporates multiple facets of the phenomena to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The primary sources utilized in this study were one-on-one interviews with key individuals at the high school, colleges, and foundation; documentary evidence; and site observations. Since the objective of this study was to present a more holistic picture of the high-performing low-SES high school as well as to understand and explore the role of the relationships between the high school and colleges, culling data from a variety of sources helped to provide more rich data. Each of these data sources provided different types of specific information crucial to the study (see Table 3.1). Patton (1990) posits that using several methods of data collection as well as different data collection techniques can help to improve the overall quality of the data and the findings and is in keeping with the case study design.

In conclusion, the decision to choose a case study for the design of this study was to enable the researcher to explore in-depth the factors and relationships at both the high school and colleges in relation to college-going rates. Although some of the factors at the high school level that contribute to higher college-going rates for underrepresented students is established in the literature, little is known about whether or not the relationships between such high-performing low-SES high schools and four-year colleges might play a role in the higher than expected college going rates.

### **Sampling**

#### **Definition of High-Performing Low-Socioeconomic Status High School**

In the context of this study, a high-performing low-SES high school is one that meets the following conditions:

- Must be located in the state of Michigan
- Overall college-going rate is one standard deviation above the state mean for all low-SES, public high schools
- Must have higher than the state average for students who qualify for free and/or reduced lunch

What follows is a discussion of the data sources used and how the sample was selected in three phases.

#### **Data Sources**

To select the sample for this study, data were gathered from two main sources. First, data from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) were collected from the class of 2008-2009.

This information is for every public high school in the state, and includes number of graduates at each high school, number of graduates enrolled at an institution of higher education (IHE), percentage of graduates enrolled at an institution of higher education, and the number of graduates achieving at least one year's worth of college-level credits. Second, data were collected from the National Center for Education's Common Core of Data (CCD) which provides basic fiscal and non-fiscal data on all public schools, public school districts and state education agencies in the nation. At the time of the sample selection (2010), there was no state coordinated effort to collect information related to all factors used in this study's sample selection<sup>3</sup>.

## **Sample Selection**

Extreme purposive sampling was utilized in this study (Patton, 1990). Extreme purposive sampling allows the researcher to “learn from highly unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest, such as outstanding successes/notable failures” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). This approach fits the current study by providing an in-depth case study of a high school exceeding expectations in sending high numbers of students to college. Examining such an extreme case will illuminate the factors, characteristics and strategies that can increase college-going rates, as well as the nuances of the relative importance of these factors. Of special importance to this study are the relationships between the sampled high school and local colleges.

---

<sup>3</sup> As of 2012, the state of Michigan Department of Education partnered with the Center for Educational Performance and Information to not only publish college-going rates (starting with the 2007-2008 academic year) of all public high schools in Michigan but also report on the college persistence of these students once they left high school. As soon as data was made available through Michigan School Data, four-year college-going rates over time were examined for UHS and were also compared with other public high schools in the state (see Chapter 1, Tables 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3), all support the selection of UHS as a “high-performing” low-SES high school.

A three phase sample selection process was utilized in this study. The first phase of sample selection was to determine which high schools qualified as low-SES, public high schools. The second phase of sample selection was to determine which high schools from the first phase were deemed “high-performing”. The third phase entailed utilizing a phone survey with high school counselors to gather information on basic college-going patterns, relationships between the high school and four-year colleges, and the willingness of the high school to have research conducted on-site to choose the case study high school.

### **Phase 1 of Sample Selection.**

Using the two data sources previously discussed (MDE and CCD), I created a sampling frame which included the following information:

- MDE: must be on the list of public high schools in the state of Michigan
- CCD: must NOT be designated as either a “charter” or “magnet” school as these schools are able to select students based on specialized criteria<sup>4</sup>
- CCD: percentage of students at high school who are eligible to receive free and/or reduced lunch must be greater than 44.45 percent, which is the state average for all public high schools

In the first phase of sample selection, a list of all Michigan public high schools in the state was compiled. Based on MDE data, there were 745 public high schools in 2009. Second, using CCD data, all schools that were labeled as “charter” or “magnet” (173) were removed,

---

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note, that while I removed all schools that had these designations, the state of Michigan, nor the CCD, automatically designates a school of choice as either a charter or magnet school. Although a school of choice can be labeled as charter or magnet, not all schools of choice (like the case study high school in the current study) are labeled as magnet or charter.

leaving 572 “regular” public schools. Finally, using CCD data, out of this pool of 572 schools, the percentage of students eligible for free and/or reduced lunch was compiled. In this study eligibility for free and/or reduced lunch was used to determine whether a school served a higher than average low-SES population<sup>5</sup>. Of the 572 schools identified as “regular” public schools, the average percentage of students eligible for free and/or reduced lunch was 44.45 percent. Any high school who had higher than 44.45 percent was included in this sampling frame and labeled as low-SES—for a total of 238 high schools (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1  
Phase 1: Sample Selection to Determine All Michigan Public, Low-SES High Schools



### **Phase 2 of Sample Selection.**

Phase 2 of the sample selection process focused on identifying which of these 238 high schools would be deemed as “high-performing” low-SES schools. I used the data compiled from the Michigan Department of Education on the college-going percentage for the class of 2009<sup>6</sup>. The average college-going percentage for all low-SES Michigan public high schools in 2009 was 61.58 percent, with a standard deviation of 14.75 percent (Figure 3.2). For this sampling stage I

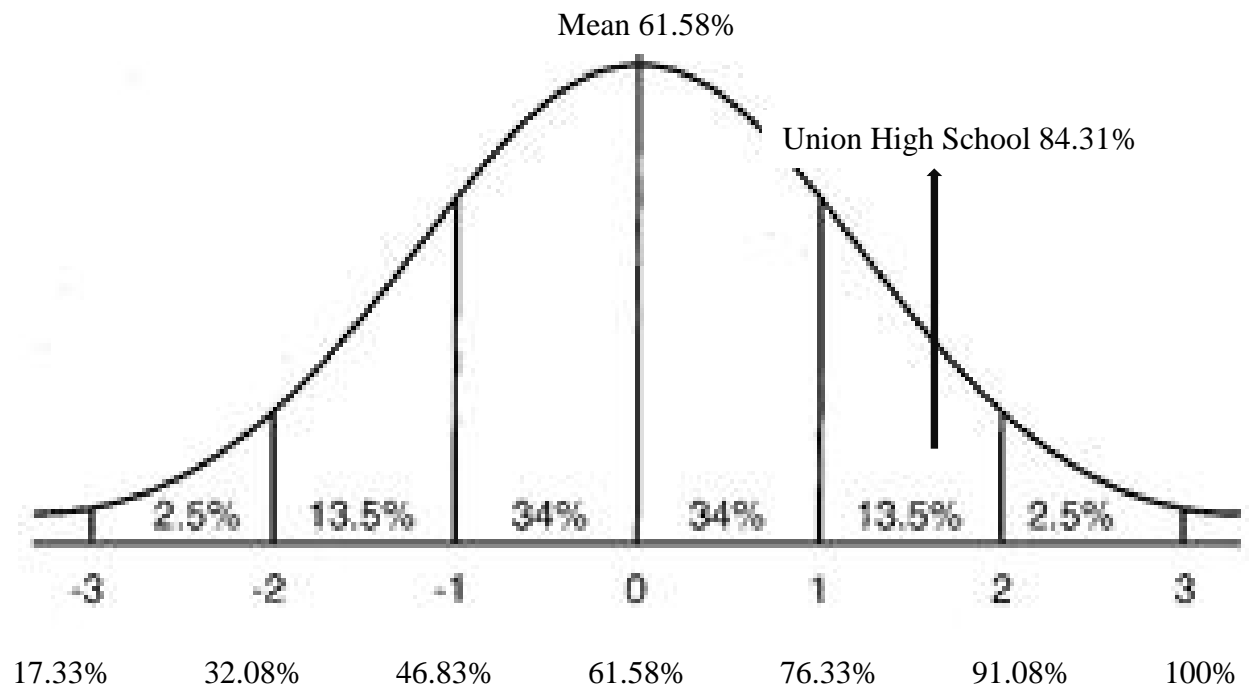
---

<sup>5</sup> The use of free and/or reduced lunch to determine socio-economic status is prevalent in the research literature (See: Ensminger et al., 2000; Harwell & LeBeau, 2010; Nicholson, Slater, Chriqui & Chaloupka, 2014) and the policy world (GearUp, TRIO, etc.).

<sup>6</sup> At the time of sample selection, the most recent college-going data that was available for all public high schools was for the graduating class of 2009.

defined “high-performing” low-SES schools as those whose college-going rate exceeded the mean for low-SES schools by at least one standard deviation (for this study a college-going rate of over 76.33 percent). Selecting high schools that were more than one standard deviation above the mean ensured that these schools were exceeding expectations and sending higher than average percentages of students on to college. I also considered using a stronger criterion, two standard deviations above the mean, but decided to stick with one standard deviation because only three low-SES high schools met the two standard deviation criterion (college-going rate greater than 91.08 percent) and these were somewhat atypical schools —two were test-in schools and the third was rural. The initial sampling frame—low-SES schools with college-going rates one standard deviation above the group norm—contained 37 “high-performing” low-SES schools.

Figure 3.2  
Normal Distribution Curve of College Enrollment Rates (2008-2009)  
Low-SES Public Michigan High Schools



Of these 37 schools, ten were removed as they did not fit the commonly conceived notion of a public high school, e.g., they were either alternative/specialty schools, required a rigorous testing/selection process to be admitted, or had a built-in financial incentive program for students to attend college. This left 27 high-performing low-SES schools for further consideration. Finally, I removed all rural schools because the focus of this study was on suburban and urban schools. This left a final sampling frame of eight high performing, low SES high schools<sup>7</sup>.

### **Phase 3 of Sample Selection.**

In the final phase of sample selection, I carried out a brief phone survey with the guidance counselors at the eight high schools identified above (see Table 3.1). I selected guidance counselors because they are the primary point person in the high school for information related to college going, particularly for low-SES and minority students (McDonough, 1997; 2002; 2005). The purpose of the phone survey was twofold: (a) to make direct contact with the school's guidance counselor(s) to develop rapport and (b) to determine whether or not the school was willing to participate in the full study. The survey included questions that helped provide a first glimpse of the school's college-going patterns, historical data regarding college-going percentages and institutions attended by graduates, and most importantly, information regarding any relationships with higher education institutions (see Appendix A for survey questions).

---

<sup>7</sup> The initial number of high schools was 10, however, two schools closed their doors leaving eight schools in the sample frame.



Table 3.1  
Final Eight Michigan High-Performing Low-SES Public High Schools  
Class of 2009

School	Locale	School Size	Percentage Minority	Percentage Free/Reduced Lunch	Percentage Enrolled in Institution of Higher Education
A	City	1846	23.29	50.38	74.93
B	City	1232	97.80	51.62	75.17
C	Suburban	1004	6.39	55.98	79.62
D	City	1512	12.83	47.88	81.1
E	City	2362	4.02	66.38	82.99
F	Suburban	1153	71.81	66.78	83.01
<b>UHS</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>98.67</b>	<b>67.11</b>	<b>84.31</b>
G	Suburban	1410	18.51	51.56	87.5

I called all eight high schools in the early fall of 2013. I quickly found that reaching counselors at the start of the school year was difficult. I completed three phone surveys and followed up by email. Two respondents from the phone survey expressed interest in allowing me to conduct a case study, requesting that I contact the principal to get formal approval. To try to reach guidance counselors at the five remaining schools, I contacted the principals directly. I completed the phone survey with two of these principals, making for a total of five high schools surveyed.

Of the five high schools surveyed, the co-principal of one high school was quite interested in meeting with me in-person to discuss the possibility of further research. I immediately scheduled an in-person meeting with him for that same week. He was not only receptive to me conducting my research at the high school, but also offered to help me connect with the other two co-principals at the high school as well as the district to get approval for the research. He discussed the unique partnership that the school previously had with a local, private four-year college since the school's formation and the newly formed partnership with another

local, public four-year college. Moreover, we discussed the unique counseling positions (college transition specialist and college success advisor) that were part of the staff. He also noted that the college success advisor kept extensive records of the college-going patterns of each graduating class. Because of the receptiveness of the school to allow me access for my research, the established relationships with four-year colleges, and the unique counseling positions were all integral factors in leading me to choose this school—UHS—for the case study

To review the reasons for selecting UHS for the case study from among the eight high schools comprising the final sampling frame (see Table 3.1 for the data on the eight high schools considered for the case study):

- UHS had the highest population of low-SES students (of eight high-performers)
- UHS had the second highest population of minority students (of eight high-performers)
- UHS had the second highest college-going rate (of eight high-performers)
- UHS had higher than average student college persistence rates (see Chapter 1, Table 1.4)
- UHS school leaders were highly receptive to participate in the study
- UHS was easily accessible geographically
- UHS tracked all graduates after graduation
- UHS personnel had several formal programs/relationships with four-year colleges

After my meeting with the first co-principal, I scheduled two more meetings with the remaining co-principals. Both principals were also receptive to having me conduct research, although the last principal asked that I submit a proposal to him that gave a brief overview of my

study for him to garner formal approval by the district superintendent prior to beginning data collection (see Appendix B). The superintendent approved my proposal, and I began data collection in Fall of 2013.

### **Instrumentation**

I applied and received Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval of the study in July of 2013 (Appendix C). After receiving approval from IRB, I began to conduct my case study.

As described previously, phase one of data collection began in late August of 2013 with the phone survey conducted at the five high-performing low-SES high schools. I chose a phone survey because it allowed me to collect general data in a brief amount of time from multiple sources. The purpose of the phone survey was to gain more information about the college-going patterns of the high-performing low-SES high schools, and more importantly, to develop rapport in order to gain permission eventually to conduct the case study.

Phase two of data collection began in early October of 2013. The research instruments used in this phase were one-on-one semi-structured interviews, site observations at both the high school as well as the partner public, four-year institutions, documents, and audio-visual materials were also collected. I utilized an interview protocol for all one-on-one interviews conducted (Appendices D, E, F, G & H). There were separate protocols based on the role group being interviewed (high school, college, foundation and the specific role of the interviewee). I utilized purposive sampling to select my interview participants. I first interviewed the three co-principals at the high school, followed by the counseling staff, teachers, and former principal. After the high school participants were interviewed, I then interviewed all relevant college personnel (i.e., involved with the formal high school/college transition programs). Finally, I interviewed the

President of Michigan First, Inc. The decision of whom to select for interviews at the college level was made through suggestions of high school personnel I interviewed as well as review of documents and audiovisual materials. During the entirety of the study from August, 2013 through September, 2014 documents, and audiovisual materials were collected. Many documents were provided by participants whom I interviewed, others I found online, at the high school or college. Finally, I used observations in this study to better understand the culture of the high school as well as the day-to-day activities of the formal partnership. A brief description of each research instrument follows as well as how and why the specific data were collected.

### **Data Collection**

At the heart of case study research is the utilization of multiple data sources, each a single piece of the “puzzle”, with each piece contributing to the understanding of the whole phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The convergence of the data can add to the overall credibility of the data as the “strands of data are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case” (p. 554). In this case study, data were collected through several research techniques in order to create a holistic picture of the high-performing low-SES high school and the relationships between the high school and partner four-year colleges (see Table 3.2). Each research technique and the data collected is summarized below.

Table 3.2  
Data Collection Matrix – Type of Information by Source

<b>Information/Information Source</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Documents</b>	<b>Audio-visual Materials</b>
High School Administrators	yes	yes	yes	yes
High School Teachers	yes	yes	yes	yes
High School Counselors	yes	yes	yes	yes
High School Students		yes	yes	yes
College Administrators	yes	yes	yes	yes
College Faculty	yes	yes	yes	
College Admissions Counselor	yes		yes	yes
College Financial Aid Director	yes	yes	yes	yes
Non-profit Foundation Director	yes		yes	yes
Physical plant (high school and college)		yes	yes	
Newspapers			yes	
Press Releases			yes	
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter)				yes
Podcast				yes
YouTube Videos				yes
High School, College, and Foundation Websites			yes	yes
High School Rankings			yes	yes
National Student Clearinghouse			yes	
Common Core Data			yes	
Michigan Department of Education			yes	
Michigan School Data			yes	

### **One-on-One Semi-Structured Interviews**

A total of 17 one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted over the course of four months between September and December of 2013 with participants from the high school

(10), two four-year colleges (6), and foundation (1). Each interview was face-to-face, with the exception of three interviews (two college and one foundation) that were conducted by telephone. Interviews were carried out in a private room. All participants were provided with an informed consent form, which I reviewed verbally with them, containing information about the purpose of the study, the kinds of questions I would be asking, and the participant's right to decline to answer questions or withdraw from the interview at any time. Before beginning the interview, I assured the participants of their confidentiality. I also asked permission for each interview to be audio-recorded and had them sign to verify that they agreed. For the phone interviews, I received verbal consent from each participant to the informed consent form as well as the ability to audio record the interview. Interviews varied in length from half an hour to two and a half hours.

In an effort to best capture a holistic image of what matters in terms of the college-going rate of the high school, as well as a nuanced understanding of the relationships between stakeholders at the high school and colleges, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, utilizing open-ended questions were conducted with stakeholders at the high school, college, and outside individuals (President of Michigan First, Inc.) that played a role in the partnerships. The selection of these individuals involve stakeholders in layers 2 and 3 of Perna's (2006) conceptual model (high school counselors, administrators, and teachers) as well as the interaction between these stakeholders. The selection of the qualitative interview is in keeping with the purpose of the current study—that “the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, p. 278). One-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to understand more fully what might matter in relation to the high four-year college-going rates, and more importantly, the

types and importance of the relationships that exist between high schools and colleges that can affect the college going rate.

The purpose of asking open-ended questions gives the participant a forum in which to best voice their experiences “unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2005, p. 214). Patton (1990) refers to this semi-structured approach as the “interview guide approach” whereby the “topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance; in outline form [however], the interviewer decides the sequence and wording of the questions in the course of the interview” (p. 288). This “interview guide approach” helped to increase the comprehensiveness of the data and helped to make data collection somewhat more systematic than a completely unstructured approach. In addition, I had the flexibility to change the order of questions to fit in with the conversation and fill in logical gaps in the data and close them (Patton). Semi-structured interviews also allowed for adaptation of the questions based on the individual interviewed. For example, questions varied somewhat based on whether the participant was at the high school, college or foundation. In addition, questions were adapted as the study progressed based on newfound information and knowledge gained from previous interviews and other data collection methods. Finally, this approach created a more comfortable interview environment for the participant and allowed them to feel more at ease in sharing their thoughts and ideas (Patton).

Ten participants were interviewed at the high school during the early fall of 2013, including: administrator of building affairs, administrator of staff affairs and instruction, administration of student and family affairs, counselor, college success advisor, college transition specialist, former principal of the school from 2005-2012, and three teachers (science, math, and social studies). This approach allowed for a cross sampling of the high school (there are a total of

23 full time personnel at the school) and provided the greatest amount of descriptive data. An eleventh individual, the superintendent of the Midvale School District, was to be interviewed as well. However, after scheduling and confirming the interview, I arrived to find that the superintendent had retired that morning and was no longer able to be reached for my study.

The selection of these individuals was in keeping with the literature regarding whom and what can make a difference in the college going rates of students at the high school level, as well as reflects the purpose of the research questions. Although a group of questions was used to start the conversation, these served as a jumping off point in which to probe more deeply into the answers and additional topics not in the interview protocol.

The first group of questions in the interview protocol was meant to elicit participant's general understanding and descriptions of the mission and college-going culture of the high school. A mission and culture that is aligned with expectations of all high school personnel toward college-going is well established in the literature as a factor to increase college-going rates. The following questions were asked: What is the high school's mission in relation to college-going? How do you help to foster a college-going culture? What do you do as a school to encourage college attendance? Do you do anything in particular to encourage students to attend a four-year institution?

The second group of questions in the interview protocol were meant to elicit a participant's understanding of who(m) the primary information providers were regarding college-going, the kinds of information shared about college-going, how this information was shared, and where this information came from. Many recent studies have found that school counselors, along with teachers and other high school staff, are the primary providers of information related to college-going for underrepresented students (McDonough, 1997; 2002;



2005; Perna et al., 2008). The following questions were asked: Who(m) at the high school is the primary provider of information related to college-going for students and families? What kinds of information are shared? How is this information shared? Where does this information come from?

The third group of questions in the interview protocol were meant to elicit a participant's responses to the relationships between the high school and four-year colleges. As presented in Chapter Two, while there is ample evidence in the literature that shows that the numbers of relationships between high schools and colleges is rapidly growing. What is not known about these relationships are how they are formed, funded, operate, and whether they play a role in high college-going rates for low-SES and minority students. The questions asked included: Do you have particular programs, activities, events, or relationships with four-year colleges (or individuals at the college), either formal or informal, that are targeted at increasing college-going rates? If so, can you describe these? How did these come into being (e.g. did you or someone at the high school initiate them or did the college come to you and ask you to participate)? Who is the primary point person or coordinator for each activity at the high school? Are there individuals at four-year institutions that you are regularly in contact with regarding your students? Specific probes were also made into the formal partnerships with both Middle Technological University (MTU) and Johnson State University (JSU), including: Can you describe what the partnership actually entailed with MTU (JSU)? Did it stay the same, change? If it changed, what were the reasons for these changes? Do you consider the partnership with MTU to be successful? If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways?

Finally, participants were asked for their thoughts and opinions regarding what they believed to be the reasons the high school sends a higher than average percentage of students on to four-year colleges as well as any additional thoughts that may be relevant.

Six participants were interviewed in the Spring of 2014 at the college level—four individuals at the current partner public, four-year college (Johnson State University) and two individuals at the former partner private, four-year college (Middle Technological University). At MTU both the Provost and Assistant Provost for Enrollment Management were interviewed—both were instrumental in the creation and operation of the partnership with UHS. I encountered some difficulties when trying to schedule interviews with personnel at MTU that had a direct relationship or role in the former partnership with UHS. Although I was able to schedule interviews with the two current staff participants, I was unable to interview former president of MTU who helped develop the partnership with UHS. At JSU, I interviewed the Outreach Coordinator for the School of Education (primary point person for current partnership), the admissions counselor in charge of recruitment for UHS, the director of financial aid in charge of UHS, and an adjunct faculty who teaches dual enrollment for UHS.

The interview protocol for college personnel differed slightly from that of the high school interview protocol. The introductory questions focused on the role of the college in the recruitment of low-SES and minority students instead of the role of the high school. These questions included: Does the college have a particular interest in recruiting low-income high schools students? If so, why is this of particular interest to the college? What are the recruitment strategies that are employed to target or encourage low-income students to apply? Can you describe these? As with the high school interview protocols, the remainder of the interview protocol focused on the activities and relationships between the college and UHS.

I conducted the final interview in the summer of 2014 with the President/Founder of Michigan First, Inc., who was instrumental in the funding, formation, management and evaluation of the partnership between UHS and MTU. This interview focused on the goals and expectations, funding, and evaluation of the partnership.

### **Documents and Audio-Visual Materials**

Based on existing research, it is clear that the kinds of information about college-going, as well as the quality of that information, transmitted to students can make a difference in the choices students make including whether or not the student views college as a viable alternative for future schooling (Kirst & Venezia, 2004; McDonough, 1997; 2002; 2005). Documents discussing the formal and information relationships that exist(ed) between the high school and colleges offered clues about the programmatic factors influencing the college-going of students at UHS. I collected several documents including: vision/mission statements for the partnership, contracts regarding partnerships, proposals for partnerships, meeting notes from partnership discussions, evaluations of the partnership, bylaws for partnership, and newspaper articles about the partnerships. In addition, I reviewed documents from the high school and colleges shared with students and families about the college search and application process, including documents like admissions, financial aid, and scholarships brochures. At the high school level, the curriculum guide, course catalog, and course syllabi (e.g., for the College Prep Courses, dual enrollment courses) were gathered. Finally, I obtained documents containing statistical data on the college-going patterns of students nationwide, statewide, and at UHS.

I also collected audio-visual materials related to the culture and college-going of the high school. These materials included taking photos of the physical plant of both the high school and college. Additionally, the websites of the high school, colleges and foundation were carefully

examined. Finally, I joined several social media pages (Facebook, Twitter) made by the high school and colleges for students and families to collect relevant information.

## **Observations**

Creswell (2005) asserts that “to truly learn about a situation” it is important to become involved in activities at the research site(s) (p. 211). I conducted observations at the high school as well as at the current partner four-year institution beginning in the fall of 2013 and continued through the spring of 2014. Before conducting any site visits to the high school, the co-principal asked me to fill out and sign a permanent volunteer form so that I would officially be able to come and go in and out of the school without having to check in each time. He encouraged me to come and visit and sit in on any classes or meetings that I wished. During my first site visit to the high school I was taken around the grounds of the high school by the same co-principal. He introduced me to the staff, including teachers, counselors and administrative personnel so that everyone would know who I was and my purpose for being at the school over the next several months. During the next several months I made a total of 15 more site visits to the school to perform observations, which included:

- Multiple site visits to UHS to walk around the building and grounds, including classrooms, offices, counseling center/library, lunch room
- Recruitment event for prospective students and families
- FAFSA informational night at UHS with JSU financial aid officer, Rose, and UHS counseling staff as well as UHS students/parents
- Dual enrollment course “Nutrition and Health” with UHS students taught by JSU adjunct faculty member

- Lunch site visit to UHS, with UHS students, administrators and teachers
- College Planning Course (CPC) for juniors with teacher and students

During each observation, I took detailed field notes documenting each experience.

In addition to observations conducted at the high school, I also conducted several observations at JSU. Although the partnership with JSU had just officially begun that fall, after the dissolution of the partnership with MTU the previous year, I wanted to understand how this new partnership might be similar or different than the previous partnership. I sought information about the day-to-day schedule and experience of the senior students who were spending half of their day on the JSU campus. As approved by one high school co-principal, I spent half a day shadowing a group of students as they traveled from UHS, through their three courses at JSU (observing English, Math, and History courses) and then returned to UHS mid-day. I also took the opportunity to talk informally with each of the teachers as well as the co-principal during this process. In addition, I conducted two additional observations on the university campus—one of the physical plant and surrounding areas and the other a tour of the College of Education building by the Director of Outreach who was also the point person for the UHS-JSU partnership. Again, detailed field notes were taken during all observations.

### **Data Analysis**

In a qualitative case study data analysis requires “continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study. Data analysis is not sharply defined from the other activities in the process, such as collecting data or formulation research questions” (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Analysis of the data was an ongoing process throughout the study (Merriam, 1998). Throughout the entire study I wrote memos in order to help keep track of

ideas, concepts and themes. I started my data analysis after receiving results from all five high-performing low-SES high schools where I conducted phone surveys. I reviewed the notes from these conversations to get a better sense of the college-going patterns of each school as well as to ascertain the likelihood of a high school allowing me to conduct a full case study of the high school. After selection of the case study high school, I continued my data analysis with a general review of all documents and audio-visual materials that I collected prior to any interviews with the high school personnel. This review allowed me to understand better the overall picture of the high school and many of the data sources provided preliminary clues regarding the college-going patterns as well as types of relationships with colleges. Based on this information this helped to inform my questions asked in my one-on-one interviews. After each one-on-one interview, I transcribed the interview to gain a better overall sense of the interview and general themes. This ongoing review allowed me to adapt any future interview questions to better suit the needs of the study as well as to help me understand the kinds of additional supporting materials (documents, audio-visual, etc.) that might be advantageous to collect in the future. In addition, reviewing the interview transcripts also helped me to make decisions on whom I might interview next and possible events or activities that I might observe. I continued to collect and review relevant documents and audio-visual materials throughout the course of the study. After each observation, I transcribed my field notes and reviewed these notes to gain a general sense of the experience. After reading and re-reading all interview transcripts, field notes, and examining all documents and audio-visual materials, I began to get a general sense of major themes that spanned the data.

To assist in the coding and analysis I used MAXQDA, a program designed for qualitative data analysis. I input all transcribed interviews and field notes; scanned all documents and

uploaded all audio-visual materials into the software program. The next step in the analysis process was to code the data.

Coding allows the researcher to segment and label the data in order to “form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (Creswell, 2005, p. 237). Using MAXQDA, I began the process of open-coding, which involved “forming initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied” (Creswell, 2005, p. 595). I divided the data into large segments based on general themes and assigned a code to each segment. After an initial coding of data, I reviewed the data to refine the number of codes and combined repetitive or similar codes. I paid special attention to looking for any inconsistencies in the data. I continued to refine and re-label my codes until I felt that I had completed an exhaustive review of all of the data. After open coding, I then used axial coding, the process of “relating concepts to each other” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195) to develop and compare patterns, themes and concepts across the data. In particular, I paid attention to identifying major and minor themes as well as unexpected, and hard-to-classify themes. I then used a narrative approach to describe my findings in two broad areas—successful high school-university relationships and partnerships (see Chapter 5) and less successful parts of the high school-university partnership (see Chapter 6).

### **Pseudonyms**

In this study, pseudonyms are used throughout to protect all participant’s confidentiality. All interview participant’s names as well as the names of high schools, colleges, foundations, and districts have been changed to pseudonyms.

### **Validity**

To ensure validity I used member checking and triangulation of the data. Throughout the data collection process, as well as during data analysis, I remained in contact with many of the participants at the high school, colleges, and foundation. As I wrote the results and findings of the study I called respondents frequently to verify that I fully understood their comments, to clarify an idea or statement, and to ask for additional information that was missing from our original conversation or the documents collected. Triangulation is the “process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes” (Creswell, p. 252). Since qualitative research incorporates the subjective opinions and perspectives of participants, it is crucial to also include other forms of data (e.g., additional interview transcripts, documents, etc.) to confirm emergent themes. For this study I used several sources of information in order to corroborate the accuracy of the theme (e.g., data from the state of Michigan, contracts that discussed the partnership, etc.). Both member checking and triangulation of the data ensured the accurateness and credibility of the study.

### **Participant Profiles**

The following provides brief profiles of the primary actors in this case study. Some individuals who were interviewed have not been included because their roles were considered not as crucial to the aims of this study.

#### **Union High School Participants**

##### **Gene Thomas.**

Gene was the principal of Union High School from the opening of the school until his retirement in 2012. He is a seasoned educational leader with over 40 years of experience as a teacher and administrator at both the primary and secondary school levels. He was approached



by Bill Williams, the superintendent of Midvale Public Schools to serve as principal of Union before the school opened in 2004. Gene decided to take the position, a place where he could make a difference in his last 7 to 10 years of his education career.

**Jude Bareman.**

Jude started as a teacher at Union and, after the retirement of Gene Thomas, was promoted to Administrator of Building Affairs. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from a local Midwestern university. Although Jude oversees the physical plant of the high school, he also collects data related to student progress and performance in addition to helping with marketing and recruitment efforts.

**Kelly James.**

Kelly was recruited by Gene Thomas in 2005 to serve as an English teacher at Union. She is a graduate of a Midwestern university with a teaching degree. After Gene's retirement, she was promoted to Administrator of Staff Affairs and Instruction. She focuses on improving instruction in the building, including instructional strategies, literacy strategies, common core rollout, professional development, and mentoring of new and tenured staff.

**Andrew Wilson.**

Andrew was hired in 2007 as teacher at Union. He grew up in the local area and previously was a teacher at several Detroit public high schools. After the retirement of Gene Thomas, Andrew was promoted to Administrator of Student and Family Affairs. He works with students and families regarding a variety of emotional, social, and academic issues. He also helps with marketing and recruitment efforts.

**June Hanover.**

June was one of the first employees hired at Union. For the first two years of the high school, she was the only counselor on staff. June has been a high school counselor for over 20 years and previously worked at two Detroit public high schools. She had hoped to stay in the Detroit Public School system as a counselor, but due to school closings, this was not a possibility. Her main job responsibilities include student scheduling, organizing the college calendar, college visits, and administrative tasks related to the college application process.

**Marlon Johnson.**

Marlon was hired as the College Transition Specialist in 2012. He is from the local area and has a keen interest in helping minority and low-income students succeed in high school and after. His own experiences have helped him to understand the difficulties that underrepresented students face in the pursuit of higher education. His main responsibilities include working with junior and senior students to help them successfully navigate all parts of the college search and application process, schedule events and activities related to college-going (e.g., college admissions officer visits to the school, visits to college campuses, financial aid workshops, etc.), and meet individually with students to ensure they are on track to graduate on time.

**Sam King.**

Sam was hired as the College Success Advisor in 2006. He is a graduate of Midvale High School (the main high school that serves Midvale residents), and a graduate of a small four-year college in the Midwest where he majored in Biology and played football. He moved back to the area after college and was hired to coach football at Midvale High School. He then decided to take the job at Union even though his original plan was to work in a research lab. Instead, he

decided to stay in education and give back to the community where he grew up. His main job responsibilities include tracking and supporting all Union High School graduates whether they choose college, the military, or the workforce.

### **Middle Technological University Participants**

#### **Amber Vale.**

Amber has worked at Middle Technological University for 15 years, first as Director of Admissions, and now as Assistant Provost for Enrollment Management since 2002. She has over 30 years of experience in higher education in admissions, recruitment and retention. Her general responsibilities include recruitment and retention and the financial aid, admissions, registration, student accounting, leadership, and first year study abroad programs all report to her. She was asked by the former President of Middle Tech to serve as the main point person for the partnership with the Union High School.

#### **Mary Lazio.**

Mary joined Middle Technological University as a faculty member in 1983. She has served as associate provost, dean of graduate programs, interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and interim dean of the College of Engineering. She now servers as Provost of the University. Mary was the lead administrator overseeing Middle Tech's partnership with Midvale Public Schools to launch and develop Union High School.

### **Johnson State University Participants**

#### **Rose Antonio.**

Rose has worked in financial aid for almost 20 years at Johnson State University and currently serves as the Financial Aid Administrator. Her primary responsibilities include counseling undergraduate and graduate students regarding financial aid, progress toward degree, bankruptcies, defaults, and exit counseling. She has a particular interest in helping minority, low-income and migrant students with understanding financial aid and college costs.

### **Michigan First, Inc. Participant**

#### **Larry Garver.**

Larry is the President and co-founder of Michigan First, Inc., a non-partisan, non-profit organization. The organization's mission is to serve as a source of new ideas to help Michigan succeed as a knowledge-driven economy. Its work is funded by a variety of Michigan foundations. Larry is currently helping to start new high schools, to scale, that will help to prepare Detroit students for college success.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, the findings from one case study cannot be generalized to all public, minority and low-SES high schools. Second, information collected from interviews is retrospective data or recollections of past events and is subject to the problems inherent to participant memory. Third, my prior experiences potentially could bias the analysis. I attended a low-SES public high school and have also served as a high school counselor and college admissions officer for such schools in my professional career. To the best of my ability, I avoided making assumptions based on my personal experiences as it relates to my perspective of the high school and colleges. Finally, respondent bias potentially was also a limitation of this study. Interviewees knew that my study was focusing on what I was considering a "high-

performing” low-SES high school. This situation could have prevented those that I interviewed at the high school, college, and other outside individuals from feeling comfortable talking about any information that might not reflect this image of a "high-performing" low-SES high school or the associated partnership. To try to redress potential respondent bias, I triangulated interview data with observations and document analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY DESCRIPTION**

In this Chapter, I describe the UHS case study site. First, I describe the administrative and instructional staffs. Second, I describe the demographics of the student population as well as students' participation in the UHS-postsecondary institution partnership. Third, I review the extracurricular offerings at the high school. Finally, I describe the college-going patterns of the graduating classes of the high school including students' choices of college major.

Midvale Public Schools opened Union High School in the fall of 2005 to a small group of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students primarily from inner-city Detroit. UHS is a public school of choice with the goal of providing urban youth with a unique opportunity “to attend a high school focused on college success and retention as a direct result of a unique partnership with a local university” (School without Walls). The high school was the brainchild of several individuals at Midvale School District (Superintendent and several staff), Middle Technological University (President, Provost, Assistant Provost for Enrollment Management), and a non-partisan think tank, Michigan First, Inc. The partnership was meant to “represent a shift in the traditional structure of secondary education” (School without Walls) with the goal of increasing the numbers of students who would enroll, and persist, in post-secondary education. In addition, the high school would be geared toward preparing students for white collar careers in the automotive industry by providing a curriculum structured around project-based learning and heavily anchored by STEM courses. Several unique opportunities were part of the original creation of the school, including a senior on-campus experience at MTU, dual enrollment opportunities through MTU and exposure to rigors and expectations of university life (School without Walls).

### **Staff**

#### **Principal**

The first staff member to be hired at UHS was Gene Thomas. Gene was approached by the Superintendent of Midvale Public Schools, Bill Williams, to serve as the principal. Gene was the principal of an intermediate school in the district at the time and was looking for a place to end his career, to make a difference, to leave a lasting legacy. Gene recalls:

I was 53, I want to say at the time, my Dad had just died and I was assessing what I wanted to do with the last part of my career. Because I thought I was entering the last seven to ten years. I thought I would stop at 62. So I said ok. So I started meeting with Amber once we settled all that. I just started with a secretary.

After the hiring of the school secretary, the superintendent allowed Gene to hand-select the teachers and counselors who he wished to hire. Gene made the decision to bring on a cadre of teachers who were almost entirely new college graduates. The majority of teachers graduated from Michigan higher education institutions with strong teacher preparation programs (Michigan State University, University of Michigan, Oakland University, etc.). Many of the first group of teachers who were hired still remain at UHS today. In addition to the teaching staff, Gene hired one guidance counselor, June, who had previously worked as a counselor at two inner-city Detroit public high schools for over 20 years. As the school grew to incorporate all four classes being filled (9-12), additional teaching and support staff were hired to help meet the demands of a larger staff and student population. Included were additional teaching staff, an additional secretary and two unique positions that no other public school in the Midvale district had ever had—a College Transition Specialist and a College Success Advisor.

The leadership of UHS has changed recently with the retirement of the original principal, Gene, in 2012. Before his departure, he hired three seasoned UHS teachers to serve as co-principals of the school. Gene believed that having three administrative positions, as opposed to

only one, would allow for better oversight of all areas of the school and better balance of the intense time commitment required. Gene and each of the three teachers discussed those areas of the administration of the school would best fit their strengths and each then took on a specific role—Administrator of Building Affairs (Jude Bareman), Administrator of Student and Family Affairs (Andrew Wilson), and Administrator of Staff Affairs and Instruction (Kelly James). All three co-principals are in their mid-thirties and have spent the majority of their teaching and administrative careers working at UHS. Two of the principals earned master's degrees in teaching from the two most selective graduate programs in teacher education in the state. The third received a bachelor's degree from a local research university.

## **Teachers**

As of the 2013-2014 school year, UHS employed 23 professional teaching staff working in several departments (English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Spanish, Physical Education/Health, and Business/Marketing/Technology). Twelve teachers have master's degrees, and eleven have bachelor's degrees. The average class size is 28 students and the student to teacher ratio is 18:1. Teachers were “carefully selected to ensure the school would have a sense of community, students would feel welcome and would know their teachers care about their success” (Realizing the Vision, 2007, Attachment A). The vast majority of teachers are White and hail from the local community and greater Detroit suburbs; however, few are from Detroit. Although the age of teachers varies, many are in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, on the whole, a relatively young staff. The staff is unique in that it is made up of instructors with a variety of professional experiences “in business and industry, including both seasoned and novice teachers, including a naval engineer, US patent agent, forensic scientist, and corporate marketing executive” (Realizing the Vision, Attachment A). A particularly interesting feature of the



teaching staff is that they are non-unionized unlike other public school teachers in the area. This means that teachers cannot be bumped from their classrooms based on for example seniority (Detroit Free Press).

## **Counselors**

The counseling staff at UHS consists of a counselor (June Hanover), a College Transition Specialist (Marlon Johnson), and a College Success Advisor (Sam King). June, the counselor, has been in place since the first year of the school, and serves a more traditional role including planning student schedules, working with students to discuss career options, and processing of transcripts and school report forms for college applications. She has worked as a guidance counselor in public schools for over 20 years and previously worked as a counselor at two larger inner-city Detroit Public Schools. She was recruited to come to UHS when her former high school was closed due to budget cuts. Marlon, the College Transition Specialist, “is dedicated to keeping students on track through high school, helping students to identify, apply and be accepted to colleges, and assisting with scholarship identification and application” (Advisory Board Report). Marlon’s position is unique in that most public high schools do not have a staff member whose sole job is dedicated to helping students navigate the college search and application process. An even more specialized position was created soon after the school opened—the College Success Advisor. Sam’s “sole responsibility is to maintain contact with all graduates and help them negotiate college life. He spends the bulk of his time on college campuses, helping students with a variety of issues including scheduling, financial aid, and other personal problems” (Advisory Board Report). Each member of the counseling staff has specific job responsibilities. Even so each member works to help one another in order to support students’ success at UHS.

## **Students**

As of the 2013-2014 school year, there were 425 students in grades 9 through 12 at UHS. The school has a cap on student enrollment of 500 but has not yet met this cap since the formation of the school. Since UHS is a school of choice, students come from both the local area and from surrounding districts. More than 75 percent come from Detroit, and the remaining students come from a variety of nearby communities, including Midvale (Detroit Free Press). Recruitment of middle school students is conducted mainly by the co-principals as well as the College Transition Specialist. Recruitment includes staff visits to several local, urban public and private middle schools. In addition, radio and print ads serve to recruit new students to the school. However, many staff at UHS agree that most new students are encouraged to attend through word of mouth from current or previous UHS students and families. UHS only accepts applications from students who will be entering their freshmen or sophomore years. Although an application is required to be admitted, all students are accepted unless there is a major disciplinary infraction in the student's record.

Throughout the brief history of UHS, the demographics of the student population have remained relatively the same—with approximately 99 percent African American students, and anywhere from 45 to 67 percent of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch (mischooldata.org). For the 2013-2014 school year the State of Michigan Department of Education found that 76 percent of UHS students were considered economically disadvantaged, a more inclusive measure of a student's socio-economic status. In addition, the vast majority of students are considered first generation. Overall, UHS student population has a higher than average percentage of African Americans, economically disadvantaged, and first generation when compared to other public high schools in the state of Michigan.

The original vision of the school was not to have a primarily African American, low-SES population mainly from Detroit. Gene, the former principal, related that the “original concept was to have a school that drew half the kids from north of 8 mile and half the kids from south of 8 mile” (Gene interview). This vision of a student population that would be more racially, socio-economically, and geographically diverse was also espoused in the original proposal that was presented to Michigan First, Inc. to secure the funding for the new school. The proposal states “the goal is to have an equal mix of Detroit and suburban students, as well as a rich mix of social and economic, racial/ethnic and gender diversity. These students should mirror the diversity of southeastern Michigan” (UHS Proposal p. 2). However, this goal would not come to fruition, as UHS, from the first day opening its doors, would be a school that was predominantly African American, low-SES, and most students would hail from inner-city Detroit.

Part of the reason for this lack of a “rich mix” of students was the recruiting strategy used by UHS staff. As previously mentioned, most of the recruitment strategies employed by UHS now are through presentations at UHS, local middle schools, radio/print ads, and word-of-mouth. However, before the school was formed, the primary recruiter was the newly hired principal, Gene. Since recruitment needed to take place before the partners had secured a space for the school, Gene held many information sessions for parents on the campus of MTU. Although they incorporated the use of print and radio ads to market the school, Gene noted that the main source of recruiting that first class to UHS were through these face-to-face informational sessions. Because UHS was a school of choice, many families that were interested in attending were from outside of the school district, primarily African American families from Detroit. Gene felt that Larry Garver’s (President of Michigan First, Inc.) vision of suburban and urban, White and

Black, and low-income and middle-income students all coming together in one school, was not realistic. Gene bluntly stated:

What we knew to be true, although you can't tell Larry anything, was that once parents see mostly Black families, the White parents will slowly disappear. I'm not saying any more than that, but I could. People don't choose to be a minority. If they don't have to, they're not going to.

After this first round of recruiting with the school mainly attracting African American families, the partners seemed to do little to build the school according to the original vision of a more diverse school. Instead they focused on filling the ninth and tenth grade classes to get the school up and running. Once the student population was set during the first year, nothing substantially different has been done to increase the representation of other students at UHS. The vision to have a school that would “mirror the diversity of southeastern Michigan” never materialized.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

In comparison to similar public schools of its size, UHS offers a limited number of extracurricular activities. This lack of activity choice may be a function of students having to make their transportation arrangements to and from school, which might make attending after school events more difficult. Part of the school’s original vision was to prepare students for careers in the automotive industry and, thus, two activities remain that still connect to this goal—Girls Exploring Together Information Technology (Get It!) and Innovative Vehicle Design (IVD). Both clubs help students explore technology by requiring students to undertake hands-on experiences in building robots and unique small car designs. The most popular student activity (25 percent of students) is the DECA Marketing Club where students learn leadership,

communication, and business skills and participate in regional, state, and international competitions. In addition, UHS offers National Honor Society, Student Council, Yearbook, Chess Club and Boys to Books (mentoring club to help young African American males transition from boyhood to manhood through empowering them via culturally relevant literature). UHS has a very limited number of athletic teams, including boys and girls basketball, girls volleyball, bowling, and cheerleading.

### **Union High School College-Going Patterns**

Data collected from the National Student Clearinghouse (2013) shows that students chose to attend a handful of institutions, all of which were regional, public four-year colleges (See Table 4.1<sup>8</sup>). Twelve institutions enrolled more than five UHS graduates from the graduating classes of 2008-2013, for a total of 214 students<sup>9</sup>. Eleven out of the 12 most frequently attended institutions are located in the state of Michigan; one is located near the Ohio-Michigan border. Nine institutions are four-year public colleges (157 total UHS students enrolled) and three are two-year public colleges (57 total UHS students enrolled). The average net price for freshmen students at the in-state, four-year institutions on the list ranged from the least expensive, Johnson State University at \$11,981, to the most expensive, University of the Midwest at \$15,939. The majority of four-year institutions attended are considered selective in terms of their admissions criteria with admitted students scoring in the low-to-mid 20s on the ACT and acceptance rates in the 60-70 percent range. One exception is the University of the Midwest, which is considered highly selective with an ACT range of 28-32 and acceptance rate of only 33 percent.

---

<sup>8</sup> All institutional names have been changed to pseudonyms

<sup>9</sup> 42 additional students enrolled in 13 other institutions and were not included in Table 5. A total of 253 students graduated from 2008-2013 at UHS

Of particular interest when examining the college-going patterns of UHS graduates is what is missing—MTU is nowhere on the list of the most enrolled in institutions. Only one UHS student enrolled in MTU over the course of the entire partnership. This leads to an important question examined in the case study—Why do the UHS students enrolling in college do so in institutions other than the partnership institution (see Chapter 6)? Also of particular interest is the most commonly enrolled in college for UHS students—Johnson State University, a four-year public, urban institution located in Detroit. This trend would become important later on (See later in Chapter 6) when UHS’s partnership with MTU dissolved and the high school sought a different four-year institutional partner.

Table 4.1  
Higher Education Institutions where More than Five UHS Graduates Enrolled  
Graduating Classes 2008-2013  
Fall Immediately Following High School Graduation

College (Pseudonym)	Count	State	Type	Freshman Acceptance Rate <sup>10</sup>	ACT range <sup>11</sup>	Net Price <sup>12</sup>
Johnson State University	30	MI	4-yr public	76%	19-26	11,981
Maple Community College	29	MI	2-yr public	Open	N/A	5,086
Midwest State University	27	MI	4-yr public	69%	23-28	14,526
Tahoma University	18	MI	4-yr public	64%	19-24	12,610
Redford University	18	MI	4-yr public	66%	20-26	12,713
Hinton State University	17	MI	4-yr public	79%	18-24	12,627
Lincoln State University	16	MI	4-yr public	76%	19-24	13,357
Cole Community College	16	MI	2-yr public	Open	N/A	5,218
Buckeye State University	13	OH	4-yr public	72%	19-24	N/A <sup>13</sup>
Lynn Community College	12	MI	2-yr public	Open	N/A	4,896
Elmer University	12	MI	4-yr public	83%	19-25	15,796
University of the Midwest	6	MI	4-yr public	33%	28-32	15,939

Sources: National Student Clearinghouse, 2013. “Most Common Institutions of Enrollment in the Fall Immediately following High School Graduation for All Classes by Number of Students.

National Center for Educational Statistics. College Navigator. [www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator](http://www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator).

Standardized test scores can play a role in whether, and where, a student is admitted—particularly to a four-year college. Accordingly, in Table 4.2 I present data on the ACT scores of UHS students compared to their African American peers in the state and nation. Although UHS

<sup>10</sup> Class of 2012 acceptance rate for all applications received.

<sup>11</sup> Class of 2012 middle 50<sup>th</sup> percentile range of all accepted students.

<sup>12</sup> 2012-2013 Average amount for all undergraduates based on full-time beginning undergraduate students who paid the in-state or in-district tuition rate and were awarded grant or scholarship aid from federal, state or local governments or the institution.

<sup>13</sup> Figures not available for average net price for out-of-state entering freshmen

students score similarly to other African American students nationally (with an average of 17), they score a full point better than their peers in the state of Michigan. However, when examining average ACT scores of admitted students to the four-year colleges to which UHS students have most often enrolled, every college's middle fiftieth percentile for accepted students was above a 17—most several points above (Table 4.1). This finding raises two interesting questions: (1) How can these students be receiving lower than average scores for the college, yet, still be admitted at such high rates and (2) Do these students actually persist once they graduate? Based on data from the state of Michigan (see Chapter 1, Table 1.4), UHS students are not simply enrolling in four-year colleges, but they are persisting once there at much higher rates than their low-SES peers across the state.

Table 4.2  
Average ACT Composite Score of African American Students  
Class of 2012

<b>Union High School</b>	<b>State of Michigan</b>	<b>National</b>
17.0	16.0	17.0

Finally, I also examined students' choice of college major because such information might be related both to the choice of institution and eventual matriculation in college (Broekemier & Seshadri, 2000). Interestingly, even though UHS quickly moved away from an emphasis on technology, science, and preparation for technical careers, students still pursued STEM degrees in college at higher rates than are expected for primarily first-generation, low-SES, minority students. Although business was the major most often pursued by UHS graduates (21.63 percent), STEM majors were a close second with almost 20 percent of graduates enrolled



(see Table 4.3) followed closely by Health Sciences (15.87 percent). Equally interesting, even though many UHS graduates attending college selected technical disciplines very few chose to attend MTU, a technical institution.

Table 4.3  
UHS Graduates Choice of College Major  
Classes 2008-2010

<b>Major</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage of Students</b>
Business	1	45	21.63
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)	2	41	19.71
Health Sciences	3	33	15.87
Undecided	4	27	12.98
Visual and Performing Arts	5	16	7.69
Humanities	6	13	6.25
Not Enrolled in College	7	12	5.77
Other (Military, Trade School, Specialty)	8	10	4.81
Education	9	6	2.88
Social/Behavioral Sciences	10	5	2.4

Source: “Midvale’s Union High School: A Model for Measuring Exemplary College Success Urban High Schools”, 2011. Categories for Majors taken from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014001rev.pdf>

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a general overview of Union High School. It is a relatively new school formed by a novel partnership between Midvale Public Schools and Middle Technological University with support from a non-profit think tank, Michigan First, Inc. UHS serves a student population that is primarily African American, low-income and first-generation, with most students hailing from the city of Detroit. The school is small in comparison to the

average public high school in Michigan with only 425 students. Although the former principal of UHS was a seasoned educational leader, the teaching staff was relatively young though well qualified in terms of their educational backgrounds. The counseling staff is unique in that two of the three full time staff are positions that are dedicated solely to college counseling. Finally, UHS students are enrolling in four-year colleges more than any other type of college. Of the colleges to which they most often enroll, all are regional, four-year, public higher education institutions, and the majority are selective in their admissions criteria. Finally, the three most popular majors that UHS graduates elect to pursue are business, STEM, and health sciences.

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS—WHAT WORKED?**

### **Successful School-University Relationships and Partnerships**

At the heart of this study is uncovering the reasons for the unusual success of a high school that serves low-SES and minority students—students who are less likely to attend college (especially a four-year institution)—at such high rates. I explored the following research questions:

1. What kinds of formal and informal partnerships and relationships exist between the case study high school and four-year institutions?
2. From both the college and high school perspectives, which formal and informal partnerships and relationships are most important and why?
3. What additional factors play a role in the case study high school's higher than expected four-year college-going rate?

In this chapter, I describe the informal relationships and the formal partnership important to the success of UHS in sending graduates to college. I first describe the strong informal relationship between a counselor at UHS and a financial aid administrator at a local four-year college (an individual not at the partner institution). In addition, I explore the reasons behind the general lack of informal relationships between the counseling staff at the high school and individuals at local four-year colleges. Next, I discuss the formal partnership that existed between the high school and a local four-year college, Middle Technological University, and the components most important to creating a strong college-going culture at UHS. Finally, I discuss other factors that may have played a role in the high school's unusual success.

#### **Informal Relationships**

*Numbers don't tell the whole story, they just don't. You've gotta talk to people. The day and time where I cannot talk to students, I'll have to quit. Because that's what I do best, I have to know there's a humanness...I could work behind that computer and hide under my desk for years. I couldn't do that. I've gotta see people, I've gotta help them, and support them. If they need my help, then I'm there. It's all about the relationships (Rose, Financial Aid Administrator, Johnson State University).*

Although I found several informal relationships between individuals at UHS and local four-year colleges<sup>14</sup>, only one was long-standing and contributing to improving the high four-year college-going rate of UHS students. In the context of this study, informal relationships are defined as any *regular* contact between individuals at the high school and local four-year colleges that involves the sharing of information regarding the college search and application process. For example, the high school counselor regularly emails a financial aid officer at a college. Or the financial aid officer regularly participates in financial aid informational sessions for high school families. Informal relationships are not based on a contractual agreement between individuals at the high school and college, such as a formal partnership.

### **June and Rose.**

*Our kids are taken care of with Rose. Rose makes sure that our kids know what they need and know when they need to do it (June, UHS Counselor).*

---

<sup>14</sup> When interviewing UHS staff, most talked about general informal relationships between the staff of the high school and four-year colleges. For example, the most often mentioned informal relationship discussed was when admissions counselors from various four-year colleges would visit UHS to meet with students once a year and present an informational session about the college. All interviewees said that these visits were short and afterwards, there was typically no regular or consistent contact with these admissions counselors.

Before UHS opened, the local community raised questions about the placement of a school that would attract African American, inner-city Detroit students to the primarily White suburban town of Midvale. Several town meetings were held in the months leading up to the opening of the high school to discuss concerns about the new high school being housed in a former elementary school in the heart of the suburban neighborhood (City Council meeting minutes, 2005). Members of the Midvale City Council and local residents voiced concerns in these meetings regarding Detroit students coming into the suburban town and creating disturbances (City Council meeting minutes, 2005). The Midvale City Council responded to these concerns by organizing a meeting between the local police force and superintendent of Midvale Schools, Bill Williams (City Council meeting minutes). The meeting appeared to mollify local residents and the plan for the school to move into the neighborhood moved forward.

However, UHS counselor June, who was hired before the doors of the school were opened, related that the backlash lasted long after the school opened. June shared “the community has never been welcoming. The neighbors didn’t want Black students in their neighborhood. They didn’t want them tramping all over their lawns, their flowers, in their little suburban bungalows. They had a fear of young Black males” (June).

It was only after the school had been open for several years with no major incidences involving UHS students and Midvale residents, June noted, that residents accepted the high school. Even so, June said that most Midvale residents are not active in the life of the school and simply “tolerate” it being in the neighborhood.

Not all Midvale residents were against the creation of this new school. A financial aid administrator named Rose, from a local, urban four-year college, Johnson State University

(JSU), attended many of the city council meetings that discussed the new high school. Rose lives a short two blocks walk away from where UHS now sits. Rose has served as a financial aid representative for JSU for almost 20 years and had previously served as a Spanish teacher at a small Christian school in the suburbs of Detroit. She is a lifelong educator and teacher. Although her main responsibilities are to service undergraduate and graduate students at Johnson State, her job includes providing services to the entire local community, no matter where students are attending or planning to attend college. She stated:

As a service to the community, we do a ton. From this office, from these little four walls, we do a ton of service to the community. I'm ecstatic and happy to do this within limits. I can't abandon my students to take care of the community; I'm not going to do that because I'm a Johnson State representative, and that's what I do. So I will always take care of our students first...[but] I don't care where they go to college, but I want them to come here [Johnson State], that's my main goal. But if they can't, I want to empower them to go on to another school, to do something (Rose).

Her passion for wanting to help others regardless of institutional affiliation is evidenced by multiple presentations that she gives at local recreation centers, libraries and other community venues about financial aid and preparing families to meet the cost of college. Although she is a representative of JSU, she made it clear that she would help any student or family who was in need: "I'm a resource to those people [UHS families]. And whether their kids are coming here or not, it's irrelevant" (Rose). In particular, she targets students who are first-generation, immigrants, and low-SES, as they are often the ones who do not have the resources at home to understand financial aid and college costs. Her commitment is in part related to strong personal

beliefs regarding her role as a financial aid officer at an institution that values diversity. Rose stated that while her job is:

very hard...you have to be dedicated and when I get an account online from a student, to me, that's not just a verification—that's a family, with a child, or single mother or single father. It's a family. I put human bones and flesh to everything I do.

In addition, Rose noted that the “number one goal” in the mission of JSU has always been to bring in more low-SES, minority, and first-generation students to campus (Rose). Rose also values the role of the relationship between the college and the high school counselor—whether through financial aid or the admissions office. She related, “it's very important for us [Johnson State] to have an exceptional relationship with the high school counselors. That's number one” (Rose). This priority to form strong relationships and her drive to help underrepresented students compelled Rose to offer her help to a newly formed public school-of-choice that would be opening its doors a mere two blocks from her home—Union High School.

Within a week of the opening of UHS, Rose decided to walk to the high school with a handful of Johnson State brochures in tow and offer her help. She met June, the sole counselor at UHS at the time. Rose remembers that meeting well, recalling:

Union High School used to be, the sponsor used to be Middle Tech, as you know. But when they first opened, they're two streets down from my house. I went with all my brochures, and I said to June, 'Is there anything I can do?' And June, God bless her, said 'I'm so glad you're here, we're being sponsored by Middle Tech, but they've not shown up, not once.

This would be the start of a decade-long relationship between Rose and June. Importantly, the relationship between Rose and June blossomed even though UHS was involved at the time in a formal partnership with another private, four-year college in the local area, MTU. Why did Rose want to help a high school where a formal partnership with another institution already existed? Rose stated matter-of-factly:

Because I know Middle Tech. I knew that those [UHS] students, very few of them if any, would be admitted to Middle Tech, there's just no way. It's a STEM school--science, technology, IT and engineering; they're not prepared. It may be in time they will be, but at that point when they started, I knew right away...I said **no!** The second reason was that maybe we can recruit some of those students to come to Johnson.

June also remembers that first meeting, noting that she was somewhat surprised when Rose came to her almost immediately after UHS opened and introduced herself, stating, "I'm a financial aid officer from Johnson and I'm here to help your kids in any way I can". June was skeptical of Rose at first. June notes that she had always held a view of Johnson State as a "snobby school" and she rarely recommended her former students to apply as she "didn't think it was a good fit". However, June notes that it was Rose's willingness to come to her to offer her help that "changed my tune about Johnson State". After this meeting, the informal relationship between June and Rose continued to grow—a relationship built on mutual trust and regular communication.

Over the course of the next 10 years, Rose would become one of the main providers of information to June, as well as to UHS students and parents, regarding financial aid and scholarships, crucial information in encouraging UHS students to consider applying to college.



The discussions between Rose and June ranged from providing general materials about financial aid and scholarships, to specific information about individual student financial aid accounts.

Rose describes an example of the more general conversations between the two:

‘June is there anything I can do?’ ‘Do you need brochures?’ ‘Do you need financial aid information?’ ‘Can I talk to your juniors about financial aid?’ I will talk to June because I have to send her an email pretty soon. I want to get to the juniors before they go on summer vacation. I want to talk to them about their pins and everything for the following year. Whether they come to Johnson or not, it doesn’t matter, they’ve gotta go somewhere. Even if they’re going to a vocational school, they need to file the FAFSA. When I go to them, I’m not a recruiter, I don’t care where they go to college, but I would love them to come here—that’s my main goal. But if they can’t, I want to empower them to go on to another school, to do something. It doesn’t have to be college; you have to do something.

In addition, Rose also tracks individual financial aid status for those UHS students planning to enroll at Johnson State. She notes:

I look at their [UHS students] accounts, and if everything is ok, then I’ll email June back and say, ‘this one needs this, or this one needs that, or this one needs another’. Make sure they submit it to the office, or they can fax it, or I go pick them up at the school or whatever. And I make sure their accounts are ready. The students need to be awarded, and everything has to be in order and that’s what I do.

This development is crucial. It addresses a key factor identified in the literature as a barrier to enrollment: low-SES, first-generation, and minority students often have no one at home to

provide timely and accurate information regarding college costs (Perna, 2002; 2006). Instead, these students often turn to individuals at the school, primarily counselors, for information regarding the college search and application process. The relationship between June and Rose enabled UHS students to access current information about one of the most important parts of the college application process—how to pay for college.

After the initial meeting between June and Rose, the two stayed in contact with one another regularly, primarily through email and phone messages. As the first graduating class of UHS entered their senior year, Rose began coming to the school several times a year to give financial aid workshops for UHS students and parents. June noted that these workshops were generally well attended by UHS families, particularly in the late fall for senior students and families. Rose discussed financial aid and scholarships generally as well as the specific options at Johnson State.

Observation of one of Rose’s financial aid workshops in mid-fall of 2013 at UHS clearly showed a strong working relationship between June and Rose. The two talked and joked as students and parents filled the library and sat in front of a handful of computers. June who introduced Rose and told the families that Rose would help answer any questions they had related to financial aid. In a brief introduction, Rose talked about the importance of applying for financial aid and scholarships and told the gathered group of families that she had known June for “many years” and that she “lived just down the street”.

Rose began her presentation asking the group of 12 students and five parents whether any of them planned to attend Johnson State—only two students raised their hands. She immediately told the group that she “would help take care of anyone from this school” and continued throughout the presentation to reassure the group “not to worry”

and that “I will take care of you”. Most telling, Rose stated that she would ensure that if each student was “at the right place, at the right time...I will get you the money”.

Rose spent most of the hour-long workshop going from computer to computer and helping students and parents apply for a pin number that would subsequently enable them to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). As she answered questions, she talked about the importance of applying for financial aid early because “if you don’t have it done before you come [to Johnson State], it’s a mess” (Rose). Parents and students peppered June and Sam (College Success Advisor) with questions throughout the session. Although June and Sam knew some of the answers to the questions, when they did not, they went directly to Rose to ask her for the answer. Rose’s knowledge of the financial aid process was notable; she easily answered any question that students, parents, or the counselors posed to her.

After the workshop ended, June and Rose lingered for several minutes talking about UHS students who had recently applied to JSU. June expressed concern that her students needed assistance with financial aid once they were on campus. June grabbed Rose by both shoulders, looking her straight in the eye, and Rose warmly reassured June, “I’ll work with you...I’ll help your students”. A smile came across June’s face, and as Rose packed up her belongings to leave, they promised to stay in touch with one another.

### **Difficulties in Forming Informal Relationships**

In addition to the working relationship between June and Rose, several personnel at UHS and local four-year colleges formed informal working relationships to assist in the transition to college, especially between the three members of the counseling staff and admissions and

financial aid officers at local four-year colleges. For example, the counseling team contacted many college admissions officers from various local four-year colleges each year to schedule in-school visits about college admissions. Yet, in no case did any of these informal relationships become longstanding or close. In this following section, I discuss the difficulties that the counseling team faced in trying to develop these informal relationships. Interviews with the counseling staff revealed the nature of the problem in building informal K-16 working relationships especially with college admissions personnel. As one example, June stated:

...forming relationships with four-year colleges is often difficult because of the turnover of admissions officers. Sometimes, we have a new person every year who is our contact person. It makes it hard to keep, or even form, a relationship that will last over time.

Even so, June was ambivalent in whether or not these additional informal relationships could directly increase the numbers of students going on to four-year colleges: "...my role isn't to advocate for my kids. My rule of thumb is if they [admissions officers] feel the kid isn't a fit, I'm not going to push it on them". June believed that these relationships are more important indirectly such as through gathering pertinent information about the financial aid and scholarship process for her students. She does not believe that informal relationships should be used to give her students a "leg up" in the admissions process. For example, when asked regarding whether or not she would call to an admissions officer to promote or advocate for a student who might be borderline for admission at a place like Johnson State, she stated:

If the college admissions person isn't admitting my student, then the student shouldn't be there in the first place. It's not my job to get a kid in, it's the admissions officers' job to decide if the kid is capable of doing the work there (June).

For June, the value of informal relationships with individuals at four-year colleges is in the information that they can provide regarding the cost of college, not the actual application or search portion of the process.

Marlon, the College Transition Specialist, also related the difficulties of forming informal relationships with individuals from four-year colleges, noting:

...the admissions reps, there's a lot of turnover. It's difficult. Each year you find out if that person is still there or not. Now if you develop a relationship with an admissions director, that may be a little different. They tend to stay in those positions a little longer, but you don't deal with them as much. You deal with the person who comes to our school.

Marlon's relatively recent appointment also meant that he was still "developing" and trying to "forge" relationships with individuals at four-year colleges (Marlon). Nevertheless, he found the college personnel in general to be helpful:

I've found that the people that have come across my path, when I've had to reach out to them, maybe in an unorthodox way...they've all been more than helpful. In education, that seems like that's kind of the culture. When people are truly educators, regardless of their position, they have the heart for what it is about and you know what you're trying to do with young people--and reach them from here to here. They seem to be more than willing to assist. I would say that there aren't too many that I have, uh, you know, specific, uh, close relationships. Say, this one person.

In essence, June and Marlon tell a similar story—the difficulty in forming informal relationships with college staff has not directly negatively impacted the college-going rates of UHS students.

Rather, they have found ways on their own to get the necessary information to help their students complete the college search and application process.

Sam, the College Success Advisor, also describes the types of relationships that he has formed over his seven years at UHS. Similar to June and Marlon, Sam relates that “there is no direct person I go to.” Instead, he is in:

...touch with academic advisors, tutors, the financial aid offices, things like that, you know what I mean. When problems come around, I may not have a direct person to go to, but I know how they operate and I can tell them [UHS students], this is the hours they work, kind of like. I’m the liaison for students between the colleges and their staff members. I just, you know, try to be there for them if they need help to guide them where, we don’t do the work for them, we just guide them to where they need to go. So, it’s not a direct partnership or relationship because we have students at so many different universities that we don’t have any particular one relationship. It’s just, literally, I tell my students I consider myself a self-proclaimed financial aid expert. Because over seven years, you just learn all the tricks...it’s so hard to say that, yeah, we do this, or we do that—every situation is different, every situation requires different help, different resources...so it’s very hard to pinpoint one person.

Because Sam’s job requires that he supports all graduated UHS students no matter where they are enrolled in college, he has developed a wide web of ties with individuals at a variety of four-year institutions. Sam relates that there is not one single relationship that stands out in his mind as being long-standing or impactful. Rather, it is his knowledge of the various college campuses and offices that has helped him to best support his students. This approach is unlike the long-standing and close relationships between June and Rose. Yet, his ability to navigate this web of

informal ties to a variety of individuals at several local higher education institutions seems to work in best supporting all 400 students under his charge.

### **Formal Partnership—Union High School and Middle Technological University**

*I firmly believe that if colleges in general, either for financial reasons or for moral reasons, are committed to serving poor kids in general, and poor minority kids growing up in central cities in particular, this is by far the most powerful lever that they have available to them--which is getting much more intimately involved in the lives of kids while they're in high school, including helping sort of design high schools so that they are aligned. And far as I can tell, it's not an area the colleges have been very involved at all, which I just think is short sighted (Larry Garver, President/Co-Founder, Michigan First, Inc.)*

The formal partnership between Midvale Public School District and Middle Technological University to create Union High School was the main, and only, contractual relationship between UHS and a four-year higher education institution for the first seven years of the high school's existence in part because the partnership was built into the decision to start the new high school. In the following sections, I describe the formation and funding of the partnership followed by an examination of the most important elements of the partnership in the success of UHS.

#### **Formation and Funding.**

Middle Technological University was no stranger to partnering with a high school with the hope of improving college-going rates for low-SES and minority students when they approached the Superintendent of Midvale Public Schools, Bill Williams, in 2004 to discuss the

possibility of a new type of formal partnership. MTU had for several years housed a charter high school, Tech Central, on their campus for low-SES and minority students. The funding for the formation and maintenance of Tech Central was provided by a grant from a Michigan-based non-profit, Michigan First, Inc. The non-profit provided funding for organizations seeking to create “a new path to the middle class for kids growing up in cities like Detroit” particularly through the formation of “new high schools that were designed around the knowledge part of the auto industry” (Larry). Michigan First, Inc. was well aligned with Tech Central’s rigorous college-prep, STEM-focused curriculum focused on improving the chances of low-SES minority students of going into a STEM field in college. However, two years into the partnership the partnership dissolved because of the intense clashes between administrators at the college and Tech Central about the management of the school as well as the high school becoming too big for the space provided by MTU (Larry; Mary).

The President of Michigan First, Inc., Larry Garver, was and continues to be intimately involved in all aspects of reviewing and awarding funding to form new high schools in the Detroit area. Larry remembers what happened after the dissolution of the original partnership between Tech Central and MTU:

The high school decided that they wanted to leave the campus, and you know, strike out on their own, independently. Somewhat surprisingly, Middle Tech decided that they wanted to continue a relationship with a high school. So what we ended up doing, was that we let them bid against each other for the continuation of working with us on the grant. And Middle Tech found Midvale as a partner. It was their doing, not mine. I think they shopped around to find someone to partner with and were willing to do it with a school district or a charter school and decided that Midvale offered the best partnership,



and they put a proposal together. That [the MTU and Midvale proposal], we decided, was better than the proposal that came from the charter school as a separate stand-alone high school.

At this time, the majority of partnerships that existed between colleges and high schools in Michigan were with charter schools, not with public school districts (Larry). However, as Larry stated, MTU was not looking to break the mold of the typical college-high school partnership model. Rather, they were “shopping around” to find a school, or school district, within close proximity that would allow them to continue to work with a high school to increase college access for underrepresented students (Gene). The president of MTU at the time was committed to increasing the numbers of students in STEM fields, particularly those from inner-city Detroit, and believed a way to accomplish this goal was for MTU to be intimately engaged in the creation of a STEM-focused curriculum at a high school. After getting turned down many times by various charter schools, MTU turned to a superintendent of a local public school district, Midvale, that was known for thinking outside of the box. Gene Thomas, the principal brought in by the partnership to help start UHS, noted that the Midvale superintendent, Bill Williams, was the “only public school superintendent that would talk to him [Larry Garver]” (Gene). After several conversations, the Midvale superintendent agreed to partner with MTU to create a novel partnership, one between a private university and public school district that “represented a shift in the traditional structure of secondary education” (A School Without Walls, 2009, p.2). The university would work alongside the administration of the school district and the funding partner to help create the high school from the ground up—from its mission and vision, the curriculum, to the inclusion of unique counseling positions. The partnership aimed to create a:

...school without walls, [where] the youth of Detroit and the surrounding communities would have the opportunity to experience college through an on-campus experience in their senior year of high school. The students would also have dual enrollment opportunities and the ability to head to college with transferable credits. For many of these students, often the first college-going members of their families, the college experience would be their very first exposure to the rigors and expectations of university life. It was designed to be a learning experience and a catalyst for encouraging urban youth to attend college (A School Without Walls, 2009, p. 2).

The awarding of the 1.8 million dollar grant by Michigan First, Inc., to MTU and Midvale Public Schools cemented the formal partnership between these two entities and would mark the beginning of the planning phase to create Union High School.

### **Successful Components.**

The partnership between MTU and the Midvale Public School District contributed to the success of UHS directly in three main ways: successful early collaboration to create and plan a high school was focused on creating a strong college-culture; providing a senior on-campus experience that exposed students to a four-year college; and offering dual enrollment courses for UHS students. Although the partnership helped to create opportunities that aided in the eventual success of UHS, the high school administration and staff had to bring to life a culture centered on the expectation that every student would attend college. The partnership provided the starting point to structure the school and curriculum to promote college-going. At that point it became the responsibility of the high school staff to bring this vision into fruition. What follows is an examination of the ways in which both the partnership and the high school staff helped create what has become a very successful high school, UHS.

***Focus on Creating a Strong College-Going Culture.***

*This has been a very strong goal of ours, of the entire staff at UHS, is to create a college-going culture that helps to build an **expectation** to go to college, not just a **hope** to go to college (Marlon, College Success Advisor).*

Corwin and Tierney (2007) describe a college-oriented culture in a high school as one that “cultivates aspirations and behaviors conducive to preparing for, applying to and enrolling in college” (p.3). They note that a “strong college culture is tangible, pervasive and beneficial to students” and ideally should be “inclusive and accessible to all students” (p. 3). The researchers posit five main areas, based on fostering college readiness, that affect building a college-oriented culture in high school:

1. Academic momentum
2. An understanding of how college plans develop
3. A clear mission statement
4. Comprehensive college services
5. Coordinated and systemic college support (p. 3).

The founders of the partnership purposively implemented components of the high school that would help to foster such a culture. However, the Provost of MTU, Mary Lazio, in discussing how the partners worked together in the planning of the high school, said that they “did not really” use specific research or examining other partnerships between colleges and high schools to inform their decisions, rather:

We were the higher learning institution, and so we were the experts on one side and we wanted to understand what college was about and wanted to be able to help students to

understand what college was about. And, at the same time, we really knew that the Midvale schools, they were experts in K-12. So the two of us, not the two of us, there were more than us, there was a team of people, and we just sat together and we thought about what were the important components. We wanted the students, one of the things for sure; we wanted to make sure that the students in ninth grade to know that college was the next step. You know that this school has a very large number of minority students from Detroit. So we knew that these students did not have the role models and that many times the parents did not know how to guide the students you know through the high school for them to be able to think in terms of college (Mary).

Both the partners from MTU and Midvale Public Schools based their strategies for developing a college-going culture more on their prior experience than on the research literature on effective schools. Using Corwin and Tierney's (2007) five main areas as a guide, the following sections explore the components of the partnership in greater depth and the reasons why these components were important in creating a strong college-going culture and in contributing to the unusual success of UHS.

#### *Academic Momentum.*

A crucial ingredient in developing a strong college-going culture is academic momentum, which includes the offering of challenging academic courses taught by qualified teachers at the high school and dual enrollment opportunities for students to earn college-level credit (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Moreover, the ability of a high school to "forge ties with local four-year institutions" is also of critical importance in the formation of a college-going culture. Union High School already had part of this equation in place, a ready-made partnership with MTU. That left the development of a curriculum to provide the academic momentum, not just for the

top students at the school, but for every student at UHS to graduate high school and attend college. Gene Thomas, UHS former principal, reinforced the importance of the curriculum in instilling student interest in and preparation for going to and succeeding in college. He talked about his two main goals for students early on in his conversations with prospective parents and students:

One [goal] was getting kids graduated from college, not just high school. I didn't even want to have a graduation party...why are we celebrating this? So, the other thing is what we do with the bottom half of our students, not just the top. So those are the two ways I told parents this is what we're about. You know, and its condensed form, this is what we're about. Now on the way we were preparing kids with every core content area. They had to take physics. So I would say...here's what I told my kids, they had to take AP Physics, they had to take AP Calculus, they had to learn a foreign language and the language of music. I said I won't be able to do some of those things with your families, but I'm planning to do so many on the academic side, preparing them for college. So we wanted them to have as many options as possible (Gene).

In essence, the partner's goals for the curriculum at UHS were centered on the preparation of students for the rigors of college-level work, regardless of whether they were the valedictorian or the last in the class.

### *Curriculum.*

The original curriculum at UHS was modeled after one instituted at a nearby charter school, the Henry Ford Academy, which structured the school day around a block schedule of four ninety-minute classes. The structure centered on project-based and cross-curriculum

learning—a keystone that the founders believed was important for an automotive-themed high school. The curriculum addressed core learning skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics as well as learning activities which would help students “demonstrate competencies in the diverse and changing use of technologies, communication skills including writing, speaking, listening, negotiation and conflict resolution” (UHS Proposal, 2004, p. 7). The curriculum, crafted originally by outside educational experts who worked with another local charter school, was intended to prepare students to enter into STEM majors in college and then enter careers in the automotive industry. The curriculum primarily centered on creating a strong foundation in STEM, including course offerings such as Advanced Computer Applications; Automotive Design; Introduction to Engineering; Integrative Mathematics; Industrial, Commercial, and Design Arts.

The original curricular emphasis project-based learning, STEM, and the automotive industry changed during the first semester of operation. Gene Thomas realized, after talking with teachers and examining test reports, that the first class of students was not meeting standards in basic core subject areas. Moreover, some of the teachers felt the need “to pass students to simply get them to the next grade” without the students having necessarily learned the skills needed for mastery of the core subject areas (Gene). Gene knew that the curriculum needed to be changed, and changed quickly, to ensure that students met core areas of competency and did not fall behind grade level. Gene pulled in the newly hired teachers to work with him to rewrite the entire curriculum over the next two years. By the time the first class reached their senior year, the curriculum was completely rewritten. This updated curriculum is still used today.

This new curriculum focused on developing foundational skills in the main core content areas to help best prepare students to succeed in college—with some project-based learning incorporated into the teaching model. After the updated curriculum was instituted, all students:

...start in a college-bound track and must take four years of mathematics, science, social studies and language arts. Some of the assumptions in their curriculum are that every student will take Physics, Pre-Calculus, and Chemistry by their junior year. This provides the opportunity for all students to take electives in the four core areas. All credits point towards four-year college success using rigor and relevance (Realizing the Vision, 2007, p. Attachment A).

UHS exceeds both district and state standards for graduation requirements. All students must complete satisfactorily the following credits by subject area (25 credits are needed for a student to graduate):

- 4 credits of English
- 4 credits of Science\*
- 4 credits of Mathematics
- 4 credits of Social Studies\*
- 3 credits of College Preparation (CPC)\*
- 1 credits in Computer Education
- 1 credits in Digital Media Studies
- .5 credits in Physical Education
- .5 credits in Health Education
- 1 credit in Electives\*

\*denotes subject area in which UHS exceeds state of Michigan requirements ([https://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final\\_HS\\_Grad\\_Requirements\\_One-Pager\\_5\\_158245\\_7.04.06.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_HS_Grad_Requirements_One-Pager_5_158245_7.04.06.pdf)).

Over the past several years, UHS, with the approval of MTU and Michigan First, Inc., continued to adapt the curriculum to best help prepare students for college-level coursework. They added Biochemistry and Forensic Science as well as an updated curriculum in English Language Arts and Mathematics to better reflect the new Common Core State Standards. The administration recently expressed some concern over the need for students to acquire a more solid foundation in English language arts, mathematics, and science as well. To address these concerns, the administration changed the daily schedule, starting with the 2013-2014 school year, to increase instructional time for these core content areas. In addition, they added two new mathematics courses to improve foundational skills, such as ACT math preparation for juniors, and four new English language arts sections, which are focused on the fundamental skills necessary for reading information texts (UHS Annual Report, 2014). Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered in English Language & Composition as well as Calculus AB. Honors courses are offered in all grades for English (9,10,11,12); Math (Algebra, Geometry, Pre-Calculus); and Spanish.. There are no AP courses offered in Science, Social Science, or Foreign Language. Although there are a *limited* number of AP courses offered, juniors and seniors at UHS were also given the opportunity to take college courses, or dual enrollment, at MTU throughout the school year (see Dual Enrollment section of Chapter 5). Overall, the partners, even while having their differences, decided upon a curriculum that would best support students in the next phase of their life—success in a four-year college.

*Understanding How College Plans Develop.*



*If you overhear conversations in the hall, it's not kids talking about "gosh, **if I go to college**", "It's **when I go here**, I'm gonna do this". It's just; it's what we do (Jude, Administrator of Building Affairs).*

For a high school to “create effective college services”, they need to “first understand how students develop college preparatory behaviors” (Corwin & Tierney, 2007, p. 4). To accomplish this goal, the partners needed to understand that these plans begin with student aspirations. A strong college-going culture means that every member of the high school “expects that their students will attend college and students share those goals” (p. 4). Simply aspiring to attend college is not enough. For decades research showed that underrepresented, low-SES students were less likely to aspire to go to college than their White and higher-SES peers (Chenoweth & Galliher, 1994; Cobb, McIntire & Pratt, 1989; Hearn, 1991). In the past decade this pattern has shifted. Now these students’ aspirations to attend college are similar to their White and higher-SES peers (ACT, 2013; Avery & Kane, 2004; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Even so, underrepresented students often don’t understand the required steps, nor have the support necessary, to accomplish their goal of going to college (Increasing College Opportunity, 2014). Accordingly, UHS staff had to make sure that student aspirations were accompanied by strong support “to ensure college preparedness and enrollment” (p. 4). UHS staff accomplished these goals in three primary ways: ensuring buy-in from all staff that college is an expectation for each student, creating a school environment that encourages college-going, and instituting a college preparatory course required of all students. In the next section I discuss each of these factors:

*Cultivation of the Expectation that Every Student Will Attend College.*

*Everybody from teachers to secretaries to administration is involved because it's, there's just kind of a general expectation that you're going to college, and that's not negotiable. You know and we tell parents when we do our recruiting events that if you or your student is not serious about going to college, you know, if your student wants to be a mechanic, that's fine, we need mechanics, but this is probably not the place for you. There are good options that are not us, but if you want to go to college you gotta take a look at us, we're a great option and so you know there's just this general sense that every kid that walks in the door is going to college. It's not an option, and so everybody contributes to that sort of informally, the culture of the building, the college-going culture (Jude, Administrator of Building Affairs, UHS).*

As Jude claims, cultivating an expectation that every student will attend college must take place at every level of an institution—from the principal to the teachers, to the administrative staff. The hiring of Gene Thomas was crucial. He was integral in hiring a group of teachers who were young, dynamic and eager to support this mission. Gene was also particularly adept at creating this college-going culture. Larry Garver, Director of Michigan First, Inc. related:

The stuff that they [the partnership] did best was instill both an adult and student culture around going to college. I mean that's what Gene was terrific at. So you know, Gene was very much into building ownership amongst the high school faculty. Which he did a terrific job of in the school. It's one of the strengths of the school.

Larry wasn't the only one who felt that Gene was instrumental in creating this expectation of college-going. Mary, Provost at MTU, discussed the importance of all staff buying into the notion that college should be an expectation for all students. Mary noted, "there is ownership from the principal down—everybody that was there. That happened because they were hired for

that school. This tight group, that's energetic and dynamic..." (Mary). Even staff that spent a short amount of time with Gene, like Marlon (College Transition Specialist), spoke of the critical importance of Gene and his impressive work in creating a strong college-going culture:

Mr. Thomas, who was the principal at the inception of the school, I really enjoyed my time, even though it was a short time. He was the leader who brought me in, and the entire staff, but he appointed the three school leaders we have now and I just think he set up an expectation, he set a good model, um, in what he created and I think that we're going to continue to grow and improve on that, but the foundation has been set.

Every individual interviewed at both UHS and MTU stated that cultivating the expectation of college-going for every student was a central reason for the success of UHS. Gene Thomas was the leader who cultivated this college-going vision and hired a young and eager staff that would also espouse this mission.

Kelly, Administrator of Staff Affairs and Instruction at UHS, talked about the "really dynamic teaching staff that believes they [UHS students] can do it [go to college]" as being the "number 1" thing that caused UHS to be so successful. She went on to say more about the importance of creating this college-going culture, even in the face of daunting statistical odds based on the average standardized test scores of UHS students:

So there's this culture of high expectations, um, that they *can* do it and that if you teach them to use their resources that their test scores don't matter. We're at a 17 ACT; that's the national average of African Americans. It's two points above the state average for African American students because normally the only people who take the ACT are college-going. There are only a small subset of African American students nationally who you can compare to. We are at the college-going average, the college-going African

American average. We are far above what is the national African American students who, um, have to take it, like in states where it's a mandatory test. Um, so but our goal is people always want 21s, 21s, 21s, our goal is to make that irrelevant. A lot of our students, and our graduates who are at four-years are making that clear. Um, that if you teach the whole student and you focus, you know, helping them to use their resources, how to ask for help, how to navigate a college campus, how to not give up on the financial aid system, if you do those things, they'll be ok.

The average ACT scores of UHS students might lead many to expect that students aren't academically ready to attend college, particularly a four-year college, and should be funneled into community colleges, vocational programs, or even the military. However, this lower expectation was not the goal that Gene Thomas had for his school, not the goal that he instilled in his teaching and counseling staff, and not the goal that he and the partners at MTU had agreed upon. Instead, the school culture promoted an expectation that every student would go to college regardless of their standardized test scores. Gene aimed to make the ACT score "irrelevant", to focus more on another metric of success—whether students were going to and succeeding in college. UHS students were doing both.

Although MTU and UHS were in agreement, Larry Garver did not see eye to eye with Gene about the irrelevance of test scores and the relation to college-going. Yet, Gene forged ahead with his mission of creating a college-going culture that encouraged college-going no matter the average ACT scores of the students. Gene recalls:

So we were messaging from the very beginning, college going, college readiness, despite, Larry and I, our biggest fights are about you know, they aren't fights because he doesn't listen, that college indicators are the only way to assess college readiness. Meaning the

test became more important than our success in college, the data was there, qualitatively and quantitatively, somehow the 21 was a gold standard for high schools. My job was to make these irrelevant. Because our kids, historically, we've got a 60-year problem here of scores, for low and impoverished kids. Why would I fight that? I'll do everything else I can do. That's the toughest nut to crack. If somebody had cracked the code, or if we cracked it, they would come flocking to us. But it's not that easy to crack. Places are showing the data, their attrition rate between 9 and 12 grades, probably indicates why they're doing well. They're kicking out the kids who score low before they take the test in 11th grade.

This statement indicates that the mission of UHS was not simply to target a group of high-achieving students and encourage them to attend college. Rather, the focus was on the expectation that every single student, from the top to the bottom of the class, would be going to college and succeeding.

Given the modest average ACT scores of UHS students, it is of particular interest how the counseling staff reacted to their role in creating this college-going culture. Recent research has suggested that low-SES, first-generation and minority students are more likely than their higher-SES and White peers to seek information and guidance about college plans from their school counselor (McDonough 1997, 2002, 2005; Perna et al., 2008). Moreover, recent research from the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago suggests a substantial undermatch among low-SES students who aspire to earn a four-year degree.

Undermatch occurs “when a student’s academic credentials permit them access to a college or university that is more selective than the postsecondary alternative they actually choose” (Smith, Pender & Howell, 2012, p. 247). Approximately two-thirds of Chicago Public School students

who aspired to earn a four-year degree undermatched. Of those students who undermatched, the majority chose to enroll in a community college or no college, with only 50 percent of students actually enrolling in a four-year institution (Roderick et al., 2008). Some research suggests that counselors may support this culture of undermatching for low-SES and minority students. It appears that the ways in which these three counselors work with students to create an expectation of college-going and particularly four-year college-going is crucial to the success of UHS. They are on the ground, working with students one-on-one throughout the college search and application process. They know what it takes to gain acceptance to local four-year colleges, and typically a 17 ACT score (the average at UHS) would be deemed unacceptable by many of these colleges. However, these scores did not deter the counselors. They forged ahead with the mission that MTU and Gene Thomas laid out for them—that they too would expect every single student to go on to college after graduation—regardless of ACT scores. Marlon talks about this school-wide expectation:

You know, we have a certain number of students in credit recovery. You know, a school that accepts everyone for where they are, you know it's not selective. I mean it's a lot of work on a lot of different things within the building, but ultimately everyone at different times carries more weight than others to get them prepared, but we're all working together to get them across the stage. To get them graduated. Now, walking across the stage from our role...everyone is either going to be accepted to a four-year or a 2-year school walking across that stage. Every single student. So, whether you gonna choose the military, you gonna work for a family business or get a job, you have the option, you still can go to school. You can go to OCC [local community college]; you're gonna be accepted somewhere. Your FAFSA's gonna be done. You know then the personal

relationship comes in, and they sit in that chair, and we have a talk and go through their paperwork. We talk about, just what do you want to do? That's when we really get into it (Marlon).

Sam parallels Marlon's thoughts and reinforces the importance that all staff support one another and students in this college-going expectation:

We really believe in supporting them [students] and instilling an expectation of college inside the building...without the staff and without the support of the the administration and the whole faculty, in itself, I wouldn't have this [success]. I have you know 300, 400 students in college right now and without them having the the structure and the foundation that they got from UHS it would really make my job impossible. Um, so, it uh, it really starts inside the building, just the culture and our mission of trying to make sure that every student is prepared and excited about going to college (Sam).

As Schneider (2007) posits in “Forming a College-Going Community in U.S. Public Schools” it is crucial to have a “whole school-based design” where there is a “consistent message that matriculation to a postsecondary institution is an attainable goal” (p. 3). Gene and MTU understood this need. They were purposeful in setting up a culture where each and every student was not simply encouraged, but expected, to attend college.

*School Environment and College Branding.*

*We Are Successful. We Are Intelligent. We Are Innovative. We Are College-Bound. We Are UHS. 99% Graduation Rate. 100% College Acceptance. 85% of Grads in College. (Sign posted on the wall of the main office of UHS).*

Messages such as these can be found everywhere on the grounds of the school—all messages with one purpose—to encourage students' college aspirations and to help create the

expectation that every student will attend college. From the moment a student enters the school grounds it is clear that college is an expectation though the public messages, subtle and not-so-subtle—from the school sign touting the high school as “college-preparatory” to all teachers displaying their college diplomas on their classroom walls, to the brightly colored student-made signs that line the hallways with inspirational messages like “keep on moving-never throw in the towel” and “success is key—don’t give up”.

Kelly, the Administrator of Staff Affairs and Instruction, talks about the way in which UHS went about crafting these messages, or what she labels “college branding”:

We think that's one distinguishing factor [our college branding]. Our college branding is probably different, the messaging they get within the school from the time they walk in. I mean, that's what we call the branding. Every teacher has their college flag up on the wall, their college diplomas, um, their university, that's like a big part of our messaging and our branding. Even the dress code, the only structured thing is that you can wear college sweatshirts or plain black, or white. Even down to those little things, make this culture of college-going.

Kelly’s claim that UHS does a better job than most of their peer high schools in college branding is supported by looking around the main office where she resides. Covering every inch of the main feature wall of the office are carefully laminated newspaper articles touting the success of UHS students and their college enrollment and success rates. Once local newspaper article, titled, “All UHS Grads Earn College Placement Letters” shows the beaming faces of recent UHS grads decked in their graduation attire with the story focusing on the high college placement rate and even listing all the colleges to which graduates had enrolled. Another brochure from the school district has a story about the college success rate of UHS graduates and



in big, bold letters, Kelly is quoted stating, “Our goal is for UHS students to graduate from COLLEGE, not just high school”. And as Kelly states in the above quote, they have subtly tried to reinforce the encouragement of college-going through something as simple as their school dress code, which is clearly posted on the office wall as well. The dress code states that students must always wear a collared shirt (black or white), or they may wear a hooded/crewneck sweatshirt, but only if it is a college one.

In addition to the college branding around the school, the counseling staff has created a “college center” located in the school library. The area may be a small nook off to the side of the library, but it’s immediately evident that this is the area to come if a student needs help in the college search and application process. College pennants and posters line the walls and many print resources are available to help students learn about colleges, financial aid and scholarships, and standardized testing preparation. Sam notes that although the college center has sufficient resources they are:

in the midst, process of reorganizing it and turning it into an unlimited source of...you know, we’re going to have a different station pretty much for the majority of our college, represented by students where students can go there and just come for information and sit down at the computers and things like that. That’s in the works now.

In addition, Sam and Marlon both have their offices in the college center which enables them to have conversations with students who visit the center and to help students take advantage of the resources available there. A UHS student cannot help but encounter these messages geared toward college-going—an important reinforcement of the message that college is an expectation for all students.

*College Preparatory Courses.*

*As soon as I introduced myself to the class as a Midwest State University doctoral student, Ms. Sanders excitedly interjects and yells to the class, “Go Red!” With no prompting or hesitation, almost every single one of the 15 teenagers in the classroom eagerly scream back at her, “Go White!” and then turn to smile at me. (Site observation, Junior College Preparatory Course at UHS)*

Ms. Sander’s math classroom walls are covered with Midwest State University pennants and posters touting “Go Wolves!” and “Go Red!” In the mix of college posters and paraphernalia is a framed copy of her college diploma from Midwest State. Nearby is a corner jam packed with hanging medals and pictures of Ms. Sanders many marathon victories as well as her family. She is young and energetic and easily connects with the 15 or so juniors who slowly filter into her daily, half-hour long, College Preparatory Course (CPC). On the large whiteboard at the front of the class, in big bold letters is written “Days to MME countdown=20!” (Michigan Merit Examination).

It is a typical day in her fall semester CPC course. As students pick up their individual binder for the day from the cabinet, they open to Lesson 5 and begin reviewing worksheets that will help them prepare for the upcoming MME (Michigan Merit Examination) as well as the ACT tests in March of the following semester. Ms. Sanders starts her review on reading passages. She has students read passages on their own, and then as a group they review the answers together. She gives test-taking tips as they go along. For example, she encourages students to “read the questions before reading the passage”. She also has a student read a passage, stops the student mid-passage to remind the class that “time is limited” during the exam, and tells students to make sure “you understand what is, and isn’t, necessary to take into account” in a reading passage—“annotating can help” she adds. She also stops to ensure that

students are aware of the meaning of what she deemed “big words” that they might not know and asks the class to define these words. They continue working through the worksheet until a student raises her hand and asks how she should go about guessing an answer on the ACT. Ms. Sanders hesitates a bit, then responds, “Ms. [Kelly] Johnson told us before, generally, a shorter answer is better in terms of guessing”. The bell rings and students gather their belongings to head to their next class.

College Preparatory Courses were part of the original curriculum design of UHS. Mary, Provost of MTU, talked about how the partnership founders decided to include this unique course:

We wanted the students, one of the things for sure; we wanted to make sure that the students in ninth grade knew that college was the next step. You know, this school has a very large number of minority students from Detroit. So we knew that these students did not have the role models and that many times the parents did not know how to guide the students, you know, through the high school for them to be able to think in terms of college. And so we knew that we had to put an emphasis on that and so we created actually a course from the ninth grade on to help the students that would help each one of them through the steps to prepare them in terms of exams...And the teachers in that particular course really emphasized the next step and the preparation for college. So this really helped because the majority of students in that school actually ended up in college.

MTU administrators and Gene Thomas agreed that having a required, daily course that focused on providing information about the college search and application process, preparation for standardized testing, information about financial aid and scholarships, and a forum to discuss questions and issues related to college-going openly was crucial. As Mary noted above, UHS

students—primarily first-generation, low-SES and minority—often lack the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the college search and application process. As Corwin and Tierney (2007) note, to create a strong college-going culture a school must encourage aspirations and provide hands-on experiences that help students learn about the college search and application process—including gathering information about different college options, financial aid and scholarships, and preparation for standardized testing. The founders of UHS designed this series of courses for ninth through eleventh-grade students (seniors would be on the MTU campus, see Chapter 5 section On-Campus Experience). Every student must take a CPC each year. Passing the course is required for graduation.

The Administrator of Staff Affairs & Instruction, Kelly, created the curriculum that each grade utilizes to teach the CPCs. She developed the curriculum through a variety of online resources as well as with the help of other staff at the high school, including the counseling staff. All teachers in each grade follow the same syllabus each day. It is handed out at the beginning of each semester. Every student is required to keep a binder with assignments and homework. In addition, each week teachers review each student's grades with them and discuss their progress and ways to improve grades in all of their courses.

In ninth-grade students focus on developing strong study habits through exercises that focus on time management, as well as organizing and planning ahead for homework and tests. In addition, teachers begin talking to students about colleges including a weekly activity that spans all three years of the CPCs, called “Know What You Don’t Know.” An activity that Kelly describes as follow:

Students come up with all these questions about college all the way from dorm rooms to fees, to what classes you take and then the CPC teachers everyday answer different questions, and that stems a discussion.

These questions help to spur discussion with the class as a whole and help all students better understand what it means to be a college student—information that many of these students may not be able to get from family members at home. Finally, students are introduced to persuasive writing and complete practice essays throughout the year.

In the sophomore year, CPCs begin preparing students for the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) and the ACT. This preparation begins in the fall semester of sophomore year with teachers handing back EXPLORE (pre-ACT) test results and going through incorrect answers to help students understand why they missed certain questions. Work in the second semester shifts to prepping for the ACT. This includes work on the types of questions asked, test taking strategies, completing actual test questions and specific exercises meant to improve students' writing skills for the essay portion of the exam. Although preparing for standardized testing is an important component of the CPC, students also spend a significant amount of time work on persuasive writing. Students are regularly required to write persuasive essays and feedback is routinely provided to improve their writing skills.

ACT preparation exercises continue into the junior year CPCs; exercises to help students prepare for the MME are also reviewed. After the MME and ACT in March, the focus shifts to helping students prepare and understand the college search and application process as well as researching and understanding college scholarships. This process includes weekly sessions called “College Forum Days” where all juniors, with the guidance of their teachers and counselors, conduct online college searches, discuss entrance requirements for various types of institutions,

and begin crafting a preliminary list of possible colleges to which they might apply. Moreover, teachers help students to prepare an activities resume to use when applying to colleges. Finally, toward the end of the semester, the teachers help students write practice college essays and review them with each student.

One note about the efficacy of this program: the average ACT score of UHS graduates (17) represents substantial improvement (more than 2.0 points) for students based on pre- and post-test practice tests for juniors after only five months of work in their CPCs (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1  
ACT National Test Score Average  
UHS Class of 2008

<b>Fall 2006 ACT Composite Score</b>	<b>March 2007 ACT Composite Score</b>
14.69	16.89

Student performance on the writing section of the ACT also showed significant growth. All UHS freshmen, sophomores, and juniors took practice tests. The test was administered at the beginning of the school year and then in January at semester's end. Each grade showed a substantial improvement in mean scores with 9<sup>th</sup> graders seeing the largest improvement followed closely by juniors (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2  
ACT Writing Score Data  
January 2007

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Fall ACT Writing Average Range: 2-12</b>	<b>January ACT Writing Average Range: 2-12</b>
9 <sup>th</sup>	4.43	6.83
10 <sup>th</sup>	4.61	5.75
11 <sup>th</sup>	5.46	7.08

The counseling staff also use CPCs as a venue to meet large groups of students to talk about important parts of the college process, e.g., application or financial aid deadlines. The guidance staff also use the class time to meet with students individually to talk about college plans. Sam notes that this time allows Marlon and himself to meet “one-on-one” with students to talk about college “without missing class” and enables students to be taught about standardized testing without having teachers “take time out in class to have to teach the test”. In addition, college admissions officers often are able to schedule on-site admissions or information sessions at UHS during this time.

In sum, the majority of respondents felt that having a dedicated time to discuss the nuts and bolts of the college search and application process was important to the success of UHS graduates as it provided a way to disseminate crucial information about the process for students.

*Clear Mission Statement.*

*We are a rigorous, innovative college preparatory school, with a curriculum organized around college preparedness and careers for the 21st century. UHS offers students a dynamic learning environment where multiple modes of instructional strategies are used to prepare students to meet the ever-growing challenges of college and the professional world. UHS has a 9-16 vision, where we measure our success by the percentage of students we graduate from college. The UHS staff strives to create a culture where students learn to be self-motivated learners and are respectful, professional, and invested in their education. Students and teachers work together to create a safe and caring learning environment (UHS Course Catalog, 2014-2015).*

A clear and concise mission statement that incorporates “college expectations, goals, benchmarks and an action plan” is critical in setting the tone so that students, parents, administrators, teachers and staff are aware of the goals of the high school to promote college-going (Corwin & Tierney, 2007, p. 5). In addition, I argue that the vision statement of the school must also align with these goals to ensure clarity across all documents that relate to the current and future goals of the high school.

The original mission statement for Union High School was crafted in the early 2000s primarily by a small group of individuals at MTU and Midvale Public Schools, with the help of Michigan First, Inc. At that time, the automotive industry in Detroit was booming. There was also a shortage of skilled workers who could fill positions through the ranks of the industry—from factory workers to white collar administrative positions. This combination of the local booming auto industry and the focus by major charitable organizations (Mott; McGregor; Thompson, etc.) on trying to help and educate underserved student populations in Detroit, helped to shape the original mission and vision of the high school—to create a public high school that would serve low-and-middle-income students from Southeast Michigan using a technically-oriented curriculum to prepare them for entry into higher education institutions, and eventually, into white collar jobs in the automotive industry. However, the mission of UHS quickly changed.

The original mission hoped to provide students with the ability to “explore career pathways and to prepare students for the twenty-first century automotive industry careers” (UHS Proposal, p. 2). Interestingly, there is no mention in the original mission statement of the expectation for students to attend four-year colleges after graduation. However, interviews with funding partners, staff and administration of UHS and MTU made clear that the original vision of UHS included the expectation for college going. Larry Garver, President of Michigan First,



Inc., related that the “emphasis of the high school” was for students “to enroll in a four-year college” from the beginning. Gene Thomas, the former principal of UHS, confirmed this view, stating that in presentations to prospective students and families at recruitment events before the school opened, the main goal of the high school was:

...selling this concept of this college experience for a college-going school. So, conceptually selling the idea very early on, of college going. And having the opportunity to be exposed. So we were messaging from the very beginning, college going and college readiness... We started this program that said college exposure should be for our kids—it should be an essential component (Gene).

All three of the current co-principals concurred that the original goal of UHS was to send students on to four-year colleges either directly after high school or by transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions (Andrew, Jude, and Kelly). The founding partners original vision for UHS stated that they would “develop students that are responsible, self-sufficient, critical thinkers and problem solvers who will function as viable citizens in our global community” and (UHS Proposal, p. 3). Finally, the high school would:

...blend excellence in curriculum and career preparation for a future in the automotive industry in the twenty-first century. Union High School will provide a student-centered environment that fosters independent learners utilizing project-based learning, integrating cross-content team teaching, and focusing on the accommodation of the multiple learning styles and needs of each of the students. The students will experience a process of personal growth and professional development that will enable them to make informed career choices. Students, parents, high school educational staff, Middle Technological University and other educational/industrial partners will form a community that supports

content rich education and workplace culture. Teacher advocates, student, and professional mentors will ensure the students' integration into the school's culture and success in attaining their goals. Each student will have the knowledge that they matter within the Union High School community (UHS Proposal, p. 3).

The high school's mission quickly shifted in the first years after its formation for three main reasons. First, and most importantly, the automotive industry that had for decades been the cornerstone of the economy in Detroit experienced serious financial setbacks. Beyond the collapsing automotive industry, the entire United States economy started to decline rapidly. This crisis in the automotive industry occurred at the same time that UHS was enrolling its first class of students. Administrators at Midvale Public Schools and the principal of UHS quickly realized that a mission that centered on preparing students for the automotive industry would prevent them from recruiting the student population that they needed.

In contrast, MTU and the primary funding partner, Michigan First, Inc. felt that it was still important to keep the automotive theme of the high school. Mary, Provost at MTU, and a member of the small group of actors who formed and executed the partnership, talked about how MTU felt as though the automotive theme was important to keep. That stance also changed quickly:

I think we continued to think that was important to have that, that theme. But really the high school, themselves, as the students came in, and as they started working with the students, they felt that the most important part for the students is really the college connection and the understanding of their next step. And the students were very young to actually try to understand and try to see the automotive industry as something close to them.

Mary believed that the change in UHS mission did not mean there was a cutting of all ties with the automotive industry, in contrast, maintaining such connections was important:

We still worked with the automotive industry; Union High School had sponsors in the automotive industry. They worked with engineers in the automotive industry, so there was still a connection. But we initially had in the curriculum courses that were about the automotive industry and that is what I think was phased out.

Nevertheless, the school's leadership made the decision to steer away from the automotive theme. And so they did after gaining approval by both MTU and Larry Garver at Michigan First, Inc. (Gene). This relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) between the partner entities and the ability to adapt the mission quickly was crucial to shaping the high school efforts in the future. The UHS mission then shifted to reflect a more general preparation of students to enter any field of study, to prepare them for entry into college and to help them persist once they enroll.

Second, faculty, counselors and administrators working with students through the college search and application process realized that students' interests went beyond science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (see Mary's quote above). Instead of encouraging students to limit their pursuit of major to STEM fields, counselors began encouraging students to pursue majors across all disciplines.

Third, the unwritten mission, as it relates to helping students gain entry and persist in four-year colleges slowly shifted from the initial focus on partner institution MTU toward encouraging students to go to any college and graduate. Counselors and administrators alike noted the significant financial commitment that a family would have to make to have a student

attend a four-year college. June spoke at length about her concerns in encouraging students to enroll in a four-year institution given the economic situation in Michigan, stating:

It's my job to find the right fit for a student, and sometimes financially, a four-year college, that would put a student in great amounts of debt upon graduation, is not the best move...community college would be a better fit.

Kelly, one of the current co-principals, shared similar hesitations about exclusively focusing on four-year institutions, stating:

Um...I don't know...maybe that used to be the mission [all students enrolling in a four-year college], but um, as soon as everything crashed in like 2007-2008 it wasn't. That's not a really realistic goal for a lot of our students, at least immediately after high school. Most of them are first-generation college students, and most of them are free and reduced lunch. Scholarships or work study, or things like that, the 4 -year is a lot harder to do (Kelly).

June went on to state that she wasn't sure that a four-year college was right for some of the students for reasons other than finances. She believed because that many of the students had been "coddled too much" being at such a "small school" and "that a lot of the students were not ready, or independent, or mature enough to go on to a four-year college to be able to navigate it by themselves".

Although the original mission and vision for the school was clearly aligned with providing opportunities, both academic and extracurricular, to prepare students for a future career in the automotive industry, to pursue a STEM major, and to attend a four-year college, all three objectives have changed in some way since the founding of UHS. The updated mission for

UHS is much more inclusive of providing opportunities and support for students and families in general—not limited to a certain type of academic pathway. The current mission states that UHS provides a “physically and emotionally safe environment where students become prepared for success in college and 21st century careers” (UHS Course Catalog, 2014-2105). The most striking difference between the current and original missions is that the original mission never mentioned preparing students for college. Although all individuals interviewed noted that college-going was a goal and expectation at the onset of the high school, this goal was not formalized in writing until the mission statement was modified.

The modified vision statement now also includes a commitment to college preparation and college persistence:

We are a rigorous, innovative college preparatory school, with a curriculum organized around college preparedness and careers for the 21st century. UHS offers students a dynamic learning environment where multiple modes of instructional strategies are used to prepare students to meet the ever-growing challenges of college and the professional world. UHS has a 9-16 vision, where we measure our success by the percentage of students we graduate from college. The UHS staff strives to create a culture where students learn to be self-motivated learners and are respectful, professional, and invested in their education. Students and teachers work together to create a safe and caring learning environment (UHS Course Catalog, 2014-2015).

UHS has worked hard in communicating their new mission and vision to stakeholders. First and foremost, they have made a concerted effort to better “brand” the school and relate the mission of the school to prospective families and the public as a college-preparatory school where the expectation is that all students will go on to college. They have done this by creating

print marketing materials that state their primary mission and provide statistics related to high school graduation, college-going rates, as well as college success rates. The College Transition Specialist and the College Success Advisor have large copies of the mission statement prominently hanging in their offices, clearly visible to students and parents who visit. Even the logo of the school now includes the words “a college-preparatory” school in partnership with “MTU”. Finally, UHS created a new video on the front page of the website which talks about the college-prep mission and the 9-16 vision of the high school. This clear messaging to the public is crucial in helping to promote a strong college-going culture.

*Comprehensive College Services.*

*“You could go through pretty much a whole class of students this year, between Mr. King and myself, and we would know each one of their goals” (Marlon Jones, UHS College Transition Specialist).*

Comprehensive college services provide guidance as well as preparation and information and resources regarding the college search and application process (Corwin & Tierney, 2007, p. 5). To understand the complex process of applying to college, particularly for first-generation students, a high school must provide individualized and on-going support to all students. Without the appropriate academic preparation, in addition to quality information and resources, students may not even apply to college (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). UHS’s strong curriculum, including the required college preparatory courses and dual enrollment offerings, provided the necessary information about the college search and application process and standardized testing. The partnership’s founders decided it was also crucial to provide designated staff members (non-teaching) to carry out these functions. The perceived need to provide individualized and on-going support to encourage college-going led to the creation of two unique counseling

positions—the College Transition Specialist (Marlon) and the College Success Advisor (Sam). In addition, of their own volition the UHS counseling staff developed a specialized college visit program for juniors and seniors. I discuss the effects of the specialized positions below.

*Marlon Johnson—College Transition Specialist.*

*That's his [Marlon's] whole job. To work with those seniors, get 'em graduated, get 'em into college, and get 'em financial aid. I mean it's expensive, but we think it's worth it (Jude, UHS Administrator of Building Affairs).*

From the beginning the partnership had discussed the need for a counselor who would go beyond traditional counseling work—scheduling, discipline issues, report cards—to guide UHS students through the complex process of searching for and applying to colleges—from helping students search for appropriate colleges to helping them fill out applications and financial aid forms. The College Transition Specialist position—Marlon's job—was “dedicated to keeping students on track through high school, helping students to identify, apply and be accepted to colleges, and assisting with scholarship identification and application” (A School Without Walls, 2009, p. 5). Informally, Gene Thomas bluntly explained:

The College Transition Specialist, their job was to provide a level of support that you're going to be able to provide your kid, because of your PhD, to help your kid with those 30 page stupid applications and essays.

To enable the counselor to assist students effectively the position did *not* include traditional responsibilities such as course registration or discipline issues which research shows detracts from time spent on preparing students for the transition to college (Bridgeland & Bruce,

2012; Johnson & Rochkind, 2012). As Sam (College Success Advisor) relates, these UHS positions differ from public school counselors who are:

...overstretched trying to help kids go to college, and in school, in the building things that they have to do with scheduling and all the curriculum. The administrators can worry about the administrative part of the job. Where we've got two non-teaching staff positions, where it's totally focused on college and then, if we do need assistance, our counseling department (June) would help at the drop of a dime. We're solely set up where people don't have to overstretch themselves.

Marlon's work starts when students begin the second semester of junior year. His first job is to work with every student in the class to ensure that s/he is on track to graduate. Jude, the Administrator of Building Affairs, discussed this responsibility and its importance in helping Marlon develop relationships with students:

He starts to work with the juniors, just sort of starting to form that relationship. He verifies that everyone is in the right classes or if somebody needs credit recovery, he arranges that. Making sure every student has a viable plan to graduate in May. And then he stays on them throughout the year and if their grades start to slip, he's on their butt, you know, 'Hey what are you doing about this?' or 'You need to talk to this teacher.' You know he's pretty relentless, and a lot of them need that.

Marlon sees his job as helping students "to find the right fit". He accomplishes this by helping students first understand what it means to be a thoughtful and mature student. He explains:

You just have to understand, you have to say certain things. Like we have to, the bubble sheets, the ACT test. We had a few students that said I don't know my address, or they



didn't skip a space in the name part or something, right? Well to us, you know, you know how to do that, but to some students, we say 'you've been doing this all of your life in school', but for some students you have to break things down for some students and do it with a certain level of patience. So norms of teaching stuff that it is proper in how to respond, how to talk, how to communicate, how to follow through with commitments, so I started the year off, I start with these senior questionnaires. And they have to complete the senior questionnaire, and they have to give me information. But a norm is, 'I don't wanna have to keep tracking you down...turn stuff in'. That's where with each class, man, so I go hard at first, you know, and then as I see them grow and mature and they do things, you know, in a professional, then it's like, you get it. The norms are different, the developmental part of our relationship and dialog.

This early preparatory work means that when the time comes to work on college applications the students are already comfortable coming to Marlon. He meets one-on-one with every senior student to go through a 'senior questionnaire'. The questionnaire serves as a tool to help Marlon talk with each student about her/his goals, aspirations and expectations after high school graduation. These conversations focus on possible college majors, characteristics of a college in which the student might be interested, how to finance a college education, etc. During these conversations, Marlon sees his job as encouraging and providing students with realistic expectations about college. This reality check may mean that for some students starting with a community college might be the best way ultimately to achieve a bachelor's degree:

You know telling the kids to look at a community college right now. Starting against the stigma of 'I'm not smart', 'that's for low-level people'. No, we gotta get that outta your head. I'm looking at your life five or ten years down the road. I know what it's like to

have debt or to, you know, be in a situation where you drop out, and it's hard to go back in, all these different types of things. We just try to take each one (Marlon).

His approach takes into account the individual student and family's needs rather than a one-size fits all mentality to applying to college.

The student questionnaire also provides a timeline for students regarding the college search and application process. Students must check in frequently with Marlon which helps Marlon ensure that students remain on track during the process. Marlon also takes every opportunity to talk to the senior class, whether it be having an assembly to discuss upcoming application deadlines, or pulling a student into his office at the end of the day. He states, "you have to be creative to find the time to get to them. You know, just talking to them, being personable with them". Marlon discusses the importance of his check-ins with students:

On the questionnaire, they update their major, a lot of them put engineering for example, so I went to Johnson State (new partner institution), um, the person that we work with and told her that I'm not comfortable with our students' understanding of the rigor of the engineering program as well as having a good grasp of the different types of engineering. So we're going to schedule with Johnson State and their engineering department some type of forum to take those students and meet with the engineering departments so that they can get a better grasp what's going on, what this is about. What am I about to walk into? You know, what preparation could you possibly do between now and then? I don't know, but just have to have the dialog and the conversation, I think in itself would be good for them.

In addition to forging effective working relationships with students, Marlon provides accurate and timely information about college-going from a variety of sources including bringing

in outside experts on the college search and application process as well as representatives of local four-year colleges. Marlon also has worked with several local colleges to setup on-site admission days. If UHS students bring a completed application with supporting documents the admissions officer from the college will review the application and give the student an admission decision that same day. This practice was more common early on than it is today—only a few colleges continue to offer this service. Finally, Marlon works with June (see June and Rose Section) to bring in a financial aid officer from a local, urban four-year institution several times a year to discuss financial aid and scholarships with students and parents.

In sum, the targeted nature of Marlon’s position as well as his own expertise in all likelihood contributes to UHS’ success in promoting college-going by its graduates. In part this effect is a consequence of the position—Marlon has the time and resources available to provide individualized counseling about college—and in part it is a tribute to his own efforts and his ability to gain the trust of UHS students

*Sam King—College Success Advisor.*

*“Mr. King. Mr. King (big smile and nodding). He would email. He would Facebook. He would call. He would send messages. He would come down to Michigan State just to make sure we were ok. I honestly believe that I would’ve never went to college. I think I would’ve been lost” (UHS alumna, current Michigan State University undergraduate student talking about who made a difference in her college-going plans).*

The College Success Advisor was not part of the original plan for UHS. After the first class of students graduated, Gene Thomas, the Assistant Provost (Amber Vale), and the Provost (Mary Lazio) of MTU realized that in addition to enrolling in college UHS wanted its student to

succeed in college: “college persistence was another goal...it was college success” (Gene).

Beyond the curricular structure and the quality of teaching, the question remained how best to address college persistence in the UHS administrative structure: Amber noted:

I think that when the students started graduating and started going to the universities and colleges. That position wasn't there at the start. They really needed to connect with the students. So at that time, we thought this is really important that we have a person to follow the students.

As mostly first-generation students, UHS graduates are likely to require continuing support once in college. UHS leaders grappled with the question: How could the high school step in to help continue to support its graduates once they left for large college campuses across the region? Gene discusses how he, with the help of Amber and Mary at MTU, came to the conclusion they needed another staff member to help serve this unique role:

We knew that kids in poverty were going to run into financial, but also psychosocial issues, so we created this position, the College Success Advisor, to follow kids to serve as the brother, sister, aunt, or whatever. A lot of them don't have fathers, I didn't leave that out, but I could. The bottom line is that we wanted that person to provide a level of support, knowing that to do it is really, really hard. It isn't to say it can't be done. A conservative mind would say, ‘You need to pull up your bootstraps and all that bullshit!’ I thought it was bullshit for what it was. We did, you know I was in the late 60s, we did it in a better economy. I've been through four recessions in the last forty years. There was government support and other arms of support that aren't in place today. So we felt that we had to have that boots on the ground person, to make a call when things were getting rough. Lots of time it's personal, girls would get pregnant. When there are financial

issues, or when they're on probation, they need someone to advocate for them, to guide them. So that was the purpose of that role.

Gene, Mary, and Amber applied for a second round of funding from Michigan First, Inc., to hire a new position, the College Success Advisor. This novel position, designed especially for the UHS student population, was supported by Larry Garver and the partners approved the quest. Sam King was hired to fill the position.

Formally, Sam King works directly under the supervision of the Midvale Superintendent's Office—he has a district phone number—but his office is located at UHS alongside Marlon in the college center. Although Sam's job is to work with UHS graduates who are enrolled in college, he realizes the importance of developing relationships early with students before they graduate. The school supports him spending part of his time at UHS and the other part traveling around to various colleges meeting with UHS graduates:

I'm in the building working to build a relationship with our seniors. Because we feel like it's important that they need to have relationships with me in order to trust me enough to reach out and call and things like that. And know that when I call, when I try to reach out to them, that it's only gonna be beneficial for them.

Taking the time to work to develop strong relationships with seniors before they leave is crucial in Sam's opinion because a student is much more likely to call him if s/he needs help or advice. Sam discusses how he sees his role in helping to ensure the success of UHS students:

I am a safety net; that's the best, the short word summary for our students. A safety net. Someone that they can depend on when things might get hard in their college career.

They know that before all else fails they have someone that they can go to that will give

them as many resources as possible to make sure that they can bounce back and keep going and things like that.

Sam explains his position as follows: “We structured the position, um, in three layers—track, support, and intervene. We track everybody, we support the majority of the students, and we intervene to a select few that need it”.

Sam is solely responsible for tracking every UHS graduate. He maintains a spreadsheet for each UHS graduate with the following information: whether they enroll in college, where they choose to enroll, how many credits they are taking, if they transfer, if they drop out, what major they declare, and whether they graduate. Sam uses several resources to help him track students ranging from data from the National Student Clearinghouse database, to meeting in person with students on their college campus, to connecting through social media and text messaging. Sam uses the information he collects to better support students. For example, if several students at one college are not progressing toward their degree in a timely manner he tries to find out why. He also shares this information with other members of the UHS staff to help them understand the challenges of graduates and ways to serve students who are still at the high school. This sharing of information is akin to Birnbaum’s (1998) concept of “feedback loops” in his cybernetic organizational model. A feedback loop is a set of "structural or social control[s] that are sensitive to selected factors in the environment" (p. 183). The sharing of information through feedback loops helps UHS to learn about what is happening after graduation in a way that can benefit current students when they are in college. For example, Sam shares information with Marlon so that he can better advise students about their college plans. As Marlon states:

For me to take what he does to benefit what I do. That wasn't in the template, but like I said, when you're trying to continue to grow and help the process of what we do, I'm trying to pull in all the different resources I have. So right now I just talk to him. I think I texted him last night...could you give me the data that use, the websites and what have you, just so I can have it and go over it. And like you said, seeing where our students go, and we can have a dialog about it. You know, just tapping into that. I wouldn't say that it has been directly in this position, but I'm just trying to see how I can use that information.

Sam's second focus is on providing on-going support to the students currently attending college. This support varies by student need. For some students, Sam might help them in understanding how to reapply for financial aid their sophomore year. For another student, it might mean driving to the college campus to meet the student:

Like today, I contacted a student that sent me a text message earlier this week. He said Mr. King give me a time to meet. I met him at Wayne State at 10 o'clock this morning for breakfast, and we just talked about some problems he was having in college. Literally, there's no, no routine, it's always changing, you never when you know when you'll have a situation to deal with, or when someone wants to talk.

Although Sam has specific responsibilities, the ways that he meets them vary by student need. He states that "every, every situation is different, every situation requires different help, different resources and things like that, so, it's very hard to really put a, pinpoint on...on certain things that we do". He does; however, see himself as a:

...liaison for students between the colleges and their staff members. I just, you know, try to be there for them if they need help to guide them. We don't do the work for them; we just guide them to where they need to go.

In sum, Sam uses his broad knowledge of the resources available at a variety of colleges to connect students to the appropriate resource.

Although Sam is “not an expert at any campus yet.” he has learned enough about the various campuses that UHS graduates attend to help students navigate the college campus:

I've just been around enough where I learn, ok, I get contacts and things like that. You know, because after seven years, you just learn all the tricks of the trade...I've been, I've been, I just started to learn each campus over the seven years. I know where to send our students. I'm in touch with academic advisors, tutors, the financial aid office, things like that, you know what I mean. When problems come around, I may not have a direct person to go to, but I know how they operate and I can tell them [students], 'This is the hours they work.' I kind of like, I'm just, like a liaison for students between the colleges and their staff members. Um, so if our students call me and say, 'I need this.' I know how to navigate the campus for them to help them get what they need to get done, things like that.

This is a substantial task for one staff member. UHS graduates about 100 students per class; 85 percent of them are still enrolled in college. Sam estimates that he works with around 400 students currently. He can keep up with this workload because most UHS graduates go to one of the handful of nearby colleges. This proximity makes it possible for Sam to meet with students



on campus and to maintain close contact with college counselors. In addition, Sam utilizes social media and text messaging to help stay in contact with his students:

Facebook is a lifesaver. I send messages and things; they send me messages. Text messages, I do a lot of text messaging. I do, I wanna say about, I try to get on the phone at least once a month, uh at least try to contact them. One thing that's challenging about the phones are they are young, and they're not financially stable, so numbers change. That is a difficulty that I come across as having a consistent contact, but Facebook never changes and things like that. So that saves me a lot of time, you know, so we send a lot of mass things out, just like, 'How you doing? Contact me if anything, um, a problem or concern comes up.' I know certain things like, like when OCC [local community college] and things are re-registering for the upcoming semester, I'll send out a bulletin saying, 'I'll be at OCC-Southfield from such and such time if you need help registering, you come see me' and things like that. So, it's just, I contact the students that way, in a mass way.

Finally, Sam also intervenes to help students who struggle with academic or social issues in college that may threaten their enrollment status at an institution. Often times these issues are financial in nature. Kelly (UHS Administrator of Staff Affairs and Instruction) talks about how Sam supports students who are often in difficult financial situations to help them get back on track at a four-year college:

Our [National Student] Clearinghouse data will show that some of our students will go fall semester but they don't have enough money and they go back to OCC [community college] for spring semester, go back for summer semester. So he helps navigate that and really stays on them about getting back to that four-year.

Does Sam make a difference to the college-going outperformance at UHS? Jude (UHS Administrator of Building Affairs) gives an emphatic affirmative answer:

I mean just the fact that Sam keeps busy helping kids says that there's a need for his help, right? If they didn't need his help, he'd be sitting here twiddling his thumbs, right? He's busy because the kids need help. So that's how we know it's important because they need it. So you know, imagine if he wasn't there if those kids didn't have Mr. King, who they already knew, they already had his phone number, and they trust him. If they didn't have him, would they go find the help on their own? Like would they, would they, know where to go and would they take the initiative to go there. I don't know.

As additional evidence of Sam's effectiveness, Larry Garver and Michigan First, Inc. will require each of the 35 schools they hope to open in Detroit in the near future to employ a college success advisor. Larry stated, "It's one of the non-negotiables. We think they're [College Success Advisor] that important" (Higgins, Detroit Free Press, 2010).

### *College Visits.*

Hill (2008) found that visiting college campuses often was effective in helping students from low-SES high schools to make the transition to college. Research does not address the importance of college visits for low-SES students in persisting in college. Even so, UHS decided early on that their students should visit four-year college campuses throughout the school year to encourage their transition to college.

The counseling staff, particularly June and Marlon, plan these college visits for juniors and seniors throughout the school year—two visits in the fall for seniors and two visits in the spring for juniors. Students typically visit colleges within a two-hour driving radius from the

high school. Most frequently visits are made to the four-year institutions where UHS graduates have attended.

During the visits, the students meet with admissions counselors who provide more detailed information about the college and the application process. Students also participate in campus tours to get a feel for the environment of the school. Whenever possible, Marlon and June ask former UHS students to serve on an “alumni panel” where they can share stories about their college experience and answer questions from current UHS students (Marlon). Interview respondents unanimously agreed that these visits were important to allow students to see “a college campus that they normally wouldn’t see” (June). When asked why he believes UHS students are so successful in enrolling and persisting in four-year colleges, Sam related:

It's just the constant exposure. Like, two weeks ago we went to Oakland University and went on a college tour and took about 30 students up there. I had three students formally graduated from UHS that go to OU come back to have a Q&A type of panel where they can talk, and you know, give advice to the, the uh, graduating seniors of stuff that they learned and their time at OU and things like that. So we try to do, we just try to constantly expose them to you know, what they're going to be facing when they get there. So, hopefully they can get an idea what it's like.

*Coordinated and Systemic College Support.*

*The on-campus program has become ever more engrained in the UHS school culture.*

*The college experience has been an integral part of creating the college-going culture at UHS and we believe it is one of the primary reasons behind our success of helping urban youth to achieve success at the college level. The opportunity that has been provided to*

*Detroit students through this partnership is a vital part of preparing them for post-secondary education. The exposure to on-campus life that the partnership provides is both unique and a central component of our students' decision to pursue higher education (A School Without Walls, 2009, p. 3).*

Creating a strong college culture in high school “necessitates a systemic approach to serving students,” preferably through “coordinated activities” through “partnerships with postsecondary institutions” (Corwin & Tierney, 2007, p. 6). These partnerships can be “invaluable” in providing “resources and expertise to help students transition from high school to college” (p. 6). The President, Provost, and Assistant Provost at MTU, along with Larry Garver and Gene Thomas, felt strongly that one way to provide this type of “coordinated and systemic support” was to offer senior students the opportunity take some college and high school classes at MTU. Larry Garver felt such an experience was “absolutely critical,” stating:

It's the exposure stuff. When you go off to college, you know, others tell me that a lot of kids, particularly first-generation kids, particularly minority and low-income kids, get to a college campus and it's such a foreign environment that their first instinct is to turn around and go back home.

The hope was that these first-generation, urban students would get extended exposure that allowed UHS students “to see other college students on the campus, see them walking around, see how they act in a class, see what it means to have some freedoms, more freedoms, more than you're used to in high school” (Kelly).

*Social and Emotional Growth of Students through College Exposure.*

*Let's imagine you're in a classroom full of kids where one dad's in prison, 40% of them don't know who their dad is, 40% more know their dad is somewhere, but he only*

*parachutes in once in a great while, and 15% maybe have a dual parent. It's nothing like what you know, what you grew up in (Gene Thomas, Former UHS Principal, regarding the background of UHS students).*

Making the transition from high school to a four-year college for low-SES, first-generation students is difficult in many ways. Gene Thomas' quote aptly illustrates how difficult it is for students who often have little emotional and family support, much less someone in their family who can talk to them about what to expect from a college experience. In the fall of 2007, the first group of UHS seniors began a unique on-campus experience at MTU to improve the odds of the students making it into college. The high school operated a 4x4 block schedule where students attended four classes each day (social studies, science, math, and English). For two days a week, every UHS senior attended a full day of classes at MTU. Most students were bussed the 15-minute ride to the MTU campus although some students were allowed to drive themselves. Students took a variety of courses on the MTU campus, which included some high school classes taught by UHS faculty who traveled to MTU and some dual enrollment courses taught by MTU faculty.

UHS students, teachers, staff (administrators and the College Success Advisor) as well as college faculty occupied six classrooms on the MTU campus in the College of Engineering building. The classrooms, located on the basement level, were regular college classrooms. Students spent the entire day on campus. They had an open lunch period. Many students brought their lunches to MTU and would sit and eat in their classrooms or in the common areas. Other students chose to leave campus for lunch. Jude talked about the importance of students having the freedom to explore on their own was important:

I think there's definitely value when students are just stepping foot on a college campus and when we were at MTU we were on a block schedule, students went there all day, every day. Um, so they actually got a little bit more of a college like experience because they had a lunch period and so we gave them free lunch, like they could go out and wander campus, they could go to eat wherever they wanted. I think anytime we're putting kids on a college campus, you know with a high percentage of kids who are first-generation college-goers, just stepping foot on a college campus could be daunting and so just having done that is probably beneficial and I think its helped.

Although some restrictions applied, the partners wanted students taking classes at MTU so that they could see themselves as future college students and feel as though college “wasn’t some foreign place that they never saw, that they never understood” (Amber, Assistant Provost MTU). Amber went on to discuss the exposure students received on campus:

When those students would come here and um, you know, they totally integrated themselves into the campus community. They went in the cafeteria, they used the library, and the librarians helped them with the research they had to do. So they really had a sense of what it was like.

Amber went on to tell a story that shows the comfort level that UHS students began to feel on MTU’s campus:

We had a dual enrollment program where we invited parents and students to come to get information and understanding about the dual enrollment program. Many of the UHS students and parents came to that program. So they were the only African Americans in the session. When I did my presentation, and then I asked for questions. The UHS

students raised their hands and asked questions. Which I found so interesting. The White students sat there and had the parents ask the questions. And I thought this is a great example of the UHS students being integrated on the campus that they had no problem raising their hand because they felt so comfortable that this was their place.

The MTU experience also helped UHS students understand the level of maturity they would need to transition to college successfully. Being able to test the boundaries of their own independence while under the watchful eye and guidance of the high school provided an avenue for students to grow socially and emotionally before going out on their own—a sort of testing ground. Gene talked about this concept:

We were getting complaints about the level of noise. We had issues. A kid would go smoke on campus. If it was a college kid, they wouldn't say shit, but it's a high school kid. It was this sort of very shaded, dark area for our kids. It was like we turned on a light switch to say, by the way, 'You know why you didn't do that, it's a problem and it's a problem of how you behave here'. It's a teaching opportunity. On a college campus, you can't do that. Well, we just said; you also don't get to do that here. It's not like being in my office; your parents can't come and bail you out. So we had all of these opportunities to speak to these things, that whether they heard it or not in the moment, they did hear it. So they learned about behavior that's expected of them. But not always because they came in knowing it, but when they crossed the line, whether it was not getting their work in or whether it was behavioral. They also learned that a college campus is very different. Gene went on to discuss his belief in the importance of students' learning from their mistakes prior to enrolling in college:

[learning about the college environment is] the whole point of the program...that they learn from their failures as much as their successes, what it meant to be a young adult in college. So it wasn't about that they should come ready to operate, that there was an operating manual that you had to read. You have to put some screws in here and...It's like an IKEA thing; this wasn't Nordstrom's. Ok? And you know we had to build this thing. It's like; it looks good on the side of the box. But then you pull out all this shit, and then you say 'Oh my God!'

In contrast to this positive view of the MTU experience for UHS students, Mary Lazio viewed the arrangement as a negative for MTU students and staff, one that would later play a role in the dissolution of the partnership (see Chapter 6).

They [UHS students] gained a lot by coming to Middle Tech in terms of understanding this is what college is exactly, you know, the next step for them is to go to college. But in terms of our on campus and lunches at college, they felt that the high school students did not behave as them, as college students. And they always felt uncomfortable because there were kids that were jumping around, and there was nothing we could do. So it's hard, they're not used to being on an open campus, and they took advantage of this because they are kids. You know, it's just the way it is.

Many of the administration and staff at MTU and UHS discussed the role of this MTU experience in reducing UHS student anxiety about going to college. Sam spoke at length about this point:

The partnership with the university, really helps the transition. It helps to get them exposed to what college is really like before they have to be there, so they can understand



that it doesn't have to be scary to go to a four-year. It's like, they say 'We've already been here for the last four years' (Sam).

Marlon paralleled Sam's thoughts, "For the seniors it helps them to become more acclimated and for some to overcome their fears and anxieties that they may have about going to college or being on a college campus".

*Academic Growth through Dual Enrollment Exposure.*

*I took an Intro. to Engineering class [at MTU], and it blew my mind because it showed me all the possibilities that were in engineering. It also helped me to learn how to act in a professional engineering environment as well (UHS African American female alumna and current University of Michigan student).*

While on the MTU campus, seniors were given the opportunity to enroll in college-level classes which were taught by MTU faculty. The second round of funding from Michigan First, Inc. included more funding to pay for the dual enrollment courses for students. Both MTU and Midvale Public Schools (particularly Amber Vale and Gene Thomas) felt that offering dual enrollment classes to students was crucial to expose them to the rigors of college-level work, as well as allowing them to accumulate college credits in high school. These dual enrollment courses were not conducted with other college students. These courses, taught by MTU faculty members, only were offered to dual enrolled students from UHS. Although Gene, Mary and Amber wanted their students to take some courses with MTU students the block scheduling made this approach impossible.

Over 70 percent of UHS seniors took and received credit for at least one dual enrollment course at MTU. The majority of courses offered were introductory level courses in Engineering

and Architecture. As a private institution MTU could be flexible in the minimum GPA that UHS students needed to enroll in dual enrollment courses<sup>15</sup>. In addition, Gene Thomas and Amber Vale were “actively involved with each other...to try to create a good, solid program of dual enrollment” (Gene). Amber allowed Gene to select the majority of faculty members for the dual enrollment program. Gene believed that the ability to select the faculty for this dual enrollment program was critical to the future success of the UHS students:

Yes, dual enrollment. That relationship was very, very important. Whenever we used an MTU person that I didn't hire or bring into the fold, we ran into difficulties. Not to say that they were right or wrong, or whatever. It was just a bigger cultural shift. Uh, whoever I pulled to the table, I could work with. So that relationship...it's not to say that the guy who did the business class wasn't workable. His line in the sand was a little bit closer to the student. I could get our people to kind of change that line. Like I said, it's about their being successful. It isn't about them needing an arbitrary line; it's about them being successful. It's about taking a group of kids that would never otherwise go to college and getting them in a position to do that. So it was really about leaving the fire where it should be, but standing at the base of the fire and helping them over. As opposed to getting yourself over the fire, or you're not. So relationships are critical, critical. At every level, the administrative level, as well as the instructional level as well as the relationships and how they're formed and dealt with on the campus.

---

15 Because MTU was private, and did not receive funds from the state, they had more flexibility in terms of operating practices internally—including relaxing university standards to enable more UHS students who wanted to take a dual enrollment class the ability to do so.

Gene felt that these courses acted as a bridge—a bridge that helped students to feel more confident about taking college level courses at a four-year institution.

### **What Else Matters in the Success of Union High School?**

Although the informal relationship and formal partnership between Union High School and four-year colleges were the most important factors that contributed to the high school's success, two additional factors also contributed including (1) being a school of choice and (2) small enrollment size.

#### **School of Choice—Self-Selecting Population**

As a school of choice, each student (with their family) made the conscious decision to enroll in UHS. Many students attended recruitment sessions with their parents. Others have friends or family members who have attended UHS. All enrollees first had to fill out an application to be accepted. Students and their families chose to attend UHS because it offered some key ingredient that their own public high school could not (e.g., college-prep curriculum, safer setting, smaller size, etc.). Although it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the parental and student perspectives on their decision to enroll in UHS, it is possible to gain some understanding by looking at the marketing strategy of UHS. Jude, UHS Administrator of Building Affairs, explains:

You know and we tell parents when we do our recruiting events that if you or your student is not serious about going to college, you know, if your student wants to be a mechanic, that's fine, we need mechanics, but this is probably not the place for you. Your students going to be miserable, they're going to make you miserable, and they're going to make us miserable. There are good options that are not us, but if you want to go to

college, you gotta take a look at us, we're a great option. And so you know there's just this general sense that every kid that walks in the door is going to college.

UHS has built a successful “feedback loop” for recruiting students. By marketing the school as a place where all students expect to go to college UHS has managed to attract students and families who share that goal. It is possible that this recruitment adds in some way to the overall success of college-going although its magnitude is unknown. In addition, by requiring parents to participate in the UHS application process UHS has improved the odds that their students will go to college. Recent research shows that parental engagement for low-SES and minority students is positively related to higher college aspirations and college-going rates (College Board, 2006; Muijis et al., 2009).

### **Small School Size**

For the purpose of this study, “small” is defined as a high school having less than 500 total students<sup>16</sup>. Smaller high schools tend to have lower drop-out rates (Pittman and Haughwout, 1987) and a higher percentage of graduates who enroll in college (Funk and Bailey, 1999). Students from smaller schools also do as well or better in college than those from larger schools (Gallagher, 1986). Research also shows that small schools are particularly effective in helping students from low-SES families and for minority students reduce the achievement gap (Johnson, 2002). UHS was envisioned as a small public school with a maximum enrollment of 500. Larry Garver, in particular, felt strongly about the benefits of having a small school. All of his work in establishing innovative high schools in the Detroit area are based in part on small size. Small

---

<sup>16</sup> Existing research on school size provides a variety of definitions of “small” high schools. However, many define a small school as having no more than 500 students from 9-12 grade (Lee & Smith, 1997), therefore, this definition will be used in this study.

size increases the likelihood that students receive individualized attention from administrators, teachers, and counselors. This belief is consistent with findings from the UHS case study.

Modest enrollment meant greater opportunity for innovation, such as the senior on-campus MTU experience, the ability to track all students through the college application process and into college, the creation of a tight-knit college culture, and the ability to intervene when students were not on track to graduate.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with a discussion of the main informal relationship that was important to the success of UHS—that of June and Rose, a close relationship that blossomed over the first decade of the high school. This relationship was crucial to provide information to students about college cost and financial aid. Next, the partnership between the Midvale School District and Middle Technological University to form UHS was crucial to UHS's success in two ways: by developing the structure of UHS in a manner that enabled a strong college-going culture and by collaborating with one another to offer a unique on-campus experience for seniors. UHS was able to implement this vision under the guidance of a charismatic principal that hired dynamic teachers and staff to cultivate a strong college-going culture. Finally, being a school of choice of modest size assisted school leaders in implementing their vision of a college-oriented culture.

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS—WHAT DID NOT WORK IN THE FORMAL PARTNERSHIP?**

In this chapter, I examine the less successful aspects of the formal partnership that created Union High School including the relationship between Midvale Public Schools and Middle Technological University.

### **The Problem of High Tuition for Low-SES Students**

*You've got 1.8 million dollars; you should've set some of that money apart for student scholarships. You know what I mean...and then maybe that pipeline would've grown over time. We should've thought about that, and nobody did (Amber Vale, MTU Assistant Provost).*

\$43,061: This amount is the total cost of tuition, fees, room and board at Middle Technological University for the 2013-2014 academic year. This is a hefty price tag no matter one's family income. When the median household income of families in Detroit (where most UHS students reside) is approximately \$31,000 (2009) it can seem prohibitively expensive. How could a student whose family might barely be able to keep up with their monthly bills afford this steep price tag? One possible response is that low-SES students might not pay the sticker price of the college (Avery & Kane, 2004; Grodsky & Jones, 2004; Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003), as their actual cost might be offset by financial aid and scholarships. The counterargument, though, is stronger. Low-SES students and their families are less likely to consider applying to a college with a high sticker price *regardless of the net cost* (Avery & Kane, 2004; Fairweather, 2006; Heller, 2012; Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003). They are also less likely to take out a loan to attend college (Heller, 2006; Huelsman & Cunningham, 2013). And the net cost at MTU is high

even for low-SES students even with financial aid and scholarships (NCES, 2015). The average net price for first-year low-SES (family income between \$0-30,000) freshmen at MTU is quite high—just over \$22,000 an academic year (see Table 6.1). Whether the effect is a function of perception or reality, the cost of attending MTU is a substantial barrier to college attendance for UHS graduates.

Table 6.1  
Average Net Price for Middle Technological University First-Year Freshmen by Income

<b>Income</b>	<b>2010-2011</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>
\$0-30,000	\$22,069	\$23,182	\$24,074
\$30,001-48,000	\$23,591	\$22,896	\$24,910
\$48,001-75,000	\$24,349	\$23,910	\$26,097
\$75,001-110,000	\$24,162	\$25,009	\$26,745
\$110,001 and more	\$26,766	\$25,164	\$26,539

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. College Navigator. Average Net Price.

When the partnership began, Gene Thomas recalled that UHS and MTU staff discussed “ad nauseam” the fact that UHS would be serving low-SES students. However, the typical student served by MTU came from middle-to-upper income families that could afford to pay the steep tuition price. Gene repeatedly told the MTU partners that “without providing some level of support in scholarships, no one would go”. However, the partnership went forward in its original design because

The foundation dollars were all ready to go, so that’s that. They could talk about it as an ideal, but realistically we knew better. I knew better. They knew better. I wasn’t going to say that’s not going to happen. Let’s give it a shot.

The partnership did not set aside grant monies for scholarship money to help support UHS graduates who enrolled at MTU. Even though MTU did “lower their normal admissions standards” and “take anybody that graduated from UHS with a 2.5 GPA or above” (Kelly), these concessions were not enough. Students needed more than gaining admission to MTU; they needed the money to pay for it. For the vast majority of UHS graduates MTU would need to provide a substantial tuition (and room and board) discount to make attendance realistic. MTU either could or would not make such a financial adjustment. Amber Vale saw the lack of awareness in the formal partnership of this fiscal reality as a fundamental mistake, one that should have been addressed early on:

We should've identified funds for scholarships so that we would have a pipeline. You know, if we believed in the partnership, we want those students here. We should've done things to make that happen. Sometimes you need to operationalize it, sooner rather than later.

Mary Lazio agreed with both Gene and Amber that it was shortsighted of the partnership not to provide a mechanism to help UHS students pay the cost of attending MTU. Mary also believed that the partnership should have earmarked some monies from the grant to help counter this problem.

So we do not have, have merit scholarships. We have some, you know, financial aid that is need-based, but at the end of the day, when you compare them, would you come to Middle Tech versus, I don't know, Johnson State (public four-year college) or something like that? There is a difference.



This lack of attention to the cost for students to attend MTU was a costly oversight especially since one of the main goals for MTU in the partnership was to enroll as many UHS graduates as possible. The results were clear: after seven years of the partnership only one UHS graduate enrolled at MTU. That student dropped out before graduating.

### **Assimilation Issues—A Clash of Cultures**

*The assimilation was a huge issue. We're talking about kids who are street smart; that could probably survive longer south of 8 Mile than anyone at Middle Tech. So there was this cultural kind of clash and this inability to see, or to appreciate the differences, and to work with them. Because when the shit hit the fan, like when some White professor was pissed, I had to sit and listen to this asshole and say, 'This kid is 17 and comes from a family that knows nothing about college'. But I couldn't even say that (Gene Thomas, Former UHS Principal).*

MTU students are primarily White and Asian, middle-to-upper income students who hail from the suburbs of Detroit. These students attended strong public, private and parochial high schools where most of their peers are attending selective colleges. Students who attend MTU choose to do so because of the strong programs in Architecture and Engineering. In contrast, UHS students are primarily low-income, first-generation, African Americans who hail from the city of Detroit. Most Detroit high schoolers are not on a path to graduate from high school, much less attend college. This is a tale of two very different groups of students brought together to share a campus with the hope that they will learn from one another and learn about one another. Even though the founders of the partnership knew that they would be bringing together two very different student populations, they did not spend enough time considering ways to ease this

transition. Gene Thomas acknowledged this flaw in the planning process and how the partnership should have been more thoughtful about planning for this challenge:

They were struggling with the fact, how to, how to assimilate us. So assimilation was probably the greatest factor. We didn't assimilate well. And they really didn't strategically plan. I guess the best way, **we** didn't strategically plan for assimilation. We just figured it would just kind of take place organically, and that was really a mistake, especially in higher ed. Higher ed is, I don't think arrogance is the word, it's just a tight-ass place. And we're bringing a bunch of kids from the city, there's not a tight muscle in our body.

Both Amber and Mary at MTU concur with Gene's perspective of the problem of assimilation. They saw the problem from a somewhat different perspective based on the perceived distinct developmental stages of the two groups. They characterized these developmental differences as follows: one group of teenagers who did not understand the appropriate way to behave on a college campus and another group (whom they considered more like young adults than teenagers) who had no tolerance for these less mature teenagers. Amber describes this conflict in greater depth:

I think it's difficult to integrate high school students with college students. Because college students are not in high school anymore, they're in college. So they don't want to be around high school students, right? So I, what I mean by that, not the people who were tutoring or mentoring, but the people who were going to college were like, 'Who are these kids? They act like high school students.' Well, they are high school students, duh! They are louder in the hallway, they run they don't walk, you know what I mean.

Mary also discussed the problem of assimilating the perceived less mature UHS students into the culture of MTU:

...in terms of our on campus and lunches at college, they felt that the high school students did not behave as them, as college students. And they always felt uncomfortable because these were kids that were jumping around, and there was nothing we could do. The professors, the teachers at the high school would try to control them as much as possible, but it's just the hormones, it's just their age, and so that is the only thing that I think I didn't see we were not able to have a very good solution.

Gene also talked about the behavior of UHS students on the MTU campus as putting a strain on Amber's role as mediator between the UHS administration and the MTU faculty and administration. Gene recalls one particularly troubling incident where one of the Deans at MTU was not pleased with the conduct of the UHS students, which further strained the relationship:

One of the Deans made the biggest stink. I'm not saying that in his world he didn't have a point, you know. It felt that my biggest problem with him was that when he was man-to-man, he was one of those marine guys. When he was man-to-man, he was very conciliatory. But, then she [Amber] would report to me, and then again, she may have been frustrated, so I may have gotten a more toxified version because of her frustration with the fact that we are leaning on her, and she's saying I can't control that. You know. So there's this piece of the, we couldn't be on campus every minute, we had the college transition specialist and the teachers, but there were things probably that I could have mitigated but I couldn't be on campus all the time, both places. Really it was up to me to fix most of it. So there were some structural flaws and cultural issues, but structural issues. What we could have done better...

The cultural clash between these two groups and the lack of knowing how to assimilate students more fully into the campus culture continued throughout the duration of the partnership. Gene relates:

My daughter is an engineer, and they're like really quiet, serious students. So we bring these kids from Detroit and one of the biggest factors was the noise level for the engineering students and teachers. But, we had a master schedule there that was our schedule...I mean the college, I don't care how big it is, if you're not in your frat house, then you're ships passing in the night at most colleges. We were the only group that all of our kids were in the hallway at once. Even if they all just said, 'Hi' to one another in the hall, the noise was pretty crazy. So we took passing time right out, we just hustled them to their next class. We were getting complaints about the level of noise, and the students and Middle Tech is White kids and Indian and Chinese kids. They're serious. Our kids, they're not serious, they were, I guess like I said, their parents could maybe spell college.

Staff from both MTU and UHS tried to remedy this cultural conflict. All sides agreed that they had tried. For example, Mary noted, "the teachers tried very, very hard. We tried very, very hard. But the development of the students was not at the point where they blended completely with college students". In essence, no one knew how to bridge the divide to help better assimilate the UHS students into the MTU campus culture.

Housing the UHS students, staff, and faculty in the basement of the Engineering building on MTU's campus also did not help assimilation. Although UHS students did have time at lunch and sometimes during the day to explore the MTU campus, most of their time was spent in this one location. Both MTU and UHS staff agreed that they would have changed the dual enrollment setting had the partnership continued. Mary posited "it would've behooved us, I think they

should've been on campus, I still believe that. But maybe in a building that was designated for them”.

After several years dealing with problems related to assimilation, the partnership “just started to breakdown, this looking for things that were wrong and there was never ‘our’ version” (Gene).

### **Sustainability—What Happens When the Well Runs Dry?**

*Truly, when the money ran out is when MTU started to have less patience, less everything*  
*(Gene Thomas, Former UHS Principal).*

As a public school, UHS received state aid based on each student’s resident district, which in 2007 was approximately \$7,500 per year, per student. This money only covered “general operating expenses, including salaries, supplies, and building overhead costs” (Midvale’s Union High..., p.2). It did not pay for additional components of the partnership that both MTU and UHS believed were crucial. The initial additional funds came from the original proposal to Michigan First, Inc., which contributed \$1.12 million to develop and implement the partnership between UHS and MTU. The partnership followed up with an additional proposal to “further enhance educational experiences and opportunities for Midvale’s Union High School students beyond the traditional public school offerings” (Midvale Schools’ Union High School Realizing the Vision, 2007, p. 3). For example, the second proposal asked for funds to create the College Success Advisor position and to pay for bussing to and from the two campuses. In addition to funding from the state and from Michigan First, Inc., MTU also contributed over \$70,000 toward the partnership to pay for things such as dual enrollment and curriculum development (Midvale’s Union High..., p. 2). After two additional rounds of funding, the last of which was for \$350,000, Michigan First, Inc. no longer could, or wished to, provide additional

funds for the partnership. In Gene's words, "Larry decided that he wasn't going to mess with MTU". This end to the external funding represented a major turning point and essentially ended the partnership between UHS and MTU.

Individuals interviewed at MTU and UHS all agreed that the end of external funding represented the time when the partnership began to break down completely. Amber took responsibility for the fact that MTU wasn't prepared to continue to fund the partnership:

The grant money running out was a huge issue. How do we pay for this thing? Because it does cost. I mean all the real stuff that, when I say assimilation, I mean both our parts. We did not do what was right. We take what we learn, and we fix this together. That's where we screwed up, in all fairness.

The lack of grant money was an issue for MTU because the bulk of the financial burden to sustain the partnership was now squarely on their shoulders. And with the institution of a new president who was closely watching the revenue of the institution, Amber shared:

And then what happens, when the money runs out, and you're starting to use your operational funds, which I will tell you was close to \$300,000. And then you go whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. And you get a new president who goes, 'What's the return on investment here?' He goes, 'Ah, I don't think so!'.

The reluctance of MTU to continue the partnership was exacerbated by the lack of UHS students enrolling in the university. Amber stated that MTU expected a revenue stream resulting from the enrollment of UHS graduates. This goal never materialized. Amber took responsibility for this lack of enrollment, stating:

Middle Tech was dumb. It shouldn't have been all pie in the sky. You made the assumption that they were eventually going to come, and that didn't happen. So you should've said up front, if we're going to do this, we want to have, we want to hedge our bets with so many students coming here and they never did. So when the funds dried up, you can't keep doing things for free just because you want to be nice. It just doesn't work. You have other priorities at your institution that you need to go to. And that's as honest as I can be.

Altruism on the part of the college was also brought up by Gene and Larry. Larry posited that the lack of funding likely caused MTU to reconsider the partnership; UHS was now seen as a “non-paying customer”. Gene talked at length about four-year colleges as being “big business” and that they were more and more focused on “revenue streams.” He ended by stating that today “these places have to make money. They can't just be altruistic. When altruism isn't enough, you have to pay your bills”. Gene went on to take responsibility of his own for the dissolution of the partnership, just as Amber had, talking about the lack of contributions that they had made to the partnership:

Maybe we should've been paying because we would have honored more. Like when your kids, when the bills come in their own name, they change. They don't leave their rooms a mess. Maybe there should've been cleaner lines. Maybe the answer wasn't as much assimilation and understanding, but as much as having cleaner lines. In all fairness, I would have to say that that could be just as likely as a possibility too.

There may not be an answer to who is to “blame” for the partnership's dissolution. However, it is telling that as soon as Michigan First, Inc. no longer helped subsidize the partnership, the partnership failed within a short period of time.

## **Institutional Leadership Buy-In**

*Walter Bailey, at the beginning of the partnership, was Provost and then VP, and then became the President. This was a baby of his. He wanted to have some impact in the city (Gene).*

Buy-in from the leaders of both UHS and MTU was needed to sustain the partnership. Buy in from the leadership of UHS was evident from the beginning: Gene Thomas believed in the mission and vision of the school and worked to make the partnership successful. In the beginning the leadership at MTU was also deeply committed to the partnership. Dr. Walter Bailey, the President of MTU at the time of the founding of the partnership, was integral to making the partnership work. Amber talked about Dr. Bailey's role:

So originally, not the current president, the president prior to Dr. Shava, his name was Dr. Bailey. He was our provost and then he was promoted into being the President, so he really, he had, one of his goals always was to, um, to devote faithful students in the fields of STEM, areas of technology and areas of engineering. So he thought it would be important for a university like Middle Tech to be involved with a development of the curriculum of a high school.

Dr. Bailey brought this vision to his staff to encourage them to find ways to collaborate with a high school in the area—particularly one that would serve a diverse group of students. Out of this vision came the creation of the first high school (prior to UHS) located on the campus of MTU and, just like UHS, was supported by Michigan First, Inc. However, this partnership dissolved after major clashes between high school and college administrators. Even after this failure, to the surprise of many, including Larry Garver, Amber noted that Dr. Bailey “still had



the vision” to partner with a high school. Larry recalled that it was MTU, upon the urging of Dr. Bailey, which spearheaded the push to form the partnership with Midvale and not “the other way around”. However, Dr. Bailey would leave the presidency in 2012, and MTU would select a new president, Dr. Shava. This shift in institutional leadership brought a shift in institutional priorities as well—and a close examination of ways to cut costs while increasing revenue. When Dr. Shava realized that MTU was now footing a \$300,000 bill for the partnership without an offsetting revenue stream generated by enrollments from UHS, he decided, as Amber recalled, that MTU “needed to go in a different direction”.

Mary Lazio talked about one of the most important criteria for a successful partnership between a high school and college is “that the people that are on the top really need to believe in the vision of the school”. With the change of the MTU president, the partnership with UHS no longer was a priority for MTU. When combined with the lack of additional external funding and the inability of MTU to attract UHS graduates the partnership dissolved.

## **CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to provide an in-depth examination of one predominantly African American, low-SES, public high school that is sending higher than expected numbers of students on to four-year institutions and (b) to examine the effects of the institutional and personal relationships between this high school and a local four-year institution on this successful college-going rate.

The research questions in this study meant to shed light on understanding the unusual success of Union High School. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What kinds of formal and informal partnerships and relationships exist between the case study high school and four-year institutions?
2. From both the college and high school perspectives, which formal and informal partnerships and relationships are most important and why?
3. What additional factors play a role in the case study high school's higher than expected four-year college-going and college persistence rates?

This study contributes to the limited qualitative research on high school-university relationships. The study provides a detailed description of the components of the informal relationship and formal partnership that helped to play a role in the success of one low-SES high school. An exploration of the barriers and challenges of the partnership were also presented.

What follows is a discussion of the conclusions of this study and how researchers, policymakers and practitioners can use the findings to support current and future high school-university relationships.

### **What Contributed to the Success of Union High School?**

Two main factors were found to be significant in contributing to the success of UHS. The first was an informal relationship between a counselor at the high school and a financial aid administrator at a nearby four-year university. The second, and most important, was the formal partnership between the Midvale School District and Middle Technological University that created Union High School. A brief discussion of the importance of the findings from these two areas is explored.

### **Strong Informal Relationship—June and Rose**

The informal relationship between June (UHS counselor) and Rose (JSU financial aid administrator) provided the UHS counseling staff, students, and families with timely and accurate information regarding college costs, financial aid, and scholarships. Existing literature shows that having this information is crucial for low-income and minority students and increases the likelihood of college attendance (Luna De La Rosa, 2007; McLafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002; Perna, 2006). These findings support the conclusions of existing literature that access to a knowledgeable source of information regarding college cost and financial aid is important in increasing college-going. Moreover, although the individuals in this study were found to be important in terms of their commitment to helping underrepresented students enroll and succeed in college, the responsibilities of their specific jobs also contributed to the success of UHS students.

Surprisingly, there did not seem to be any other *significant* informal relationships between the counseling staff and individuals at four-year colleges, which might play a role in the success of UHS. The lack of significant informal relationships may be in part a result of the high turnover rate among admission counselors. Research on informal relationships found that regular contact between admissions counselors and high school counselors increased the likelihood that

students were receiving accurate information about college costs, applications procedures, and other information in order to improve their chances of college attendance (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). In contrast, the findings in this study do not support the conclusion that these relationships increase college-going. Another finding also contradicts current research on informal relationships between high school counselors and admissions personnel. June believed that her role was not to “advocate” for her students after their applications were submitted. Rather, that once applications were submitted it was up to the admissions counselors to deem whether a student was admissible. This finding counters recent research (NPEC, 2007) that counselors at low-income high schools often communicate with admissions counselors regarding their students in an effort to help “relax admissions standards” or to explain a student “whose paper credentials do not reflect their potential and ability to succeed”. June reinforced the commitment to standards and college preparation as the best way to improve the odds of going to college for UHS students.

All three counseling staff tried to establish more informal relationships with four-year colleges; however, none felt that the lack of these relationships negatively impacted students’ college outcomes. Rather, each counselor had taken it upon herself/himself to gain knowledge (through college visits, talking with alumni, reading brochures and perusing college websites) about the college search and application process. This finding is significant because it supports recent research (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Johnson & Rochkind, 2012) that calls for schools to allow counselors to spend more time on activities related to college counseling.

### **Formal Partnership between Union High School and Middle Technological University**

The findings of this study emphasize the important role of having a formal partnership in place between a high school and college. Particularly important is the requirement of all high

school students to participate in a college experience. Not only is the formal partnership the easiest way for students to gain crucial exposure to college but also increases the odds that more low-SES, minority as a collective would go to college.

The formal partnership between Midvale Public School District's Union High School and Middle Technological University contributed to the success of UHS directly in two ways: (1) by developing the structure of UHS in a manner that enabled a strong college-going culture and (2) by collaborating with one another to offer a unique on-campus experience for seniors. Although the partnership helped to create these opportunities, it was up to the high school administration and staff to create this college-going culture. What follows is an exploration of the ways in which the partnership and individuals at the high school helped to contribute to the success of UHS.

### **Formation of a Strong College-Going Culture.**

Corwin and Tierney's (2007) five elements of a strong college-going culture were utilized to analyze the successful components of the partnership between UHS and MTU. These five elements are:

1. Academic momentum
2. An understanding of how college plans develop
3. A clear mission statement
4. Comprehensive college services
5. Coordinated and systemic college support (p. 3).

A discussion of each element and the conclusions drawn from the findings follows.

#### ***Academic Momentum.***

The partnership was integral in crafting a curriculum that provided *all* students, not just the top students, with rigorous, college-preparatory courses that were taught by engaged and dynamic teachers. Adelman (2006) posited that one of the predictors of college success for a student is the quality of the student's high school curriculum. While the curriculum shifted quickly from one that was more project-based and experiential, to a more traditionally structured college-prep program, the requirements were in excess of the district and state mandated requirements. Although UHS only offers Advanced Placement courses in English and Mathematics, the partnership provided the opportunity for students to take dual enrollment courses. Over 70 percent of UHS students participated in this program. Although research shows that more White, Asian, and middle-to-higher income students participate in dual enrollment (Museus, Lutovsky & Colbeck, 2007; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong & Bailey 2008); UHS students broke this mold as they are predominantly low-income and African American. This finding is consistent with existing literature on the importance for underrepresented groups to take dual enrollment courses to prepare them for college (Karp et al., 2008). These findings also support the conclusions of existing literature that a strong college-preparatory curriculum and dual enrollment opportunities can increase the likelihood of college-going.

### ***Understanding of How College Plans Develop.***

In the planning phase of the high school, both MTU and UHS staff understood the importance of creating a culture where all students were expected to go to college. This culture developed in large part from the charismatic leadership of UHS principal Gene Thomas and the selection of a young, dynamic teaching staff. The high school staff encouraged student college aspirations and provided the necessary information to ensure that they understood the steps needed to get there. They accomplished this outcome in three ways: creating buy-in from all staff

that college is an expectation, creating a school environment that encouraged college-going, and instituting college preparatory courses required of all students. The partnership played a significant role in hiring administrators and staff that created a strong college-going culture—one in which students were expected to go a four-year college. Even more important was the buy-in from everyone at the school—from the principal, to the teachers, to the students—that college was an expectation. Purposeful college branding of the school also helped to create this expectation. This branding came in the form of subtle and not-so-subtle messaging—from the school dress code, to teachers showcasing their college diplomas, to the college center. Finally, the partnership created College Preparation Courses, which were found important in providing students with current information about the college search and application process as well as preparation for standardized testing. As existing literature has found, low-SES and first-generation students often lack familial resources that can provide them with information regarding the college process (McDonough 1997; 2005). These courses gave students dedicated time each day to learn more about the college process, prepare for standardized testing, and ask questions about college. This study supports previous findings related to the importance of creating an expectation that low-SES and first-generation students will attend college. Moreover, structured support is necessary to provide underrepresented students with current information regarding the college process to increase the likelihood of college enrollment and college success.

### ***Clear Mission and Vision Statement.***

Although the original UHS mission statement did not clearly state that attending a four-year college was an expectation, after revision, the partners ensured that there was clear language about preparation for college success although the formal wording never specified four-year

college-as the destination. UHS was also found to have clearly communicated their mission to all stakeholders—from talking about it at recruitment events, to putting the mission on marketing materials, to hanging the mission statement up in the college center. This finding supports research by Corwin and Tierney (2007) that a clear mission statement and ability to communicate it to stakeholders helps to reinforce a college-going culture. In addition, a high school may not need to have language that talks about four-year college-going. Simply including language talking about “college success” may contribute to higher rates of four-year college-going. Finally, one particularly interesting finding was the importance that the partnership placed on crafting a thoughtful vision statement. The vision included discussing the school’s “9-16 vision” and included their definition of what “success” means—“we measure success by the percentage of students we graduate from college” (UHS Course Catalog, 2014-2015, p.1). Existing research only focuses on crafting a clear mission statement to encourage college-going. This finding supports school staff spending time on crafting and dissemination a clear vision statement geared to the expectation of college-going and college success.

### ***Comprehensive College Services.***

Providing comprehensive college services to students at UHS was one of the main priorities of the partnership. The partnership provided these services through the inclusion of two innovative counseling positions—the College Transition Specialist and the College Success Advisor—and campus visits to four-year colleges. The two unique counseling positions were created to support students through the college process and to help them once they enroll in college. Every interviewee for this study talked at length about the importance of having dedicated staff members such as the two counseling positions. This finding contradicts some previous research, such as Hossler and Stage (1992) and Cabrera and LaNasa (2000) who posit



that school counselors have little influence on the college plans of students. This study adds credence to more recent research (McDonough, 1997; 2002; 2005; Perna et al., 2008) that shows that school counselors play an important role in the college plans of students particularly for underrepresented students. This finding also is consistent with recent research (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Johnson & Rochkind, 2012) that calls for increasing the amount of time counselors spend on college counseling and increasing the number of counselors at public high schools. Moreover, the ability of individuals in the partnership (Gene Thomas and Amber Vale) to think creatively about the nature of the counselors' roles allowed them to create the position of College Success Advisor and to continue to find the funding for the position. The College Success Advisor was found crucial to helping students with the college application process, but more importantly, in helping to ensure their persistence once in college.

Finally, the insistence on the part of June and Marlon to include college visits to four-year colleges was important in providing students with exposure to colleges outside of the partner institution. This finding also supports the new vein of research, started by Hill (2008), which posits that college visits are important to give low-SES and first-generation students, who otherwise might not visit college campuses, the opportunity to do so. These visits allowed students to meet with admissions counselors to get information about admissions and financial aid and to get a feel for a campus and what it might be like to be a college student.

### ***Coordinated and Systemic Support.***

The formal partnership was critical in providing senior students with an on-campus experience that allowed them to experience first-hand what it meant to be a college student emotionally and academically. In keeping with the majority of literature on the importance of dual enrollment for low-SES and first-generation high school students (Bailey & Karp, 2003a;

Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2008), this study also found that exposure to the rigor and expectations of college classes while in high school can help students feel more confident about their abilities to succeed in a college classroom. Moreover, dual enrollment courses allow students to gain college credit and lessen the cost of attending college. An original finding of this study concerns the importance of the on-campus experience to students' emotional and social growth. Being on campus at MTU daily allowed UHS students to experiment with and develop a sense of independence. This experimentation often came in the form of pushing boundaries of the freedoms they were granted—such as smoking on campus or acting inappropriately between classes. Although the MTU staff saw this experimentation as a negative, UHS staff saw this behavior as a “teaching opportunity” to help students “learn from their failures as much as their successes” (Gene). This finding suggests that the ability for students to push boundaries, to learn earlier about the social and emotional independence required of college, is important for students whose exposure to college is limited.

### **Additional Factors.**

Two additional factors also played a more minor role in the success of UHS—the designation as a school of choice and its moderate size. First, the findings show that having a self-selected student population of UHS where students and families seek a better educational outcome positively affected the likelihood of going to college *even though UHS accepted virtually every student who applied*. The branding and recruitment practices, which made clear that all students attending UHS were expected to attend college, led to a self-selection of students with a proclivity toward college-going. Finally, the moderate size of UHS played a role in its success, allowing administrators, teachers and counselors to more easily form relationships with students and track their progression in college. Although both of these factors played a role in the

success of UHS, the informal relationship and formal partnership were more important in the success of UHS.

### **Implications for Theory**

Perna's (2006) model of student college choice provided a framework for this study to understand the multiple and intersecting factors potentially affecting college-going behavior of students. Perna asserts that college choice is only a small part of individual students' enrollment decisions. She posits that college-going behavior is embedded in micro-, macro-, and meso-level structural contexts. Perna recognizes the importance of the high school and higher education institutions in students' college choices and how social, economic, and policy factors play a role in college-going. Perna asserts that her model must continue to be tested and refined based on differences across groups and within various contexts. The findings of this study reinforce Perna's assumptions regarding the important influences of the high school context, the higher education context and the policy context on students' college behavior and outcomes. In addition, this study demonstrates the utility of Perna's model for low-SES, minority, and first-generation students. Perna's model, however, does not fully recognize that relationships and partnerships between layers (particularly layers 2 and 3) can play a major role in student college choice behavior, especially as it pertains to underrepresented students. For example, including purposeful language that clearly labels the interplay between layers would be useful to emphasize the importance of these relationships.

### **Implications for Policy**

The accountability movement in educational policy has meant greater attention at the state and national levels to student performance in high school and outcomes after high school—from debates about the type of high schools that best help prepare students for college (private,

public, charter or school of choice) to where to invest limited resources to promote student success. This study provides several important implications for state and national policymakers to help create conditions that encourage partnerships between low-SES high schools and four-year colleges. What follows is a series of recommendations for state and national policy makers to help achieve the goal of increasing college-going and success rates of underrepresented students.

1. **Make hiring college transition and college success counseling positions a priority in public high schools.** Recent research has called for the increase of counseling staff at public high schools to improve college-going for low-SES and minority students. This study shows that such a generic recommendation is not sufficient. The type of counselor makes a substantial difference. Public schools would benefit from resources to hire additional counseling staff whose sole job is helping students through the college search and application process—similar to the College Transition Specialist at UHS. This step would mirror what many successful private high schools that send the majority of their students to four-year colleges already have in place—a dedicated college counselor to guide students through the search and application process. In addition, hiring a counselor to work with students after they have graduated to help them transition into college life and succeed once there (similar to the College Success Advisor at UHS) is critical if college success is the ultimate goal.
2. **Provide incentives to encourage more high school-college partnerships.** Currently, in the state of Michigan, there are no state or national incentives that encourage partnerships between high schools and higher education institutions. Incentivizing partnerships between high schools and colleges could lead to better alignment between the two and as

one consequence potentially increase the college enrollment and success of underrepresented students.

3. **College Prep Courses should be required of all public schools.** Most public schools offer a time during the school day dedicated to non-academic advising or “homeroom.” A period considered by most students and teachers as a waste of instructional time. Instead of homeroom, states could require students to take college preparatory courses as part of their regular curriculum. This course would provide students with valuable information about the college search and application process; college costs and financial aid; and preparation for standardized testing. Such a class would especially benefit low-SES and minority students by increasing student knowledge information gap about college going.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study focused on a novel partnership between a public school district and a private higher education institution. This partnership produced a high school that serves a small population of low-SES, minority and first-generation students primarily from inner-city Detroit. Union High School students are not just attending college; they are attending four-year colleges at higher than expected rates and persisting once there. It is a success story that both secondary school and higher education practitioners can examine to gain insights into what might work in creating their own partnerships. The following is a series of seven key recommendations that practitioners can use to help guide them.

1. **Leadership matters.** It is crucial to have a principal/administrator at the high school level who is an adept leader and communicator, whose commitment to every student going to college is strong, and who knows how to motivate others to believe in that vision about college going. The principal must also be adept at resource management and

instructional strategies, as well as be able to cultivate an environment that rewards innovation by the teaching and administrative staff. At the college level, buy-in by leaders at all levels is crucial—from the president to the faculty to the students. The partnership must be an institutional priority. In addition, this institutional commitment must transcend individual leaders. Turnover of college administrators is inevitable (especially at senior levels), which requires some mechanism for ensuring institutional commitment to the partnership irrespective of the individuals involved.

2. **Require all high school students to participate in a college experience as part of the formal partnership.**

Requiring all students to participate in a college experience is beneficial, as it not only provides students who may not otherwise have exposure to college, the opportunity to do so, but also removes the possible stigma of participation. Moreover, requiring all low-SES and minority students to participate in a college experience can increase the odds, that as a collective, these students would go to college.

3. **Staff roles and responsibilities must be clearly aligned with the mission and vision of the partnership as it relates to increasing college-going.**

Teachers and counselors at the high school level must be given specific guidelines related to their roles and responsibilities which directly relate to the messaging and vision of the partnership. While hiring of a high school principal is crucial, staff must also believe in the mission and vision of the school as it relates to college-going. Staff roles and responsibilities must also be aligned with accomplishing the goal of increasing college-going. For example, high school counselors must provide accurate and current information to students and families regarding the cost of college, financial aid, and scholarships through group and individual sessions.

**4. Resource sustainability of the partnership must be addressed early and often.**

Stakeholders on both the high school and the college side must continuously revisit how they can maintain and sustain the partnership—particularly continuation of the financial support of the partnership. Working together to utilize the expertise of both institutions to apply for additional funds from a variety of sources well before initial funding runs out is a necessity to ensure sustainability.

**5. Incorporate activities, programs and events that encourage assimilation among all stakeholders.**

Both partner institutions must carefully plan and execute activities, programs, and events aimed at helping both high school students and staff as well as college students and faculty more easily assimilate into the campus culture. Relevant activities may include orientation-like activities before the students officially step foot on campus or setting up structured mentoring or tutoring programs that better connect the college and high school students. In addition, including opportunities for professional development or co-teaching could help bring together faculty and administrators at both institutions.

**6. Continuous college exposure is critical.**

Partnerships should include multiple opportunities for students to experience a college campus first-hand. These experiences could include full academic year on-campus experiences, dual enrollment courses, or college visits to four-year institutions. This exposure should be coordinated and planned by knowledgeable staff at both the high school and college. Careful attention should be paid to the hiring of appropriate administrative and instructional staff who understand the developmental needs of high school students (particularly in the hiring of college faculty who teach dual enrollment courses to high schools students).

- 7. Branding and messaging are key.** Reinforcing the message that college is an expectation for all high school students is crucial. The physical environment of the high school should reflect this expectation including incorporating subtle (and not-so-subtle) messages related to college-going (e.g. decorations, dress code, college diplomas of all staff displayed prominently, mission statement posted, etc.). Marketing and recruitment materials should also incorporate the college-going expectation of all students including the partnership between the high school and college.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this study demonstrated the promise of a collaboration between secondary schools and higher education institutions on the college-going rates of underrepresented students, more research is needed to examine the validity of these findings in other settings. What follows is a series of recommendations for future research:

- 1) Explore the impact of P-20 statewide councils and whether or not these have an impact on high school and college partnerships.** More research must be conducted to ascertain what the role of these statewide councils are, how they operate, how they are funded, and whether they are successful in increasing successful collaborations between high schools and colleges.
- 2) More qualitative case studies of high school-college partnerships are necessary.** Few in-depth qualitative studies examine partnerships between high schools and colleges. This study is limited to one high school and one partnership. Although I am confident in the authenticity of the research findings, I understand that more research must be undertaken to examine other types of partnerships in varied settings of different populations. For



example, future research might focus on collaborations between charter schools and colleges or relationships between schools and colleges that serve rural populations.

- 3) **Examine the role of funding in high school and university partnerships.** More **studies** are needed to determine how and why institutions and outside organizations (e.g. non-profits, corporations, etc.) choose to fund partnerships between high schools and colleges. These studies might explore the ways in which these “outside entities” play a role in the operation, maintenance and decision-making of the partnership, and whether or not this model of partnership may or may not be effective in increasing college-going and success for high school students.
- 4) **Examine informal relationships between high schools and four-year colleges.** This study found a limited effect of informal relationships in the success of the high school. These results are quite possibly a function of situations limited to UHS and its partner institution. Additional research is needed to investigate the effects of informal partnerships in a wider variety of settings.
- 5) **Continue to Test Perna’s (2006) conceptual model.** Perna has encouraged researchers validate her model with different student populations in a variety settings. More research along the lines of this study are needed to validate the Perna model.
- 6) **Undertake longitudinal studies that measure college success.** This study concentrated on the high college enrollment rates of an underrepresented high school. However, the goal for most students is not limited to enrolling in college, the ultimate goal is college graduation. Future studies must tackle the subject of whether, and how, partnerships between high schools and colleges play a role in the college success of students.

### **Final Thoughts**

In conclusion, the vision of Union High School was lofty—to prepare an ethnically, racially, and socio-economically diverse group of students for high-level jobs in the automotive industry. Although the desired outcome for students evolved, what did not change was the success of UHS graduates. Students primarily from inner-city Detroit who year after year beat the odds. Most graduates applied to, enrolled in, and have persisted in 4 year colleges. Although navigating this partnership was not always easy, the story of UHS and the partnership that created and maintained the high school, provides a glimpse of the potential of these partnerships for schools in Detroit and beyond.

## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Phone Survey Protocol for High School Counselors**

#### **Researcher:**

Hello, my name is Leah Beasley, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Michigan State University. I am currently working on my dissertation which focuses on examining the ways in which 4-year colleges and universities have developed successful relationships with low-income Michigan public high schools through various partnerships, programs, and activities that have resulted in higher than expected college going rates to 4-year institutions. I've identified your high school as a high-performing high school based on your previous college going rates to 4-year institutions. I am hoping to take a few minutes of your time to conduct a brief phone survey with you to see if you would be willing to participate in a more thorough case study of your high school.

Your name, the name of your school, the name of your district, and your responses to the questions in this survey will be kept strictly confidential. If you should wish not to answer any question, you may elect to do so, but I hope that you will be able to answer all of them.

Participant Name:

Participant School:

Participant Position:

#### **Questions:**

1. Can you tell me about your application process for entry into UHS? How many students apply and how many are admitted? Where are students typically coming from and how do they hear about UHS?
2. Do you collect information regarding the college enrollment rates of your graduating seniors?
  - a. If so, do you conduct a survey at the end of senior year for more detailed information regarding senior students' after high school plans?
  - b. Does this include information regarding the type of institution the student attends (2-year or 4-year college) and what specific institution they plan to attend?
3. Do you currently have any formal programs, special arrangements, activities, or relationships with 4-year institutions that are targeted at increasing college enrollment?
  - a. If so, can you briefly describe these?
4. Do you have informal relationships with individuals or programs at 4-year institutions that help to promote college enrollment (e.g. contacts at a college, alumni/faculty at institution)?
  - a. If so, can you briefly describe these?
5. Would you be willing to participate in a case study of the relationships between your high school and 4-year institutions in which your students primarily attend?

## APPENDIX B

### Memo to Superintendent of Midvale Public Schools

#### Memo

**To:** [Bill Williams]  
Leah Beasley-Wojick, MA (PhD Candidate in Higher Education at Michigan State University)  
**From:** State University)  
**Date:** January 13, 2013  
**Re:** Conducting Dissertation Research at [Union High School]

---

This memo is in response to a request by [Jude Bareman], Administrator of Building Affairs at [Union High School], to provide detailed information regarding my dissertation research that I hope to conduct at [Union High School]. I have provided a brief sketch of my background and qualifications, and a synopsis of my research below including the focus of my study, research questions, data collection methods, benefits of the research for [Union High School]/district, as well as a letter of support from my dissertation chair, Dr. James Fairweather. If you should have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 734-717-2135. I am excited about the possibility to partner with [Union High School] to help showcase the positive impact that the school has on the exceptional college going rate of the students.

#### Educational Background/Qualifications

I am currently a Dean's Scholar and Ph.D. candidate in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education at Michigan State University. I have completed all required coursework and comprehensive exams for my program and successfully defended my dissertation proposal.

I received a M.A. in Higher Education from the University of Michigan and a B.A. in Sociology from Tufts University. I also have extensive experience in secondary and post-secondary education—from my work in admissions at both Harvard University and the University of Michigan, to my work as Assistant Dean of College Counseling at Cranbrook Kingswood Upper School. In addition, I have a keen interest in college access issues as they relate to low-income and minority students stemming from my background growing up in a small, rural, low-SES town in southern West Virginia.

#### Focus of the Study

The focus of the study is to examine the ways in which higher education institutions have developed successful relationships with low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) high schools through various partnerships, programs and activities that have resulted in higher than expected

college going rates to 4-year institutions. It is my hope that conducting a case study will enable me to provide other colleges and high schools with useful information regarding strategies to increase enrollment of students from low-SES high schools.

### **Research Questions**

In an effort to understand and describe the relationships and outreach efforts on the part of higher education institutions at [Union High School], it is crucial that the questions examined in the study reflect these relationships/partnerships from both the college and high school perspectives. This will allow for a complete understanding of these successful relationships. Thus, I will examine the following research questions:

1. What kinds of relationships, activities, programs and outreach efforts do higher education institutions have in place at the low-SES high school that are sending higher than average students on to 4-year institutions?
2. From the college and high school perspectives, what relationships, activities, programs and outreach are most important? Why?
3. Do Questions 1 and 2 vary depending on the colleges to which students are attending?

### **Data Collection**

The majority of data collected will be publicly available information (e.g. website content, brochures, advertising materials, news stories). Any data that is provided to me by [Union High School] regarding college going patterns will be examined in the aggregate and no identifiable data for individual students will be collected or utilized in this study.

#### *One-on-One Interviews*

Several individuals will be targeted at the college level to conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews. First, those individuals that were named by the high school counselor(s)/administrator(s) as being crucial to the existing relationships will be contacted to interview. It is my hypothesis that these individuals might be college admissions/financial aid/outreach personnel. I will ask questions regarding the nature of the relationships, programs, activities, and outreach that they are conducting at the low-SES high schools. Questions will also focus on what the goals of the outreach efforts are and the specific strategies that they utilize to conduct their efforts. From these interviews, I will also ask for names of administrators who also are associated with the program(s) (e.g. President, Dean of Admission/Financial Aid, etc.). I hope to find out more about why these programs are being supported at the high schools from the administrators as well as if, and why, they feel it a priority to recruit students from low-SES schools. All individuals at the college level will also be asked about which outreach efforts (if there are multiple) they believe are most successful and why.

In addition, I will conduct interviews with key administrative personnel at the high school level. These might include the director of counseling, principal, vice principal or teachers—special

attention will be paid to individuals who have close relationships with the college personnel (this will be determined from asking college personnel) or directly involved with the outreach efforts on the high school side. These interviews will focus on which programs they find most important in increasing low-SES student college-going as well as why they believe they are successful.

### *Document Analysis*

Documents will be collected from a variety of sources that will help me to understand and explore the relationships that exist between my case study colleges and high school, including at the college level: websites (admissions, financial aid, special outreach programs, etc.), program/activity materials, college mission statements, recruiting materials, and social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr). At the high school level, I will collect documents, examine websites/social media, and other information provided to students, parents, and personnel regarding the outreach efforts.

### *Observation*

I hope to attend any programs or activities that are being conducted at the high school that relate to college going (e.g. college nights, college prep curriculum classes, courses on the college campus, etc.). Observations will allow me to gain a sense of how these programs are operated, the kinds of activities and information that is being provided to students and to describe the programs in greater detail.

### **Benefits/Risks of Research for [Union High School]/District**

Participation in this study may contribute to the development of policies or strategies that can help low-income high schools as well as higher education institutions better increase access to 4-year colleges for low-income students. In addition, the results of this study could be useful to [Union High School] and the district to showcase the school in terms of its performance in relation to high 4-year college going rates.

I would also be happy to present my findings to the school/district and to help in any ways that I can to make the information that I collect useful to the school/district.

Every effort will be made to maintain the anonymity and privacy of participants within this project. The Secondary Investigator, Leah Beasley-Wojick, will be the only person aware of participant identities. The data will be recorded and stored on a password protected computer until it is transcribed. Once transcribed, the hard copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked private office. All participants will be briefed regarding the study and will be asked to sign an informed consent form. At any point during the project, participants may decline to be interviewed or answer specific questions. The signed consent form will be kept in another locked filing cabinet.

The only person who will have access to this data is the Secondary Investigator, Leah Beasley-Wojick.

The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain concealed.

The questions asked of high school counselors, high school administrators, and college administrators will focus on existing relationships, partnerships, and activities that 4-year higher education institutions have developed with the high school that have produced a higher than average college going rate. In addition, the survey questions conducted with counselors/administrators at the high school are not harmful in any way as they focus only on the higher than average college going rate and the relationships that exist between the high school and 4-year higher education institutions that students are attending. Moreover, any information collected with participants will not put them in danger to be at risk for criminal or civil liability and should not damage the participant's financial standing, employability or reputation as the subject matter of this study is focused on the positive relationships that exist between high schools and colleges that promote higher than expected college going rates.



## APPENDIX C

### Institutional Research Board Approval

Dear Investigator(s),

Your new application regarding IRB# x13-703e; i043872 has been approved. You may view and print the approval letter and any corresponding documents from the on-line system by clicking on the IRB number. Select record action for the specific application number (i.e., the “i” or “r” number), select view approval documents and click “Go!” There will be a hyperlink for each individual approval document. **Please note, the primary investigator is responsible for ensuring that all individuals involved with this protocol have successfully completed IRB human subject training prior to any contact with human subjects or their identifiable data. Such training must remain valid during the duration of the research project.**

**Please do not respond to this e-mail. If you have questions or concerns regarding your IRB protocol, please contact the IRB at [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu).**

Good luck with your research.

IRB Staff

~~~~~

Human Research Protection Programs

Biomedical and Health Institutional Review Board (BIRB)

Community Research Institutional Review Board (CRIRB)

Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB)

Office of Regulatory Affairs

207 Olds Hall

Michigan State University

East Lansing, MI 48824-1046

Phone: (517) 432-4502

Fax: (517) 432-4503

Email: [IRB@msu.edu](mailto:IRB@msu.edu)

Website: [www.humanresearch.msu.edu](http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu)

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Interview Protocol for High School Personnel**

1. Can you tell me your full name and position title?
2. Can you describe your mission as it relates to college going for your students?
  - a. How do you help to foster a college going culture?
  - b. What do you do as a school to encourage college attendance? Specifically, do you do anything in particular to encourage students to attend a 4-year institution?
3. How involved would you say that the following individuals are in the college search, application and selection process for your students (counselors, administrators, teachers, parents)?
4. Who or whom at the high school is the primary provider of information related to college going for your students and families?
  - a. What kinds of information are shared with students and families?
  - b. How is this information shared?
  - c. Where does this information come from?
5. Do you have particular programs, activities, events, or relationships with 4-year colleges (or individuals at the college), either formal or informal, that are targeted at increasing college going rates?
  - a. If so, can you describe these?
  - b. How did these come into being (e.g. did you or someone at the high school initiate them? OR did the college come to you and ask you to participate? How long have these been in place?
  - c. Who is the primary point person or coordinator for each activity at the high school?
  - d. For each instance that you discussed above, can you tell me which you believe are the most important or beneficial for your students?
  - e. Do you or others at the high school or college evaluate any of these programs/activities to ascertain the effectiveness? If so, could you share these results with me?
6. Are there individuals at 4-year institutions that you are regularly in contact with regarding your students?
  - a. How did this relationship come about?
  - b. How often are you in contact with this person(s)?
  - c. What kinds of things do you discuss regarding students and college going?

7. In general, what do you believe to be the reason(s) why your high school sends a higher than average percentage of students on to 4-year colleges?
8. Are there other key people at the high school or affiliated with the high school that carry out activities related to college going that you believe would be beneficial for me to talk to?
9. Are there any additional thoughts that you'd like to share with me that you believe are relevant regarding college going rates for your students?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Interview Protocol for Middle Technological University Personnel**

#### **GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

1. Can you tell me your position and what you consider your main responsibilities to be, in brief?
2. How long have you worked at [Middle Tech]?
3. Does your office, or [Middle Tech], generally, have a particular interest in recruiting low-income/first generation/minority high schools students?
  - a. If so, can you briefly describe some of the initiatives in place to accomplish this?

#### **PARTNERSHIP WITH UNIVERSITY:**

4. Were you a part of the original formation of the partnership with [Union High School]?
  - a. If yes or no, how did the partnership come about and who was involved in the formation of the partnership?
5. Why did [MTU] decide to go into partnership with UHS?
6. What was the original plan/description of the partnership—e.g. what would both sides be doing in the partnership? Is there a contract that you would be willing to share with me laying out parameters/expectations/etc. of partnership?
7. Was [MTU] given grant money to form the partnership? How was the grant money spent/allocated?
8. Can you tell me what [MTU's] goals, expectations, or hopes were for the partnership?
9. Can you describe what the partnership actually entailed over the course of the seven years—did it stay the same, change?
  - a. If changed, how so?
10. Did you evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership in any way throughout the seven years? If so, how and what did you find in your evaluation? Who did you share these results with?
11. Do you consider the partnership to be successful? If so, how? If no, why not?
12. When looking at where grads of UHS have attended over the life of the school, only one student enrolled at [MTU]? Can you talk about why you think this happened?

13. Any other important things about our partnership with UHS that you feel are important to share with me?

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Interview Protocol for Johnson State University Admissions Counselor**

#### **GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

1. Can you tell me your position and what you consider your main responsibilities to be, in brief?
2. Does the admissions office at JSU have a particular interest in recruiting low-income/first generation/minority high schools students?
  - a. If so, can you briefly describe some of the initiatives in place to accomplish this?

#### **QUESTIONS REGARDING [UNION HIGH SCHOOL]:**

3. Do you visit [Union High School] to talk with students and staff about JSU?
  - a. If yes, how often do you visit and with whom do you talk (only students, students and counselors, only counselors, etc.)?
  - b. If yes, what do you talk about in these visits?
4. You used to conduct on-site admissions at [Union High School]...for how long did you do this and why did you decide to no longer conduct on-site admissions for Union students?
5. Are there individuals at [Union High School] that you are in contact with regarding prospective or already enrolled students?
  - a. How did this relationship(s) come about?
  - b. How often are you in contact with this person(s)?
  - c. What kinds of things do you discuss regarding students and college going?
6. Can you describe your relationship with [Union High School] and how this compares to other high schools that you are in charge of recruiting (e.g. is this different than other relationships, are there unique things about the relationship, would you consider it to be very similar to the relationship you have with other high schools, etc.)
7. Are there any additional thoughts you'd like to share with me that you believe are relevant regarding the students at [Union High School] that enroll in JSU?

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Interview Protocol for Johnson State University Financial Aid Director**

1. Can you tell me your name and position title?
2. Does the college have a particular interest in recruiting low-income high schools students?
  - a. If so, why is this of particular interest to the college?
3. What are the recruitment strategies that are employed by the college to target or encourage low-income students to apply?
  - a. Can you describe these?
4. Do you have particular programs, activities, events, or relationships, either informal or formal, with [Union High School]?
  - a. If so, can you describe these for me?
  - b. How did these come into being (e.g. did you or someone at your college initiate them? OR did someone at the high school come to you and ask you to participate? How long have these been in place?
  - c. For each instance that you discussed above, can you tell me which you believe are the most important or beneficial in increasing the numbers of students who attend from the high school?
  - d. Do you evaluate any of these programs/activities to ascertain the effectiveness? If so, could you share these results with me?
5. Are there individuals at [Union High School] that you are regularly in contact with regarding prospective students?
  - a. How did this relationship come about?
  - b. How often are you in contact with this person(s)?
  - c. What kinds of things do you discuss regarding students and college going?
6. Are there other key people at the college or affiliated with the college that carry out activities related to college going at [Union High School] that you believe would be beneficial for me to talk to?
7. Are there any additional thoughts you'd like to share with me that you believe are relevant regarding the students at (low-income high school) that enroll in your institution?

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Interview Protocol for Michigan First, Inc. President/Co-Founder**

1. Can you talk a little bit about how you became involved in the formation of [Union High School]?
2. In terms of the original partnership that [Union] had with [MTU], can you explain how and why the partnership came about and who was involved in its formation?
  - a. Was there a reason that you selected [MTU]?
3. What was the original plan/description of the partnership—e.g. what would both sides be doing in the partnership?
4. In terms of the funding of the partnership between UHS and [MTU]...How did you go about securing funding, convincing partners to support the venture?
  - a. How was the grant money allocated?
5. Can you tell me what your goals, expectations, or hopes were for the partnership?
6. Can you describe what the partnership actually entailed over the course of the seven years—did it stay the same, change? How so?
7. Did you evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership in any way throughout the seven years?
  - a. If so, how and what did you find in your evaluation?
  - b. Did you use the evaluations/model of UHS in order to help you form the basis for the new group of schools that you helped to fund?
  - c. Were there things that you changed or are different with the formation of these new school and the partnerships that they have with higher education institutions?
8. Do you consider the partnership to be successful (especially in terms of increasing the numbers of UHS students who attend and persist in 4-year colleges)? In what ways?
9. If you had to give recommendations to other public schools that serve low-SES and high minority students in improving their 4-year college going rate, what are some things that you would encourage them to do?
10. Are there any other things that I haven't asked that you feel are important in knowing about why UHS has been successful in sending high numbers of students on to 4-year colleges?



## **APPENDIX I**

### **Research Participant Informed Consent**

**IRB# x13-703e; i043872**

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

#### **STUDY TITLE (Working Title):**

Do High School-College Relationships Matter?: A Case Study of a Low-Socioeconomic Status (SES), Underrepresented Minority Public High School Beating the Odds by Sending Higher than Expected Numbers of Students on to 4-Year Colleges and the Relationships with these Colleges

#### **PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:**

You are being asked to participate in a research study on the relationships between a low-SES high school with higher than expected 4-year college going rates and 4-year higher education institutions. The study focuses on the programs, activities, events, and relationships that exist between this high schools and colleges to possibly increase the 4-year college going rates.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you are either a high school guidance counselor, administrator, or teacher at a low-SES high school with a higher than expected 4-year college going rate. OR you are an individual at a higher education institution that has (or previously had) a relationship or partnership with the selected low-SES high school.

If you are under 18 you cannot be in this study.

#### **WHAT YOU WILL DO:**

Participation in this study involves an in-person, phone or email interview. The interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the length of your responses. During the interview you will be asked about what types of relationships you have (or have had) with either the selected low-SES high school or 4-year higher education institutions, what these relationships entail, how effective you believe the programs/outreach/relationships are (were) and how these may contribute to a higher than expected 4-year college going rate.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:**

Your participation in this study may contribute to the development of policies or strategies that can help public high schools as well as higher education institutions better increase access to 4-year colleges for low-SES, underrepresented minority students.

**POTENTIAL RISKS:**

You may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions asked in the interview. If at any time you do not wish to answer a question or wish to stop the interview, please alert the interviewer immediately. You may also ask the interviewer to turn the audio recorder off at any point during the interview.

**PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity and privacy within this project. The Secondary Investigator, Leah Beasley, will be the only person aware of your identity. For reporting purposes you will be given a pseudonym. The list linking your pseudonym to your name will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office separate from the data. The data will be recorded and stored on a password protected computer until it is transcribed. Once transcribed, the hard copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked private office. Your pseudonym will be used during the interview, but your actual name will not be used. Your signed consent form will be kept in another locked filing cabinet.

The only person who will have access to this data is the Secondary Investigator, Leah Beasley.

The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain concealed with the use of a pseudonym.

**YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:**

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. If you would like to withdraw your participation, alert the investigator to your wish and your participation will be stopped immediately. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. You may also choose to continue the interview without being audio recorded at any time.

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:**

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact **Dr. James Fairweather**, Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48823, 517-353-6393, fairwea4@msu.edu OR **Leah Beasley**, 21663 Flanders St., Farmington Hills, MI, 734-717-2135, beasle33@msu.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

**DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT:**

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| _____     | _____ |
| Signature | Date  |

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

## REFERENCES

## REFERENCES

- Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college*. U.S. Department of Education.
- Alexander, K. L., D'Amico, R. J., Fennessey, J., & McDill, E. L., (1978). Status composition and educational goals: An attempt at clarification. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education. (ED 160 537)
- Arsen, D., Plank, D., & Sykes, G. (1999). *School choice policies in Michigan: The rules matter*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Avery, C., & Kane, T. J. (2004). Student perceptions of college opportunities: The Boston COACH Program. In C. M. Hoxby (Ed.), *College choices: The economics of where to go, when to go, and how to pay for it* (pp. 355-394). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bailey, T.R., Hughes, K.L., & Karp, M.M. (2002). *What role can dual enrollment programs play in easing the transition between high school and postsecondary education?* New York: Community College Research Center, Institute of Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Bailey, T.R., & Karp, M.M. (2003a). *Promoting college access and success: A review of credit-based transition programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Bailey, T.R., & Karp, M.M. (2003b). *Promoting college access and success: A review of dual credit and other high school/college transition programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Barnett, E. A., Corrin, W., Nakanishi, A., Bork, R. H., Mitchell, C., & Sepanik, S. (2012). Preparing high school students for college: An exploratory study of college readiness partnership programs in Texas. A report from the National Center for Postsecondary Research.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- Bodilly, S. J., Chun, J., Ikemoto, G., & Stockly, S. (2004). Challenges and potential of a collaborative approach to education reform. A report by the RAND Corporation.

- Boswell, K. (2001). Dual enrollment programs: Accessing the American dream. *Education Commission of the States, Office of Community College Research and Leadership, Update on Research and Leadership Newsletter*, 13(1), 1-3.
- Bridgeland, J., & Bruce, M. (2011). *2011 National survey of school counselors: Counseling at a crossroads*. New York, NY: College Board Advocacy & Policy Center.
- Broekemier, G. & Seshadri, S. (2000). Differences in college choice criteria between deciding students and their parents. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 9(1), 1-13.
- Brumbach, M. A., & Ridenour, K. K. (2003). Collaborating with local schools: Resources for building partnerships. American Association of Higher Education, February 2003 bulletin. Retrieved on November 11, 2011 from: <http://www.aahea.org/articles/k12coop.htm>
- Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Cabrera, A., & La Nasa, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Understanding the college-choice process*. New Directions for Institutional Research, No. 107. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications.
- Chapman, D. W. (1981). A model of student college choice. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 52(5): 490-505.
- Chenoweth, E., & Galliher, R.V. (2004). Factors influencing college aspirations of rural West Virginia high school students. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 19(2).
- Choy, S. P. (2001). *Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment* (NCES 2001-126). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Cobb, R. A., McIntire, W. G., & Pratt, P. A. (1989). Vocational and educational aspirations of high school students: A problem for rural America. *Research in Rural Education*, 6(2), 11-23.
- Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E. Q., Hobson, C. J., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F. D., & York, R. L. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare, Office of Education (OE-38001).
- Collins, D., Weinbaum, A., Ramon, G. & Vaughan, D. (2009). Laying the groundwork: The constant gardening of community-university-school partnerships for postsecondary access and success. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(4): 394-417
- Corwin, Z. B. and Tierney, W. G. (2007). Getting there—and beyond: Building a culture of college-going in high schools. Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis.

- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Cwiek, S. (2014). Detroit bankruptcy and beyond: Benchmark: Schools. *Bridge Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://bridgemi.com/2014/06/benchmark-schools/>
- Derringer, N. (2013, June 16). Fortress Grosse Pointe: In world of school choice, community says 'stay out'. *Bridge Magazine*. Retrieved November 22, 2014 from <http://bridgemi.com/2013/06/fortress-grosse-pointe-in-world-of-school-choice-community-says-stay-out/>
- Derringer, N. (2013, June 18). Schoolchildren shuttle across SE Michigan, raising questions about funding, community identity. *Bridge Magazine*. Retrieved from: <http://bridgemi.com/2013/06/schoolchildren-shuttle-across-se-michigan-raising-questions-about-funding-community-identity/>
- Domina, T. and Ruzek, E. (2010). Paving the way: K-16 partnerships for higher education diversity and high school reform. Educational Policy. Online first.
- Dounay, J. (2008). Counseling: Counseling high school students for postsecondary and workplace success. *The Progress of Education Reform*, 9(3).
- Elsworth, G., Day, N., Harworth, R., & Andrews, J. (1982). From high school to tertiary study: Transition to college. Hawthorn, Victoria: Australian Council on Education.
- Ellwood, D. T., & Kane, T. J. (2000). Who is getting a college education? Family background and the growing gaps in enrollment. In S. Danziger and J. Waldfogel (Eds.), *Securing the future: Investing in children from birth to college* (pp. 283-324). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Engberg, M. E., & Wolniak, G. C. (2009). Examining the effects of high school contexts on postsecondary enrollment. *Research in Higher Education*, 32, 132-153.
- Engberg, M. E., Wolniak, G. C. (2011). Access to postsecondary education: The interrelationships among high school contexts and socioeconomic status. 2010 Research Grant Report. AIR Award No. RG10-144.
- Ensminger M. E., Forrest C. B., Riley A. W. et al. (2000). The validity of measures of socioeconomic status of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15, 392-419.

- Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Fairweather, J. S. (2006). *Higher education and the new economy*. Report for: The Education Policy Center at Michigan State University.
- Falsey, B. & Heyns, B. (1984). The college channel: Private and public schools reconsidered. *Sociology of Education*, 57: 111-122.
- Farrell, P.L. & Seifert, K.A. (2007). Lessons learned from a dual-enrollment partnership. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 139, 69-77.
- Finnigan, K. S. & Stewart, T. J. (2009). Interdistrict choice as a policy solution: Examining Rochester's urban-suburban interdistrict transfer program (USITP).
- Fogg, N. P., & Harrington, P. E. (2010). Soft factors influence college enrollment. *The New England Journal of Higher Education*. June 4, 2010. Retrieved April 14, 2012 from <http://www.nebhe.org/thejournal/college-bound-in-rhode-island-understanding-differences-in-college-enrollment-outcomes-among-high-schools-in-rhode-island-2/>
- Funk, P. E., & Bailey, J. (1999). *Small schools, big results: Nebraska high school completion and postsecondary enrollment rates by size of school district*. Nebraska Alliance for Rural Education.
- Gallagher, H. D. (1986). *Relation between size of high school attended in S. D. and subsequent success in college*. (Doctoral dissertation).
- Galloway, M. (2009). Michigan P-16 Councils Lansing Statement. Michigan Department of Education.
- Gandara, P. (2002). Meeting common goals: Linking K-12 and college interventions. In W. G. Tierney and L. S. Hagedorn (Eds.), *Increasing Access to College: Extending Possibilities for All Students* (pp.81-104). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Geiser, S. & Santelices, V. (2004). The role of advanced placement and honors courses in college admissions. Research paper from Center for Studies of Higher Education, University of California at Berkeley. Retrieved July 12, 2014 from <http://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/docs/ROP.Geiser.4.04.pdf>
- Grodsky, E., & Jones, M. T. (2004). Real and imagined barriers to college entry: Perceptions of cost. *Social Science Research*, 36(2), 745-766.
- Harvey, W. B. (2008). The weakest link: A commentary on the connections between K-12 and higher education. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51, 972-983.



- Harwell M, & LeBeau B. (2010). Student eligibility for a free lunch as an SES measure in education research. *Educational Researcher*, 39, 120-131.
- Hearn, J. C. (1984). The relative roles of academic, ascribed, and socioeconomic characteristics in college destinations. *Sociology of Education*, 57, 22–30.
- Heller, D. E. (2006). Early Commitment of Financial Aid Eligibility. *American Behavioral Scientist* 49(12): 1719–1738.
- Heller, D. E. (2012). *Making college affordability a priority: Promoting practices and strategies*. Testimony before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions United States Senate. July 19, 2012.
- Higgins, L. (2010, June 14). Job is to smooth the transition from high school to college. *Detroit Free Press*. Retrieved from <http://archive.freep.com/article/20100614/NEWS05/6140301/Job-smooth-transition-from-high-school-college>
- Hill, L. D. (2008). School strategies and the “College-Linking” process: Reconsidering the effects of high schools on college enrollment. *Sociology of Education*, 81, 53-76.
- Hoffman, N. (2005). *Add and subtract: Dual enrollment as a state strategy to increase postsecondary success for underrepresented students*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.
- Horn, L., Chen, X. and Chapman, C. (2003). *Getting ready to pay for college: What students and their parents know about the cost of college tuition and what they are doing to find out*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.
- Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N. (1999). *Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hossler, D., & Stage, F. (1992). Family and high school experience influences on the postsecondary plans of ninth grade students. *American Education Research Journal*, 29, 425-451.
- Hotchkiss, L., & Vetter, L. (1987). *Outcomes of career guidance and counseling*. Report for prepared for National Center for Education Statistics: High School and Beyond.
- Huelsman, M., & Cunningham, A. F. (2013, January). *Making sense of the system: Financial aid reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> century student*. Institute for Higher Education Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/docs/pubs/reimagining-aid-design-and-delivery-final-january-2013.pdf>

- Hugo, E.B. (2001). Dual enrollment for underrepresented student populations. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 113, 67-72.
- Hurtado, S., Laird, T.F.N., & Perorazio, T.E. (2010). The transition to college for low-income students: The impact of the Gates Millennium Scholars Program. Retrieved December from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/learning/Documents/FinalTransitiontoCollege-Hurtado.pdf>.
- Immerwahr, J. (2002). The affordability of higher education: A review of recent survey research. A Report for The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
- Immerwahr, J., & Johnson, J. (2010). Squeeze play 2010: Continued public anxiety on cost, harder judgments on how colleges are run. A report for the The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
- Increasing college opportunity for low-income students: Promising models and a call to action. (2104, January). The Executive Office of the President of the United States of America. Retrieved from [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white\\_house\\_report\\_on\\_increasing\\_college\\_opportunity\\_for\\_low-income\\_students\\_1-16-2014\\_final.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white_house_report_on_increasing_college_opportunity_for_low-income_students_1-16-2014_final.pdf)
- Jarksky, K. M., McDonough, P.M., & Nunez, A. (2009). Establishing a college culture in secondary schools through P-20 collaboration: A case study. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(4): 357-373.
- Johnson, J. (2002). Do communities want smaller schools? *Educational Leadership*, 59 (5), 42-45.
- Johnson, J., & Rochkind, J. (2012). *Can I get a little advice here? How an overstretched high school guidance system is undermining students' college aspirations*. A Public Agenda for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Jones, M., Yonezawa, S., Ballesteros, E., & Mehan, H. (2002). Shaping pathways to higher education. *Educational Researcher*, 31(2), 3-11.
- Karp, M.M., Calcagno, J.C., Hughes, K.L., Jeong, D.W., & Bailey, T. (2008). Dual enrollment students in Florida and New York City postsecondary outcomes. *Community College Research Center Brief, Number 37*, 1-6.
- Kezar, A. (2007). A tale of two cultures: Schools and universities in partnership for school reform and student success. *Metropolitan Universities*, 118(4), 28-47.
- Kirst, M., & Venezia, A. (2004). *From high school to college: Improving opportunities for success in postsecondary education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Kleiner, B., & Lewis, L. (2005). *Dual enrollment of high school students at postsecondary institutions, 2002-03*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved April 10, 2013 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005008.pdf>
- Kolstad, A. J. (1979, April). The influence of high school type and curriculum on enrollment in higher education and postsecondary training. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco. (ED 173 627).
- LaPoint, V., & Jackson, H. L. (2004). Evaluating the co-construction of a family, school, and community partnership program for Black students in a low-income urban high school. In V.G. Thomas & F. Stevens (Eds.). *Co-constructing a responsive evaluation framework: Case examples from Talent Development urban school reform* (pp.25-36). New Directions in Evaluation. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Labas, G., & Minaya Rowe, L. (2010). School districts-university partnerships: A college-readiness program. Paper presented at AERA Annual Conference, Denver, CO. May 3, 2010.
- Lee, V. E., and Ekstrom, R. B. (1987, Summer). Student access to guidance counseling in high school. *American Educational Research Journal*. 24: 287-309.
- Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1997). High school size: Which works best and for whom? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 19(3), 205-227.
- Lewis, G. H., & Morrison, S. (1975). A longitudinal study of college selection. Technical Report No. 2. Pittsburgh, PA: School of Urban and Public Affairs, Carnegie Mellon University, May 1974.
- Luna De La Rosa, M. (2006). Is opportunity knocking? Low-income students' perceptions of college and financial aid. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(12): 1670-1686.
- Martinez, M., & Klopott, S. (2003). *Improving college access for minority, low-income, and first generation students*. Boston, MA: Pathways to College Network.
- Matthews, J. (1999). *Class struggle*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- McClafferty, K. A., McDonough, P. M., & Nunez, A. (2002). What is a college going culture? Facilitating college preparation through organizational change. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans, LA, April 1-5, 2002.
- McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- McDonough, P. M. (2004). Counseling matters: Knowledge, assistance, and organizational commitment in college preparation. In William G. Tierney, Zoe B. Corwin & Julia E. Colyar (Eds.). *Preparing for College: Nine Elements of Effective Outreach*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- McDonough, P. M. (2005). Counseling and college counseling in America's high schools. National Association of College Admission Counseling.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Meyer, J. W. (1970). High school effects on college intentions. *American Journal of Sociology*, 76(1), 59-70.
- Michigan Department of Education. Higher education enrollment and persistence report: High school graduates from 2008-2009-PILOT.
- Museus, S.D., Lutovsky, B.R., & Colbeck, C.L. (2007). Access and equity in dual enrollment programs: Implications for policy formation. *Higher Education Review*, 4, 1-19.
- National Association of College Admissions Counselors (2011). *State of College Admissions 2011*.
- National Center for Education Statistics: Common Core Data. Elementary/Secondary Information System.
- National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (2007). Deciding on postsecondary education: Final report. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008850.pdf>
- Nicholson, L. M., & Browning, C. R. (2012). Racial and ethnic disparities in obesity during the transition to adulthood: The contingent and nonlinear impact of neighborhood disadvantage. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 41, 53-66.
- Nunez, A., & Kim, D. (2008). Predicting Latino students' college participation: State, school, and individual effects. 2008 AIR Research Grant Proposal. Retrieved from [http://www3.airweb.org/images/224\\_nunez.pdf](http://www3.airweb.org/images/224_nunez.pdf)
- Núñez, A. M., and M. Oliva. 2009. Organizational collaboration to promote college access: A P-20 framework. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 8(4), 322-339.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd Ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Oakes, J. (1985) *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.

- Obama, M. (2015, February 2). Michelle Obama: Counselors build the bridge to college. *USA Today*, Retrieved from: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/01/30/college-funding-michelle-obama-work-counseling-high-school-column/22533683/>
- Oliva, M. (2004). Reluctant partners, problem definition, and legislative intent: K-16 policy for Latino college success. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3, 209-230.
- Paulsen, M. B. (2001). The economics of human capital and investment in higher education. In M.B. Paulsen and J.C. Smart (eds.), *The finance of higher education: Theory, research, policy, and practice* (pp. 55–94). New York, NY: Agathon Press.
- Perez Felkner, L. C., McDonald, S., & Schneider, B. (presented 2010). *What happens to high-achieving females after high school? Gender and persistence on the postsecondary STEM pipeline*. Paper presented at Annual Meeting, American Sociological Association, Las Vegas, NV. (National).
- Perna, L. W. (2000). Differences in the decision to enroll in college among African Americans, Hispanics, and whites. *Journal of Higher Education*, 71, 117-141.
- Perna, L. W. (2006). Understanding the relationship between information about college prices and financial aid and students' college-related behaviors. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(12), 1620-1635.
- Perna, L. W., & Titus, M. (2005). The relationship between parental involvement as social capital and college enrollment: An examination of racial/ethnic group differences. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76, 485-518.
- Perna, L.W., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Thomas, S. L., Bell, A., Anderson, R., & Li, C. (2008). The role of college counseling in shaping college opportunity: Variations across high schools. *The Review of Higher Education*, 31(2), 131-159.
- Pittman, R. B., & Haughwout, P. (1987). Influence of high school size on dropout rate. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9, 337-343.
- Plank, S. B., & Jordan, W. J. (2001). Effects of information, guidance, and actions on postsecondary destinations: A study of talent loss. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 947-979.
- Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J., Coca, V., Moeller, E., Reddie, K., Gilliam, J., & Patton, D. (2008). From high school to the future: Potholes on the road to college. The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from: [http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/CCSR\\_Potholes\\_Report.pdf](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/CCSR_Potholes_Report.pdf)
- Sanders, M. (2005). *Building school-community partnerships: Collaboration for student success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

- Saultz, A. & Summers, K. (2009, July/August). *Explaining school choice*. State notes: Topics of legislative interest. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.senate.michigan.gov/sfa/publications%5Cnotes%5C2009notes%5Cnotesjulg09ks.pdf>
- Schneider, B. (2007). *Forming a college going culture in U.S. public high schools*. A report for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved from  
<http://www.nassgap.org/library/docs/CollegeGoing.pdf>
- Schneider, B., & Stevenson, D. (1999). *The ambitious generation: America's teenagers, motivated but directionless*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sirotnik, K. A., & Goodlad, J. I. (1998). *School-university partnerships in action: Concepts, cases, and concerns*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Smith, J., Pender, M., & Howell, J. (2012). The full extent of student-college academic undermatch. Advocacy & Policy Center: The College Board. Retrieved from  
<https://aefpweb.org/sites/default/files/webform/Extent%20of%20Undermatch.pdf>
- Solórzano, D. G. & Ornelas, A. (2002). A critical race analysis of Advanced Placement classes: A case of educational inequality. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1(4), 215–229.
- St. John, E. (2003). *Refinancing the college dream*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strate, J. M., & Wilson, C. A. (1991). *Schools of choice in the Detroit metropolitan area*. Detroit, MI: Center for Urban Studies/College of Urban, Labor and Metropolitan Affairs, Wayne State University.
- Tierney, W. G., Hallett, R. E., & Venegas, K. M. (2007). It's about time: Temporal dimensions of college preparation programs. *Metropolitan Universities*, 18, 102-121.
- Valdez, J. R., & Snyder, J. (2006). Social, cultural, and political influences on the development of an educational partnership. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 5, 29-47.
- Venezia, A., & Jaeger, L. (2013). Transitions from high school to college. *Future of Children*, 23(1), 1117-136.
- Venezia, A., Kirst, M. W., & Antonio, A. L. (2003). *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K-12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations*. Stanford, CA: The Bridge Project.

- Waits, T., Setzer, J.C., & Lewis, L. (200). *Dual credit and exam-based courses in U.S. public high schools, 2002-03*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005009.pdf>
- Walpole, M. (2007). Economically and educationally challenged students in higher education: Access to outcomes. Series: ASHE Higher Education Report 33(3).
- Weerts, D. (2007). Facilitating university engagement with schools. *Metropolitan Universities*, 18, 67-86.
- Weerts, D., & Sandman, L. (2008). Building a two-way street: Challenges and opportunities for community engagement at research universities. *Review of Higher Education*, 32, 73-106.
- Yin, R. K. (1989). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.