ThroughCollege
THE BEST WAY IN IS THROUGH

ThroughCollege Innovation & Research Report
Darin Eich, Ph.D. 2008

Innovating College Guidance
Focus Group & Brainstorm Results

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

With ThroughCollege, BrainReactions conducted a study with the purpose to identify ways to innovate the way college guidance can happen for high school students. Currently the ratio of over 400 high school students for every one school counselor leaves much opportunity for innovation of college guidance: both incremental improvements to the way it is currently done and more innovative solutions which represent significant changes. With advancements in technology and knowledge, there should be opportunities to improve college guidance for students, and this exploratory study sought those ideas.

In late 2007 a focus group and brainstorm were conducted on the topic of innovating college guidance counseling for high school students. This brainstorm included 7 different idea generators who shared their experiences, their ideas, and their own individual analysis with a survey after the session. The lead researcher made meaning of the ideas and individual analysis to identify best ideas for future practice and themes that were important based on the perspectives of the idea generator participants. Four of the participants are undergraduate students, two graduate students, and one recent alumnus. This session was conducted through BrainReactions, an organization that conducts professional brainstorm and innovation sessions with trained idea generators. The session generated just over 500 ideas. There were six significant topic areas for the session. Results were synthesized with a summary of the themes and most important idea areas for each question.

In sum, it was a highly productive BrainReactions session which led to hundreds of ideas from brainstormers. At all times during the BrainReaction session we had hands up from idea generators waiting to share their ideas. The environment was a very positive one for creativity. Many themes did emerge as did many ideas that generated enthusiasm across the table. We use an innovation generation system to produce the idea results that we do. In the idea list you will notice that be begin with basic ideas and refine more and more specifically. As always, some will seem quite basic. Some of the ideas will seem wild and crazy. This is a part of our brainstorming methodology. However, instead of discarding these ideas, you can use them as stimulus to think about ways to fill the underlying need that inspired them. Because of the tremendous quantity produced during this session many individual ideas could have significant traction for you. A great opportunity exists to combine multiple different ideas produced into one larger concept. Many different ideas make up a larger better idea and there is creative potential in the combinations that can be produced.

It is recommended that you actually *review each idea* to see, from your perspective and the perspectives of others, if there are some ideas that have promise to be developed. From the session a number of themes emerged that can become recommendations for implementation.

Challenge Definition & Questions

The innovating college guidance topic areas we focused on included more specific idea generating questions. Significant brainstorming questions posed were:

1. What was your own college guidance experience like?

2. What are the problems with existing college guidance.

3. What could a better and even amazing college guidance system feature? It could be student based, with a mentor, group, class or program based…anything.

4. What are ideas to help guidance counselors develop, coordinate, or provide a greater quantity or quality of guidance counseling to high school students in their school?

5. If there were a system of guidance that did not require a formal guidance counselor, meaning it could be done with a mentor, teacher, etc. with the student, what are effective parts of the process? What are activities students could do on their own, with someone, or elsewhere?

6. How can a nonprofit or nonschool organization that cares about kids, like boys and girls club, Scouting, PTA, a business, YMCA, a church, etc. help student prepare for college apps?

7. If there were a new system for college guidance, how could you use the especially the internet to increase awareness about it and get people to use it? How could it be marketed?

8. What are ideas for new products that would help students with their college apps, self learning, and preparing for a peak college experience?

9. What are ideas for names for new college guidance systems or products?

Themes & Recommended Idea Clusters

The following are a number of important themes and concepts that emerged from the focus group and brainstorm. They are organized under each topic question.

What are the biggest problems with existing college guidance?

There are too few counselors and too many students in schools. Students can't get meaningful time with counselors. Students don't have enough life experiences to know themselves and what they want to do. Student anxiety and lack of confidence due to lack of knowledge and no mentor or program to help them. Counselor doesn't know the students very well or have a real connection with the students. Complicated applications and limited knowledge on the application process which is new to students.

What are great ideas for what a better and amazing college guidance system could feature?

Utilize teachers and others you are familiar with to guide you. Process reversal where the schools recruit the students and apply to the students. More experiential visits offered to careers and colleges for students. More training specifically towards self exploration and the college application. Utilize online spaces where students are at for guidance such as Facebook or text messaging or cell phones. Enable agents for students to help them with the process. More automated computer processes to help students with basic guidance. Simplifying the process through posters and other communication tools that consolidate, simplify, and produce honest information.

What are great ideas how to help school counselors develop, coordinate, or provide a greater quantity or quality of college counseling to high school students in their school?

Get life stories from students first as a foundation to help guide them. Have more events for guidance, especially intensive retreats or weeks. Incorporate a mentoring program. Let older students help younger students in the school. Counsel similarly interested students in groups. Use online chatting for effectiveness.

If there were a system of guidance that did not require a formal counselor, what are great ideas for activities students could do on their own, with someone, or elsewhere?

Computer assessing and recommending program to help students identify who they are and give them recommendations for what they could do based on that. Go directly to students and utilize Facebook and other social network applications that students spend time on. Integrate parents and universities more. Enable college students to mentor high school students. Unleash self assessments through reflective journals. Connect in best web resources for students.

What are great ideas for how a nonprofit or non-school organization that cares about kids can help students with college guidance?

Utilize speakers to tell stories and how they did it, especially recent grads. Provide tips to students at school or online. Sponsor college visits. Streamline materials and resources to the students and schools. Allow students to blog about their experiences so others can learn from them. Tap many existing organizations to partner with so that many have a share in college preparation for students.

If there were a new system for college guidance, how could you use the especially the internet to increase awareness about it and get people to use it? How could it be marketed?

Presence on Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. Sponsor graduation. Integrate with SAT/ACT. Online games and regular emails to update students. Integrate activities in during time at school. Posters in schools where people see that are motivating as well.

"After the Storm" Converging Summaries

After the brainstorm we distribute a converging activity survey where the brainstormers tap their intuition to see what ideas emerge to the top of their mind as the most promising for each question. This is an important part of the idea analysis process used to not only make meaning of the results but also to ehance validity by triangulating multiple perspectives independent of the group.

1. What are the biggest problems with existing college guidance?

1. (SJ): Not enough counselors. Brief meetings, not much personal connection with students. Students don't have enough experiences yet to make the decision or lack confidence.

2. (ND): Confusing process with scattered info. Little time with a knowledgeable person/program.

3. (DD): Not enough time with counselors. Mid-teens are not sufficiently motivated and don't know what they are good at.

4. (BQ): Lack of guidance counselors time/capacity. People giving guidance need to know the kid and be non biased. Hard to fill out applications.

5. (AC): Lack of knowledge required to make application and admission decisions. Too much anxiety and uncertainty for students.

6. (MG): They do not actually guide you. All my guidance counselor did was help with figuring out high school classes. There simply isn't any college guidance, at least not in the public school I went to. You have to look for it because it won't look for you.

2. What are great ideas for what a better and even amazing college guidance system could feature?

1. (SJ): Field visits to jobs & colleges, shadowing. Workshops (interest & personality exploration, college app process info). Online applications (facebook, youtube, etc.) and texting.

2. (ND): Consolidated and honest info on schools. Personality surveys on students.

3. (DD): Individual "agents" for each student. Schools put out info about their students, and universities recruit them.

4. (BQ): More automation, computers to give initial guide to students. Give guidance responsibility to more people than counselor.

5. (AC): Reverse the admission process. Simple 5 step poster combined with facebook app for guidance. Road trips. DVDs and podcasts for self-guided counseling.

6. (MG): More or better counselors. Having people on your own level like other students or teachers you are familiar with. I don't think regular counselors serve a real purpose.

3. What are great ideas how to help guidance counselors develop, coordinate, or provide a greater quantity or quality of guidance counseling to high school students in their school?

1. (SJ): Retreats, week-long "exploration week" sessions or summer programs. Big brothers/big sisters program, mentors.

2. (ND): Let students who did or are going through the process teach younger students.

3. (DD): Counsel students with similar interests together in groups. Have senior students & recent grads counsel younger students.

4. (BQ): Group sessions. Chat sessions online.

5. (AC): Events. Books for counselors. Online community or newsletter for guidance counselor. Get life stories from students before giving them advice.

6. (MG): Have extensive information about colleges and be able to create a one on one dialogue with students to know exactly what they are looking for, not based on their strengths, but on their wants.

4. If there were a system of guidance that did not require a formal guidance counselor, what are great ideas for activities students could do on their own, with someone, or elsewhere?

1. (SJ): Touring campuses. Connecting with current college students and other mentors. Journaling and exploring themselves.

2. (ND): Use a computer program that can be updated with new school info but that lets students say their interests/preferences and it has ideas on possible schools.

3. (DD): An online website where students enter criteria and it spits out a list of most appropriate schools.

4. (BQ): Parents take responsibilities. More responsibility on universities to recruit.

5. (AC): Facebook app that helps you choose college and apply.

6. (MG): Research online. Students should be aware of collegeboard.com which is what I used for the most part. Asking their friends or older students for help. Having teachers be knowledgeable about college and applications.

5. What are great ideas for how a nonprofit or non-school organization that cares about kids can help students with college guidance?

1. (SJ): Speeches (motivational, informational, etc.). Using commercials (with humor, celebrities, etc.). Tip of the day over loudspeaker or podcast.

2. (ND): Sponsor kids visiting colleges. Use students to teach students in the application process what to do. Use them as conduit to get out materials on programs/businesses with better resources.

3. (DD): 4-H type clubs can identify students with strong interests, develop them, and funnel them toward specific schools with which they have partnerships.

4. (BQ): Take existing student organizations and have college grads talk at events.

5. (AC): Bring speakers to explain how they did it.

6. (MG): Churches, boy and girl scouts, things that are similar to Big Brother, Big Sister counseling services. Having college students make blogs, talk about their experiences.

6. If there were a new system for college guidance, how could you use the especially the internet to increase awareness about it and get people to use it? How could it be marketed?

1. (SJ): Facebook, YouTube, etc. Texts, podcasts, commercials, etc. Sponsoring graduation, having posters around schools, sticker ad on back of ACT/SAT.

2. (ND): Facebook. Pop-up ads. YouTube video. Buy advertising on SAT/ACT or sponsor graduation ceremonies.

3. (DD): Put it in an online game, or sponsor free online games.

4. (BQ): Email at 15 years old, 15.5, 16, etc. College application software.

5. (AC): Give free posters. Simpson or Chad Vader goes to college.

6. (MG): Posters. Put posters up in high schools, have guidance counselors mention it, have places to go in the high school where you can research colleges online during your free time or study time. Make it accessible during school either way because some students don't have the internet at home. Make it motivational for people who aren't even sure if they want to go to college.

Selected Ideas from Analysis

This selection of ideas is selected through an analysis that utilizes factors such as: novelty of the idea, correlation of the ideas with the topic, enthusiasm level around the table when the idea was first presented, ideas that get developed the most around the table, post brainstorm theme and personal analysis from the brainstorm facilitator and other analysts, and analysis of "After the storm" surveys that brainstormers receive where they identify some of the best ideas. These various factor as triangulated to determine a selection of ideas that have the most traction.

3. What could a better and even amazing college guidance system feature? It could be student based, with a mentor, group, class or program based…anything.

1. Mentor that I would be assigned to, very knowledgeable about college, much older than me (DE)

2. College students who would give me advice (DE)

3. Series of activities; learn a lot about self; do some journaling (DE) Decide who I am, what I want to do (DE) Leave the process knowing more about myself, my strengths, passions, who I want to be (DE)

4. Reverse admissions process (AC) Universities apply to students, let students pick from offers (AC)

5. Video conferencing with expert (AC) Webcam (AC)

6. Meet students from target universities (AC)

7. Bring in 3,000 students from different universities, like speed dating (AC)

8. Create poster with 5 steps (AC) Poster is distributed across all high schools (AC)

9. Private trainer, like an agent (DD)

10. Need a big long test to figure out what I want to do, what I'd be good at (DD)

11. Regression, looks at my demographics, figure out where I'd be most likely to be happy/successful (DD)

12. Website where you pick which breed of dog is best for you; have a website like that for college (DD)

13. A lot of schools have SAT classes; have more direction towards applying to schools (ND)

14. Hire specialized teachers who only deal with college process (ND)

15. Reverse that, do process of elimination (SJ) List of things they know they want, narrow it down (SJ)

16. College fairs at universities; make them required, host in high schools (ND)

17. Create a way for people from different universities can create videos about their universities (AC)

18. Fellows program; people who would like to guide others are always online, can talk to them, get points for helping people out (AC)

19. Facebook application, find out where are my friends applying and why (AC)

20. Every high school student from sophomore to junior year, part of small group in school (DE)

21. Developing leadership skills; some kind of tool that helps them realize they can go places, make new friends (BQ)

22. Class project in social studies; learn about college, higher education systems, how to apply (DE)

4. What are ideas to help guidance counselors develop, coordinate, or provide a greater quantity or quality of guidance counseling to high school students in their school?

1. Give a lighter education to teachers about guidance for schools, how they're going to shape these kids' minds (BQ) Push down the actual guidance process to teachers (BQ) Kids who are interested, have questions, can go to teacher counselors, ask about ACT, SAT, etc. (BQ)

2. Meet with students 2 or 3 at a time, who have similar interests (DE)

3. Create a huge event, bring students together, explain 5 steps from poster mentioned earlier (AC)

4. Schools create volunteer program; current college students, grad students, parents can volunteer like Big Brother, Big Sister (DE)

5. Create theme groups; one volunteer guides this group once a week (DE)

6. Seniors counsel juniors (DD)

7. School to do 2 day retreat, all students go to (DE) Counselor leads retreat (DE) Do the counseling in 2 days (DE)

8. Guidance counselor can recruit students who had successful experiences getting into good schools, write stories in blog (DE)

9. Get a lot of information on these students, counselors can go through database of student info (ND)

10. Pick out students with similarities that they could help counsel effectively (ND)

11. Week set out each year of high school set out for learning more about yourself (SJ) Freshman year is more general, get more specific each year (SJ)

12. Do Hot or Not about the universities (AC) Based on doing 100 Hot or Nots, figure out preference (AC)

13. Have an assignment, students have to find 10 different schools from across the country, research them (DE)

14. Hot or Not for all these different futures (AC)

15. Facebook pictures, connect all the facebook pictures of universities (BQ) Put your face on it (BQ)

16. Students who are interested in teaching high school can give their advice (DE)

17. Masters degree students learning counseling can go into the schools, have open sessions for counseling (DE)

18. Create FAQ that can be distributed (BQ) Keep updating it and enlarging it (BQ) Knowledge base improving (BQ)

19. Guidance counselors in charge of Mentor Match (DE) Every student matched with mentor (DE) Counselor helps find mentor from community (DE)

20. Movie about student figuring out college process, applying, etc. (DE)

21. Cell phone based text messaging guidance (AC)

22. Reality show like the Bachelor (DD)

23. A bunch of universities, whittle it down each week (DD)

24. Create an application on the internet (ND) Put in a lot of information about themselves academically and also interests (ND)

25. Guidance counselor asks every student to write an essay about life story (AC)

26. Read through life stories before meeting (AC)

27. Can learn stuff from YouTube (DE)

5. If there were a system of guidance that did not require a formal guidance counselor, meaning it could be done with a mentor, teacher, etc. with the student, what are effective parts of the process? What are activities students could do on their own, with someone, or elsewhere?

1. Have students keep a journal (SJ)

2. Have students create portfolio, successes and achievements in high school (DE)

3. Generator idea; did that, kids can click on school, see a bunch of testimonials from kids similar to them who went to those schools (ND)

4. Bus tour, visit different schools in a week (DD)

5. Have students be able to contact people who wrote testimonials for information on college experience (BQ)

6. Online course that students need to take on their own (DE) Do financial aid, college choices right there (DE)

7. Head hunter for universities, find the right students (DD)

8. Figure out a way to match priorities on the website (aspects of college life besides education, temperature); prioritize them according to student preferences (AC)

9. Outsource it (DD) Get some third world country to take care of it for us (DD) We each get assigned a person who takes care of us (DD)

6. How can a nonprofit or nonschool organization that cares about kids, like boys and girls club, Scouting, PTA, a business, YMCA, a church, etc. help student prepare for college apps?

1. Nonprofits bring in high achievers to share their story (AC)

2. Churches could have counseling hour every Sunday (AC) Members from church help volunteer (AC)

3. Mentoring relationship; scout master and scouts, etc. (DE) Person also becomes amateur college guidance counselor (DE)

4. After football practice, 20 minute spiel worked in, anything to do with college, get you started earlier around 5th grade (BQ)

5. Student going through process; talk to 2 or 3 other students, better figure out for themselves what they're going to do (ND)

6. Explain the troubles that are going to come up when you're going through the process (ND)

7. Businesses care about employees' problems; college is a big problem (DE) Could offer sessions for employees/their kids, teach them about college (DE)

8. Lots of businesses these days have financial aid discussions with employees (ND) Have them branch out (ND)

9. Create own blog about how I got into college, my process (DE)

10. Make part of getting a degree mandatory, have to go speak at these things (BQ)

11. National service learning programs (DE)

12. External class that high school students take in final semester of high school (AC) All about college admissions and application process (AC)

13. College guidance paired with summer recreation programs (DE)

7. If there were a new system for college guidance, how could you use the especially the internet to increase awareness about it and get people to use it? How could it be marketed?

1. Social networks open to high school students (ND) Easy to make a group dedicated toward that (ND)

2. Having facebook applications, do the self awareness piece, learn about themselves (DE)

3. Parent/teacher conferences; parents meet with guidance counselor (DE) Here's the new system for guidance, here's how you start using it (DE)

4. Create online community or newsletter for college guidance counselors (AC)

5. YouTube or TV (SJ)

6. 30 second radio ad, played over loudspeaker of school (DE) Tip of the day for getting into/applying to college (DE)

7. Tell them what to do at certain times through a text message (DE)

8. Google maps with schools on it (DD) All universities in region, what's available near you (DD)

9. Whenever somebody searches for a particular school on YouTube, Video shows up with your organization name on it (AC)

10. College team; students interested in college, job is to find out which colleges are the best (DE)

11. After school presentation, or during lunch time, about free company, what they offer (SJ)

8. What are ideas for names for new college guidance systems, programs, or products?

1. College mentor (DE)

2. College guide (DE)

3. College culture (ND)

4. My friend from college (AC)

5. College start up kit (BQ)

6. Future Reach (SJ)

7. Dream Seeker (SJ)

8. College Track (DD)

9. College bound (DD)

9. What are ideas for new products that would help students with their college apps, self learning, and preparing for a peak college experience?

1. Board game like Game of Life (AC)

2. Video game version of that idea (SJ)

3. Generator; real small thing, download it online (ND) Kicks out a bunch of schools based on your interests, what's important to you (ND)

4. College flip book like deck of cards (DE)

5. Dashboard feature on computer; every day you come home, asks how you're feeling (BQ)

6. Widget on a Mac, throws out a random fact about a university every 6 hours (ND)

7. DVD, buy it; bunch of college videos (AC)

8. CD with 30 different tracks; what to do at each stage of applying for college (DE)

9. Half yearbook, half here's the stuff you do to get into college (DE)

10. Something for iPod; podcast, gives you tips (SJ)

11. Video game like the Sims; raise high school student, needs to get them in college (ND)