



ThroughCollege Innovation & Research Report
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Innovating College Guidance Part 2: Utilizing the
internet for positive youth development
Focus Group & Brainstorm Results

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Challenge Definition & Questions.....	3
Question Specific Themes.....	4
Overall Themes & Recommended Idea Clusters	5
"After the Storm" Converging Summaries.....	6
Selected Ideas from Analysis	9



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 the spring of 2008 a second 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 and an analyst 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. Five of the participants are undergraduate students, one graduate student, and one campus administrator. This session was conducted through BrainReactions, an organization that conducts professional brainstorm and innovation sessions with trained idea generators. The session generated hundreds of ideas. There were seven 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 we 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 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 & career guidance for High School students?
3. What could a better and amazing college guidance system feature?
4. How can you help High School students figure out who they are: what their strengths, interests, values, etc. are so that they can make better college and life choices?
5. 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?
6. How would you increase the amount of high school and college students using a Facebook application and get educators to use this with students?
7. What are ideas for new products that would help students with their self learning, and preparing for a peak college experience?



Question Specific Themes

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.

1. What was your own college guidance experience like?

Student's college guidance experience did not include a personal touch. High school was a place where everybody received some form of college guidance; but few had a very deep experience or made their college planning or choice based on this guidance. People wanted a personal decision like college selection to involve people they trust.

2. What are the problems with existing college & career guidance for high school students?

The students noted that their counselors do not know students on a personal level. A better system would include the people a high school student is close to, not just a counselor. Another problem is a general lack of information available to students. The information that is available is not engaging and fails to paint an accurate picture of life beyond academics.

3. What could a better and amazing college guidance system feature?

Students desire a more complete idea of the college experience before selecting a school. A better system would provide high school students an understanding of how everyday college life will be and how things work outside of class. An ideal system would learn about each student first, and then recommend a list of schools and provide in depth information about them.

4. How can you help high school students figure out who they are: what their strengths, interests, values, etc. are so that they can make better college and life choices?

The different ideas centered around two methods for promoting self discovery, self assessment, and experiential learning. Self assessment surveys are offered at many high schools but the format could be more engaging. A different format such as an electronic version of self assessment might be more engaging on Facebook or through their cell phones. Experiential learning is probably more revealing and rewarding but is more difficult to implement. To learn about themselves, students first need to have a variety of experiences. Organizing a large scale life experience for students might be the most beneficial for promoting self discovery.

5. 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?

Utilize Facebook and YouTube. Set aside mandatory time in high school to use web applications that promote self discovery, college planning, and school selection. Create a computerized matching program that matches student traits to a list of schools. Update students via Facebook and email when their friends make a decision on college selection.

6. How would you increase the amount of high school and college students using a Facebook application and get educators to use this with students?



Hold a contest in which the winner is the student who gets the most other students to use the program, with a possible scholarship as a prize. Have students sign their teachers up for Facebook profiles, and alert students when their friends have been recommended to a school by the program.

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

Create a video game simulation that gives kids challenging situations and has them solve the problem. Like a computer game “choose your own adventure” book. Create a family board game intended to create a dialog about college. Students and their parents draw cards with a situation and/or picture and are asked questions about it that promote self discovery and increase family communication.

Overall Themes & Recommended Idea Clusters

Students need integrated and consolidated information

Students feel there is a general lack of information available to them when planning for college. Any new guidance system should consolidate information so it is all available in one place. It would integrate self discovery with nuts and bolts of college applications. Students also want information on more than academics. Ideally they would understand college outside the classroom before they make a selection decision.

Students need self discovery

Students are unable to maximize their application experience and ultimately choose the best college for them because they have not undergone enough self discovery. Any activities or program in high school that helps students to discover themselves before they make a college decision would be beneficial.

Students need experiences

In order for students to begin to discover themselves, they will need a diversity of experiences to draw from. This is the foundation to successful college guidance, tapping into previous student experiences and guiding towards new experiences that can provide opportunity for self discovery. It is from these experiences that they can uncover their interests, strengths, values, goals, and key catalysts for creating a successful college application and deciding upon the right college for them. Self assessment will be more powerful if students have a greater diversity of experiences to draw from.

Personal touch in guidance

A better guidance system would be more personal. Students want a system that learned about them first and recommended colleges second. College counselors do not often times engage students on a personal level, and as a result students feel neglected and disengaged from a more meaningful personal college planning experience.



"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 enhance validity by triangulating multiple perspectives independent of the group.

What are the biggest problems with existing college guidance for HS students?

1. Assessing who the student is (DG)
2. How far a student is with self discovery (DG)
3. Matching that with the parents ideas (DG)
4. Opportunities available (DG)
5. Awareness of college life aspects (DG)
6. Guidance counselors don't know students on a personal level (KK)
7. Advising is too academically oriented (KK)
8. Students lack info on how college will affect career paths (KK)
9. Lack of information (CS)
10. Difficult to approach counselors (CS)
11. Students don't know themselves (CS)
12. Narrow exposure (AW)
13. Stereotyped notions (AW)
14. No mentorship (MR)
15. Lack of information (MR)
16. Not available early enough (MR)
17. Students lack in depth discussion and encouragement from counselors (GS)
18. Students don't know how major translates to job (GS)

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

1. Consolidation and accessibility are key (DG)
2. List all the features available features like you tube, Facebook (DG)
3. Make this accessible after ACT, or counselor sessions (DG)
4. Relate students to schools on a broader level (KK)
5. Students can list their favorite music, interest, activity and a computer program matches them to potential schools (KK)
6. Mentor program that tracks students (CS)
7. The students come back to HS and share info (CS)
8. Different college theme weeks (CS)
9. Use as high school homepage (CS)
10. Time in home room to ask questions (CS)
11. Focus on life stories and life scenarios, not job stuff (AW)
12. Group projects with evaluation of working styles (MR)
13. Individual 3 week internships (MR)
14. Start younger (MR)
15. Self discovery scholarships (MR)
16. Shadow a college student (physically or online) (GS)



17. Computerized matching with students interests and aptitudes (GS)
18. Day on campus visit (GS)
19. Small group advising (GS)
20. Sharing class schedule (GS)

What are great ideas for how you would get high school students to discover themselves and strategize for life?

1. One month class focused on sharing with others (DG)
2. Scholarship to best self discovery essay (DG)
3. Have a year long project where students add pictures to a collage (DG)
4. Camping trip (DG)
5. Evolving homework that has kids read and react then get reassigned homework based on interests (KK)
6. Confront students with character challenging decision to learn about themselves (KK)
7. Summer camps on self discovery (CS)
8. Online quizzes (CS)
9. Video game (CS)
10. High school self discovery class (CS)
11. Competition for self discovery scholarship (CS)
12. Give them a life challenge (AW)
13. Provoke self reflection in relation to the challenge (AW)
14. Travel to foreign destinations for self discovery (MR)
15. Work leadership development activities (MR)
16. Service projects (MR)
17. Self discovery scholarship (GS)
18. Community improvement fund (GS)
19. Hard real life situations solved in camps (GS)
20. What would you do situational game (GS)

If there were a new system for college guidance how could you use the internet to increase awareness and get students and teachers to use it?

1. Don't overwhelm, a general to specific program that asks self interest questions (DG)
2. Give incentives to students over the internet (DG)
3. Facebook group of all colleges homepages and a list of sample students (DG)
4. Include interactive tours (KK)
5. Link to Facebook and other popular sites (KK)
6. Create a Facebook profile for each college (KK)
7. Advertise on popular websites like you tube (CS)
8. Viral video (CS)
9. Use on popular blogs (CS)
10. Make it a high school homepage (CS)
11. Offer students incentives (CS)
12. Series of You tube videos (AW)
13. Apprentice spinoff (AW)



14. Market online like Facebook (MR)
15. Put in teaching magazines (MR)
16. Educator conferences (MR)
17. Student contest to promote the best Facebook applications they come up with (GS)
18. AI instant messenger responder (GS)
19. Use news articles to promote (GS)

How would you get students and educators to use a Facebook application for self discovery?

1. Could be marketed on the consolidated college website (DG)
2. This could be marketed in the aforementioned avenues (DG)
3. Offer incentives for referrals (KK)
4. Make it a video game (KK)
5. Unlock fun content for answering personal assessments (KK)
6. Make incentive points for students (CS)
7. Bring it up at teacher conferences (CS)
8. Do this for historical characters (Lincoln, Clinton) (AW)
9. Facebook face-ups where you answer what your facing today and students can compliment or comment on what your doing (AW)
10. Reward schools with the most student participants (self discovery trips, speakers) (MR)
11. Student contest to promote the best Facebook applications they come up with (GS)
12. Viral video to promote (GS)
13. Interactive gaming to earn points and buy virtual gifts (GS)



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 factors are triangulated to determine a selection of ideas that have the most traction.

Selected Ideas from Analysis

What could a better and amazing college guidance system feature?

1. Watch pod cast of a mock first semester schedule (KK)
2. Letter of assignment for students and parents, create dialog between parents and students (DG)
3. Associate school with a familiar icon like a singer, or athlete (KK)
4. Peer to peer based guidance high school senior to high school freshman, college senior to high school senior (DE)
5. Break out of job mode, don't train for one job but find common themes of success amongst students (AW)
6. Day in the life of a college student blog (MR)
7. Have companies recruit kids and place them in the company later (KK)
8. Themed weeks, every week a different school with college pictures (CS)
9. Search engine that directs you by interest to different schools (CS)
10. Add college info to daily announcements (CS)
11. Have a free lance counselor from companies (DE)
12. Send high school students in as a shadow student (GS)
14. Computer tracking of students scores and activities, analyze with a statistical program and recommend a school (GS)
15. Give students a more general major option (GS)
16. Systematically ask kids to come up with solutions to their ultimate dream (i.e. how to be an artist, yet make money) (AW)
17. Look for connections between research on science and humanity (AW)

How can you help HS students figure out who they are: what their strengths, interests, values, etc. are so that they can make better college and life choices?

1. Have students travel and experience very different situations, language barrier (MR)
2. Have students work with professors and do research, beforehand (GS)
3. Start an Internship program where the high school student does a variety of three week internships at different types of companies (DE)
4. Internet courage board, ask high school students and counselors what instances they have been courageous in the past (AW)
5. Evolving homework assignment, have student read an article answer questions, and what they liked then reassign based on what a student is interested in (KK)



6. High school class on self discovery (DE)
7. Camping or backpacking experience for learning (DE)
8. Confront students with a critical problem situation, a life altering situation, and formulate a plan (KK)
9. Ask students about a fear they have and do activities on overcoming these (DE)
10. Make a rubric for life, how you evaluate themselves (MR)
11. Give students a major world problem and have them try to solve it, they will learn if they like science, humanities (DE)
12. Self discovery scholarships, pay for their experiences (DE)
13. Have students do mini projects, have them evaluate you and you get a report card on your group work (MR)
14. Apply to different schools summer camps, the camp provides you with research tools and assigns you and your peers a problem (GS)

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. Have universities related to specific personality characteristics on a website (KK)
2. Website that has collection of webpages (DG)
3. Students get access to other students Facebook profiles to get an idea of the social scene (DG)
4. Cell phone based internet product (DE)
5. Instant messenger AI bot that is a college student or college counselor (GS)
6. Different college is the homepage of the high school week (CS)
7. Make the sims into a college life game (CS)
8. List of all colleges that you can get panoramic views of (DG)
9. Google maps application that is college oriented (DG)
10. You Tube contest for college students outside classroom (MR)
11. You log community service hours onto the Facebook application (MR)
12. College version of Wikipedia that can only be edited by students (MR)
13. Online personality test to match career profiles (MR)
14. Associate celebrities or public figures with universities they went to (MR)

How would you increase the amount of high school and college students using a Facebook application and get educators to use this with students?

1. Identify a whole block of Facebook applications that are available to educators to use with students (DE)
2. Get teachers signed up on Facebook by the students (GS)
3. Use Facebook updates to tell other kids you used the application (AW)
4. Give Facebook awards for using the application (AW)
5. Match students to their friends depending on what interests they had that were similar (AW)
6. Facebook guidance application contest, have students develop it (GS)
7. Get people to join a Facebook application and the student earns points (CS)
8. Web application, pick pictures of careers or roles and meshes into a collage (DE)



9. Facebook is socially oriented not academically oriented so link people by shared academic interests (DG)
10. Video game simulation of self discovery, confronted with difficult situations (KK)
11. A Cell phone game maybe (GS)
12. A choose your own adventure book (DE)
13. Family game, game of college life (DG)
14. Cards that put you in a situation, includes an image and leads to a dialog (DG)
15. Integrating life goals with evaluation (MR)
16. MTV series on True Life "I'm going to college" (CS)