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Review of a new report: How is technology addressing the college access challenge? A review of the landscape, opportunities, and gaps

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Report Critique

How is technology addressing the college access challenge?

A review of the landscape, opportunities, and gaps

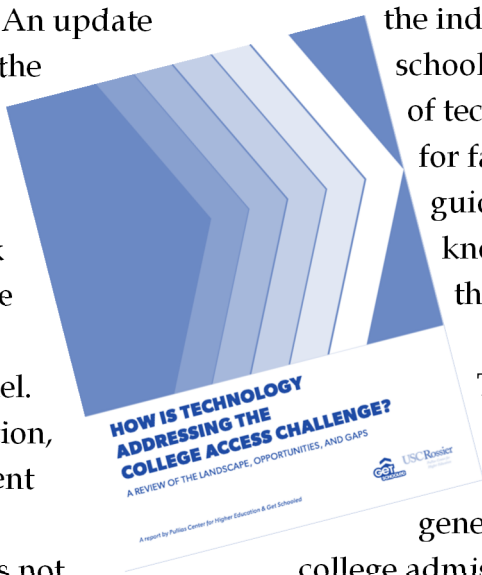


Reviewed by
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In the midst of the ongoing conversation about the value of higher education, this report aims to bring awareness to the ever-present issue of college access for students from low-income areas. An update to a 2013 Get Schooled report on the same topic, the report builds on the previous research to include new apps and technology. The report brings attention to the lack of financial resources within these districts, particularly in regard to counseling and advising personnel. One answer, although not a solution, is the option to supplement student access to information through technology. While the report does not perfectly address every type of student need and situation, this resource is a powerful centralized compilation of practical tools for both families and on-the-ground professionals.

With hundreds of students to consider and advise, many high school advisors simply cannot give students and their families the support they need to help them through the college application process. This means that families are essentially left to navigate the

vast sea of college information without much help in sifting through options and making decisions. Although this report acknowledges that technology and apps cannot truly replace the individualized support of a high school counselor, access to these types of technology are incredibly valuable for families and students who need guidance in order to make knowledgeable decisions about their higher education options.



This report clearly explains the need for additional resources to assist low-income and first generation students through the college admission process. Although many colleges offer scholarships and programs for high-achieving students with high financial needs, there is very little assistance for average students with high financial need. This is an important thing to note, because these students should have access to good institutions of higher learning the same way their peers from more affluent high schools have assistance from their high school counselors. The apps and computer programs outlined in the second half of the report aim to help meet this need, although the authors



Report Critique

acknowledge that additional work needs to continue to be done in this area of college access. The authors acknowledge that this list of tools is simply meant to be a resource for high school counselors, parents, and students, and is not an extensive quality assessment endorsing any particular app or program. This is significant because the things that define quality and relevance for one student situation does not necessarily apply to every student. The four criteria used by the authors to assess and categorize the technology are also important considerations, especially in regard to different operating systems and proper phones and other devices. This inclusion of information is very useful, as each family will have varying levels of available technology to work with.


The report mentions some of the remaining issues within the apps themselves. There is mention of the lack of financial resources needed to purchase the programs or to unlock important information within the apps. Many tools are not taking full advantage of their platforms, missing opportunities to engage students in game-like experiences rather than just passively providing replicated information. Additional concerns are referenced in regard to motivation behind financial aid information requested within the apps, and whether or not the apps are being used mainly for data mining rather than supporting students and their families. The authors also acknowledge that some of the apps still require a school-based counselor to fully engage with the full potential of the app,

which is something that overwhelmed counselors are likely not able to do. These acknowledgements are significant admissions of the need for continuing to improve upon resources for underserved populations of students.

The author references a quote from the original 2013 publication, indicating that low-income and first generation students remain an afterthought in the designing process of college access tools. This is interesting, because there are additional underserved populations of students not mentioned or considered by the authors at all. One of the most glaring omissions in consideration in this conversation is the population of students whose families speak English as a second language. These students and advisors often face issues in explaining information properly, as many students and parents have difficulty translating academic and financial words and phrases. This causes multiple issues for families and colleges alike, and technology in the form of an app would be very helpful for bilingual families. An additional field of assessment criteria could have been included for these students. Something as simple as whether or not the app offers a Spanish or Arabic text version would be incredibly beneficial for this population. Another consideration missing from this article is the population of students with physical and mental disabilities. A simple way to include them would be to note whether or not apps and programs provide text-to-speech features and to note if they are

Report Critique

compatible with other programs, such as assistive listening technologies.

Overall, this report is an incredibly helpful resource for professionals “on the ground” in the field of college access work. Not only is the second half of the report instantly usable for work with students, but it also serves as a powerful resource for families as well. The format makes it easy to print and distribute “as is” without re-creating or reformatting the document, a valuable time saver for professionals. The research itself is also helpful for bringing awareness to just a few of the gaps in higher education access that still exist for low-income and first generation students. This report gives weight to the overwhelming need of professionals working in the field, and has potential to serve as a powerful resource for advocacy and awareness. 

Reference

Pullias Center for High Education & Get Schooled. *How is technology addressing the college access challenge? A review of the landscape, opportunities, and gaps.* (2018).