American Hmong Youth and College Readiness:

Integrating Culture and

Educational Success

by

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Abstract

The Hmong people have a rich and turbulent history in which their strength and determination can be shown. Their culture embraces the family. Each member has a significant role to play and with these roles come purpose, not only to sustain but also to thrive. Through their persistence and strength in family, the Hmong refugees are writing a remarkable story. A story they hope will show success.

The Hmong people place value on education. They see it as a way to gain success and respect in America. However, there is a gap between who is going to college and who is not. Hmong students are less likely to go to college than white students. And the gap widens when adding the socio-economic status. Low-income, minority students are far less likely to enter college than white middle- to high-income students.

There may be several factors that feed this gap. However, with the Hmong people, it most likely is because students may not be college ready. To be college ready, students need to be academically prepared; know the college-going process; be aware of the availability of financial aid; and have the support of family, schools and community.

This literature examines the college-going gap, what it is to be college ready, and how schools and college-access programs are helping students become college ready. Analyzing this information, the researcher hopes to have research-based evidence that will help close the gap between Hmong students who are going to college and those who are not.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Looking for a place to call home that could offer opportunities for their children to find success, many Hmong people have come to America as refugees. The roots of the Hmong are of northern China, near Siberia. They lived in northern China for a few thousand years and then a few hundred years ago migrated to southeast China in search for freedom and economic opportunity (Vang, 2003). During the time of the Vietnam War, the Hmong people were recruited by the United States CIA to help fight against the communist forces in Laos and Vietnam. When the Royal Laos government was overthrown by the communist forces of Pathet Lao, the United States forces pulled out, the Hmong were left behind, and the new communist government saw the Hmong as traitors. In the late 1970s, the United States helped the Hmong community set up refugee camps in Thailand and then helped many relocate to the United States. The relocation of these refugees continues today. Most of these refugees have settled in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. It is estimated that there now 250,000 Hmong people living in the United States (Vang, 2003).

The Hmong people are often described as hard workers and people who value education (DePouw, 2003). Most of the Hmong refugees did not have access to any type of formal education, however they see the value of education and want their children to be educated (Park, 2007). Parents expect their children to do well in school but because many parents lack a background in formal education, they feel that they are not able to help their children. So, they rely heavily on the teachers to be the primary educators in regard to school education (Park, 2007).

The Hmong population work hard and value education, however they still trail behind in bachelor degree attainment. The average percentage of Americans who are over the age of 25

who have a baccalaureate degree is 17.1 percent, compared the Hmong population whose percentage of baccalaureate attainment is 10.4 percent (Pfeifer, 2008). This may be due to language barriers, lack of parent involvement, and/or family poverty. The poverty rate for all Hmong families is 26.4 percent compared to the United States average of 9.8 percent (Pfeifer, 2008).

Because of these barriers that put college degree attainment at risk for Hmong students, programs and initiatives to help students achieve higher education have been developed. Many large-scale programs have been developed to help make middle and high schools college friendly for underrepresented populations. Some of these programs include: Advanced Placement Program, CollegeEd, AVID, Recognizing the College Dream, TRIO, and GEAR UP (The College Board, 2006). Also, to help students overcome barriers to higher education, schools may facilitate organizational changes internally, and adopting a full college culture within their daily functions (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Students who are low- to middle-income, first generation and are minorities are more at risk not to enter post-secondary education (Schultz & Mueller, 2007). Even though programs and initiatives have been developed and implemented to address this problem, the problem still exists. The Hmong culture values education and promotes it with their children. The question then becomes, why is there still a gap for Hmong students entering college?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review and critically analyze research and literature on college access programs and initiatives and how this information can help Hmong students successfully enter post-secondary education.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What is the general history of the Hmong people?
2. What are some of the cultural traits of the Hmong to consider when looking at the concern on college entry?
3. Do the Hmong people value higher education?
4. What are the college-going gaps that exist in America?
5. What are the barriers for entering higher education for Hmong students?
6. According to established research, what do students need to be college ready?
7. What programs or initiatives that address the college-going gap currently exist?
8. Looking at the research, what can be done to help close the college-going gap for Hmong students?

Importance of the Study

The study is important for many reasons. First, the information will be helpful for middle school and high school staff to better understand and serve their Hmong students, as well as for college access professionals. The Wisconsin Educational Opportunity Programs alone serve over 4,000 traditionally underrepresented students. Knowing the cultural needs and gaps helps with better programming.

This study is important because it will help identify strategies used in college access programs and initiatives. Knowing the research behind these studies will help develop better programs with more measurable objectives.

Finally, the study will help identify effective practices which will help with planning as it relates to the Hmong population.

Assumptions of the Study

It is assumed that the literature and research reviewed that generalize barriers for culturally diverse populations are not referring to one specific population unless noted. It is assumed that the literature reviewed followed accurate research methodology and is accurate.

Definition of Terms

College Access Programs. Programs that seek to raise students' likelihood of attending college by providing information and assistance through the application process (MDRC, 2009). College Culture - The process where organizations, schools, and communities systematically structure their services and/or programs so that all who are involved are aware and presented the tools needed to enter post-secondary education.

College-Going Gap. The gap of college entrance that exists between middle- to high-income white students and minority and/or low-income students.

DPI. DPI is an acronym for Department of Public Instruction.

First Generation. First generation is when neither parent has a 4-year bachelor's degree.

PreCollege Program. Programs designed for successful entry into college.

Refugee. An individual or group of people who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution.

WEOP. WEOP is an acronym for Wisconsin's Educational Opportunity Programs.

Students at Risk. Risk is defined under WEOP's precollege programs as students who have the potential to graduate from high school and enter post-secondary education but face the difficulties of doing so because they are from low-income households and are first generation (Rubenzer, 2010).

Underrepresented Students. These are student populations that have lower representations on college campuses. This population includes low-income students, students who are first generation in their families to go to college, underrepresented minorities, and students with disabilities.

Limitations of the Study

There are limited resources of Hmong college access material. Information and research on historically underrepresented populations as it relates to culture tend to use African American, Latino and Hispanic populations for their studies.

Though it is an assumption that the research reviewed is reliable, that may not always be the case.

Due to the nature of this paper, thorough research is limited because of time.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

A comprehensive review of this research topic includes discussion of the following: Hmong brief history and culture; benefits of college education; educational gaps for Hmong students; and successful college access strategies that help close the gap to college.

Hmong Historical Background

In his article, "The Secret of the Vietnam War: Impact on the Hmong," Chia Vang (1996) writes about his own experience about the secret war in Laos as well as how he believed the war developed from his own perspective. How the Hmong came to live America as refugees stems from the secret war beginning with Vietnam. Prior to 1954, that the Hmong people that were in Laos lived in peace (Vang, 1996). When the Viet Minh defeated the French troops during French colonization, their peaceful life was disrupted. The French were forced to leave Vietnam and the Americans saw this as a problem because it would have opened the door for communism to dominate Southeast Asia. Vang writes:

> ... many individuals in the United States and around the world have said that the war between Hanoi and Washington twenty years ago was only a game played by the two regimes. It was played because the two countries wanted to test the strength of each other in order to determine who was more powerful. (p. 7)

When the French pulled out, America quickly moved in soldiers, ammunition, and weapons into South Vietnam to try to overcome the north. Realizing that they needed more support to fight this battle, Americans recruited Hmong men. It's indicated that the CIA recognized that the Hmong were good fighters who knew the mountains. This began the alliance between the Hmong and the United States.

If the North were to defeat the Americans in the South, they would need to cross through Laos. The Americans equipped the Hmong with weapons to help stop this from happening. The Secret War began when Vang Pao and his people battled communist troops in a town called Padong in 1961. This town was home to many Hmong and was the training area where CIA advisors trained Hmong farmers to be soldiers. The communists won this battle. With the aid of Americans, the Hmong resettled into an area called Long Chieng which then became a secret base.

Vang Pao reorganized and received aid for his troops from the United States. Things were changing and the war was getting worse. The Communist Vietnamese who were not to enter Laos under the 1954 Geneva Accords started to move closer. And the Pathet Loa became stronger. Vang writes that Vang Pao learned of the plans of this group to: gain control over the Hmong; join the Laotian Royal government; exploit the king; kill Vang Pao and get rid of the American CIA agents; attack the Thai government to get back the Laos territory that was given to the Thai during the French occupation; and kill the American troops in South Vietnam (Vang, 1996). After learning these objectives, Vang Pao engaged in a very violent war. Vang writes, "They fought the communists like an angry cat, tearing a trouble-making dog's skin with its sharp claws" (p. 8).

Many Hmong refugees can share stories of this time in history. Vang's uncle, Wa Seng Vang, was a military colonel during the war. He tells the story of Wa Seng waking up in a trench in the middle of the night to find that his troop is being attacked by the communists. After seeing that most of his troop were dead or wounded, Wa Seng and his cousin, Neng Vang realized they needed to flee. They crawled on the ground to avoid being shot. However, Wa Seng was shot and injured and Neng needed to carry him the rest of the way through the jungle.

The United States Department of Defense and the CIA continued to send military supplies to the Hmong in Long Chieng. The United States needed the Hmong to fight this war. It is indicated that the United States promised "to take the rest of us [Hmong] to the United States to enjoy jewelry and gold if we lost." Almost all boys over the age of 15 and men became soldiers to fight the Secret War. He also indicated that the Hmong agreed to fight because of this American-made promise (Vang, 1996).

The radio announcement that the Americans had abandoned the Hmong people gave rise to fear of those living in Laos. The people feared what the communists would do to them. Hmong soldiers knew that they would be sent to camps/prisons to do heavy labor or even be killed. Many of the top Hmong soldiers were able to fly to Thailand for safety (Vang, 1996). One family told of how they left Laos right away by taxi and then took a boat across the Mekong. The trip was expensive. It cost the couple over $100 for the taxi ride (Koltyk, 1997). But many traveled by foot through the jungle to cross the Mekong River to Thailand. Others share stories of their time in the jungle. Some families traveled at night as not to be seen by the soldiers and slept in the jungles in daylight. They lived in the jungle for days and had only leaves to eat. Some say when they got to the Mekong River, soldiers fired at them with machine guns. They saw people including women and children being killed instantly. They also saw arms blown off from the shoulder (Koltyk, 1997).

Many people died on this journey to Thailand. Many died of starvation; many were killed by the communists. Those who survived continued on to bring their families to safety. Once in Thailand, though they were safe from communism, the Hmong people experienced more hardships in the refugee camps. The camps were filthy and Vang notes, "our people were brutalized by the Thai government" (Vang, 1996, p. 15).

Camp life was tough. The Hmong described it as being "crowded, noisy, and lacking enough food." "Camp life for the Hmong represented the opposite of being Hmong – it reduced them from proud, independent, mountain people to landless refugees" (Koltyk, 1997, p. 25). Though many of the Hmong would not go into detail about camp, it was a period of time that most would like to forget (Koltyk, 1997).

Jo Ann Koltyk, the author of *New Pioneers in the Heartland: Hmong Life in Wisconsin*, spent time living with the Hmong in Wausau, Wisconsin. The research she did was for her dissertation. To understand the Hmong culture better, she learned some of the language, volunteered for services to help the Hmong, and moved into a Hmong neighborhood. After gaining respect from many in the Hmong culture, she was able to gain more knowledge of escaping Laos, the life in the refugee camps, and the transition to America as a refugee (Koltyk, 1997).

Koltyk wrote how one woman she interviewed had mentioned how crowded camp was and how the bathrooms and water were far away. People were allowed to have one bucket of water a day or three buckets of water per family. Her husband was a garbage man. Every month he was given a bar of soap and toothpaste as his earnings. The only occupations that were paid money were hospital workers and teachers. They were at the camp for nine years (Koltyk, 1997).

Because of the number of people (about 45,000 people with animals on 400 acres), there was much noise and congestion. One woman told of how, when she hears the sound of banging on a funeral drum, she gets cold shivers and sick to her stomach. She associates the sound to camp.

Though the Hmong living in camps heard that there was money in the United States, they were nervous about things they had heard such as that there was a monster creature with big teeth that ate people. They also heard it was hard to learn English and to get jobs and were nervous about stories of crimes and gangs. Many preferred to stay in camps with hope that someday they could return to Laos. Many of the refugees from that camp came to the United States (Koltyk, 1997).

In doing her research, Koltyk found that there were some things that the Hmong were uncomfortable talking about. It was found that refugees that have been in America longer shied away from certain topics. This was partly due to the fact that they have more of an understanding of American culture and know some of the customs or experiences of the Hmong may cast a negative shadow or be seen as backwardness of the Hmong. These things may include topics such as multiple Hmong marriages, sacrificing of animals, herbal medicines, money and finances, disciplining of children, shamanism, and bride capture. The Hmong may have concerns with these topics, as well. However, they discuss them in their own circles (Koltyk, 1997).

The first wave of refugees that came to America had a tough transition. There were so few translators and they had so many questions without anyone to answer them. The fear of getting lost, how to get food, how to pay for food, how to work the thermostat, and how to get from one place to the next were just some of their frustrations. Not knowing brought frustration, anger, depression, and guilt. Some were not able to handle the stress and took it out on their families and some chose suicide. Many of the Hmong were still trying to cope with the horrific things that happened during the war and this compounded the problem (Koltyk, 1997).

Even though many of the Hmong families can laugh now about some of the early transition problems they faced, there is still a sense of frustration. One family talked about the rice they had brought from Thailand running out but they did not know how to ask their sponsors how to get more. So they just started walking to look for food. Someone found them and drove them back. Another story was how a young girl had received a nice Christmas card from a boy at school. She had wanted to send him a card as well but had no idea of where to get cards. So she cut up the one he had sent and glued it to paper and sent it (Koltyk, 1997).

When the first refugees came to America, the schools were not prepared with ESL classes for them. One man remembers when he went to school for the first time at 17 years old, the school put him with the 2nd grade class (Koltyk, 1997).

Hmong Culture

Family life for the Hmong in America continues to have strong family ties and traditions. They gather in their homes and at parks. They prefer to live close to each other. Decisions tend to be made by the whole family including the very young. Their homes tend to be sparse. They may have some photos on the wall with a few pieces of furniture and a television. It is not uncommon to have children sleep with the parents. Bedrooms are used to get dressed in and to sleep. Most of the time is spent together in the kitchen or living room. Most Hmong are frugal. They don't like to invest in furnishings or expensive clothing. Saving to get ahead is important. Sometimes the Hmong are criticized for having nice cars when they are on public assistance. However, they save their money by not buying expensive furniture and clothes. They also save money by not going out to eat often and buying a whole pig or cow and freezing the meat. By saving money, they are able to afford to buy reliable transportation. Being able to get from one place to the next is very important to them.

The five most important cultural values for the Hmong are: extended family and relatives; children; religion; education; and generosity (Bavolek, 1997). The family is patriarchal. The wife is the nurturer and keeps the family money and cares for the extended family. Grandparents provide child care, guidance, advising and financial support. Aunts and uncles also serve as advisors and problem solvers. Older children are to serve as role models for the younger children as well as provide child care, do household chores and uphold the family reputation.

Other traits among Hmong parents are that they see their children as their property. Personal responsibility is shared and self-discipline is guided by superstitions; most things in life will impact the future. Large families and crowds are considered healthy and powerful. Competition causes conflict and aggression; competing is considered jealousy. And cooperation is encouraged since the exchange of labor helps get work done (Bavolek, 1997).

Hmong and Education

The Hmong value higher education. They talk about how education will make a better life for their children (Koltyk, 1997). Most parents want their children to do well in school but lack the formal education needed to help them at home (Vang, 2005).

Both Hmong parents and students believe that education is essential for opportunities and upward social mobility in America (Vang, 2005). However, it is tough for Hmong parents to help their children since many have limited English language skills. They often look to their children for help. It is because of this that they believe that some children start to take the power of the family and soon parents have no control over their kids. This may lead the children to gang involvement. In Laos, parents had strict authority over their children. The shifting of roles causes real frustrations in the home (Kaufman, 2004).

Importance of Higher Education

The Hmong people are correct in believing that higher education offers opportunities. People who have post-secondary education often earn more money in their lifetime than those whose education attainment is a high school diploma or less. Job satisfaction is higher for people with higher education. And overall health is better. However, if a person lives in poverty, they are less likely to go on to college. If a minority, they are also at risk of not obtaining a post-secondary education. Even though the Hmong value education, they are at risk for not obtaining a college degree.

Is going to college important? According to Barrow and Rouse (2005), the answer is yes. Economically, wages of college graduates increased by 18 percent since the mid-1990s as compared to a 10 percent increase for non-college graduates. Lifetime earnings increase with education level. A person with a high school degree will average 1.2 million dollars in his or her lifetime. A person with an Associate's degree will average 1.6 million; and a person with a bachelor's degree will average 2.1 million dollars for their lifetime earnings (Porter, 2002).

College degrees are often associated with economic earnings but studies have also shown that a college degree has other benefits as well. People with bachelor's degrees or higher tend to have higher levels of savings, increased personal and professional mobility, better quality of life for their children, better consumer decision making, and more hobbies and leisure time (Porter, 2002).

Porter sites a report published by the Carnegie Foundation that post-secondary students tend to be more open-minded, more cultured, more rational, more consistent and less authoritarian. These are things that tend to be passed down to the next generation (Porter, 2002).

There are also public benefits to having a higher education. Public social group benefits from people having a college degree include: reduced crime rates; increased charitable giving; social cohesion and appreciation of diversity; improved ability to adapt and use technology; and increased quality of civic life. Public economic benefits of higher education include: increased tax revenues; greater productivity; increased consumption; increased workforce flexibility; and decreased reliance on governmental financial support (Institue of Higher Education Policy, 1998).

Populations At-Risk of Not Obtaining College Degree

Given the private and public benefits of obtaining a post-secondary education, it would seem that this would be a valuable opportunity for people to invest in. However, there are barriers that can get in the way of obtaining higher education for some people. These barriers include poverty and race.

There are numerous studies that look at poverty and the effect it has on children. In general, the studies look at families above and below the United States poverty threshold, which is about $15,000 per year for a family with three members (Duncan, 2005). Duncan (2005) sited several differences between poor and non-poor children:

> Poor children are 2.0 times as high for grade repetition and high school dropout; 1.4 times for learning disability; 3.1 times for a teenage out-of-wedlock birth; 6.8 times for reported cases of child abuse and neglect; and 2.2 times for experiencing violent crime. Low family income during early childhood has been linked to less secure attachment and to higher levels of negative moods, inattention and behavior problems. (p. 3)

The educational support systems in the homes are affected by income level as well. According to a national survey, 59 percent of the parents that were above the poverty line were

involved with three or more school sponsored activities on a regular basis as compared to 36 percent of parents below the poverty line (Evans, 2004). Less involvement in a child's education can often lead to being less involved the child their own education. They can lose that sense of belonging and increase the risk of dropping out (Evans, 2004).

Ethnicity plays a large part in how a student will do in school and if they will go on to college. The achievement gap in the disparity in school performance is not only tied to income but also ethnicity. It is estimated that half of African American and Latino ninth graders will graduate from high school in four years as compared to 72 percent of White ninth graders (Pathways to College Network, 2004). This gap appears in grades, test scores, course selection, and college completion. When looking at the Asian population, overall there isn't much of an achievement gap (Johnston, 2000).

Hmong Barriers to Higher Education

However, this success does not include the growing numbers of the Hmong population. This population is clumped with the Asian statistics but does not represent the struggles that the Hmong student faces. The Hmong, refugees from Laos, are among the poorest of the refugee groups who live in America. They are also among the least educated (Krashen, 2005).

The Wisconsin's Hmong Population Report put out by University Wisconsin Extension (2002) indicates that the Hmong poverty rate is much higher than the total Wisconsin poverty rate and 70% of Hmong school-aged children were classified as Limited English proficient (Karon, Long, & Veroff, 2002). Also from this study, Table 1 indicates the education level of Hmong men and women in Wisconsin.

Table 1

Education Level of Hmong Men and Women in Wisconsin

Group	Completed high school	Achieved a bachelor's degree
Hmong Women	40%	4%
Hmong Men	69%	8%

The Hmong population values education. They see it as the way to a better future (Vang, 2003). Krashen (2005) reflects on a study by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) that shows that even though Hmong students tend to have good grades, they do not do well on standardized test scores in math and reading (Krashen, 2005). This research indicates that Hmong students show a higher percentage of school engagement than many other refugee groups as well as more hours spent per day on homework. Table 2 gives the results of this study.

Table 2

Background and Homework

Immigrant Group	School engagement	Homework
Mexico	52%	14%
Nicaragua	57%	21%
Vietnam	59%	45%
Hmong	62%	48%
Chinese/other	61%	38%

School engagement: percent who feel grades are important
Homework: percent who report doing two or more hours per day of homework

Krashen believes that school engagement and homework resulted in higher grades but that is not enough for success. Hmong students are still lagging behind on test scores.

There are other barriers for Hmong students that deter them from educational success. Vang (2003) discusses these barriers to help educators help the Hmong student:
The first barrier is that Hmong students have a tendency not to ask for help and are likely to not voice academic problems because they feel that teachers, as authority figures, should not be bothered. They also feel that their actions could be considered intrusive and disrespectful. Asking for help can be humiliating. Secondly, most Hmong students are culturally reserved and sometimes appear to be passive-obedient and compliant. They just want to go along with the flow because they are shy and want to show respect to others.

Another barrier is that some Hmong students isolate themselves socially and academically from other student groups. It is important that Hmong students learn how to develop dependent and independent study skills needed for academic success.

Some Hmong students may deny they have difficulties in school because they do not like making mistakes; failure brings shame and humiliation to their families. Hmong students should know that mistakes and failure are part of the learning process. These inadequacies may easily depress feelings and put Hmong students in a fight-or-flight mindset.

The fifth barrier is that some Hmong students may appear academically competent but may not be competent cognitively or may be poorly prepared. Oral proficiency in English may not be sufficient for academic success.

Many Hmong students may also lack academic background and academic support at home since most parents are illiterate in English and in Hmong. Students may feel

helpless and hopeless, and school may become unimportant to them. Academic barriers can lead to school dropout.

Many Hmong students rarely express their feelings, thoughts, opinions, and concerns in class because they have learned not to question adults and authority figures. (p. 13)

Looking at these tips for guidance that Vang gives, several themes occur. Hmong students tend not to speak out. They tend to be more passive in nature. This could be out of respect and/or it could be because if they are incorrect, they risk humiliation. Another barrier rests on language. Lack of proficiency in English with students and family causes academic challenges (Vang, 2003).

College Ready Criteria

To address some of these problems, one should know the criteria that help a student succeed when it comes to entering and graduating from higher education. According to the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) a comprehensive definition of college ready is:

1. The level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed -- without remediation -- in credit-bearing general education courses that meet requirements for a baccalaureate degree
2. "Succeed" is defined as completing entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency sufficient to:
    a. Pass a subsequent course in the subject area
    b. Apply course knowledge to another subject area

The report indicates four key dimensions of college readiness. They are:

1. Key cognitive strategies which are problem solving, research, interpretation, reasoning, precision, and accuracy
2. Key content Knowledge which is key foundational content and 'big ideas' from core subjects
3. Academic behaviors (self-management) which are time management, study skills, goal setting, self-awareness, and persistence
4. Contextual skills and awareness or college knowledge which include such things as admissions requirements, affording college, college types and missions, college culture, and relations with professors. (Conley, 2005, p.5)

These key components run though much of the current research. The Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE) report indicates six factors that affect decisions of students in preparing and enrolling in college. These factors are: (a) family encouragement and involvement; (b) preparation for college; (c) K-16 communication and engagement; (d) aspirations and plans; (e) student awareness; and (f) financial aid mix (Stampen & Hansen, 2004).

In this study, family encouragement made an impact on student decisions. Parents who didn't expect their children to go to college or expected some college from their children made no difference in increasing the probability for students to apply for college. However, students whose parents expected them to earn a bachelor's degree or pursue advanced degrees increased the probability by 28 to 34 percent (Stampen & Hansen, 2004).

Parent involvement is a researched component to student success. Schools may see lack of involvement as lack of caring but this is rarely the case (Davis & Taylor, 2004). The most common barrier from parents participating in their child's education is language. To help

students from families where language is a barrier, such as the Hmong population, schools may provide documents in other languages or offer translators. Cultural barriers can also hinder college access. Some cultures may not value higher education. Or the families do not see after-school activities as important as family responsibilities. And some cultures script out the career plans for their children such as working in the family business or farm in which there is no need or no time for higher education. To address the cultural barrier, schools and outreach programs educate the parents that perhaps their children can do both and help them plan for that option. They can help families see how higher education may actually advance the business.

Another barrier for parent involvement is family schedules. Work schedules and child care issues can hinder parents from attending school events or working with their children on homework. Looking at times and places where schools can meet the varied schedules of parents may partially help with this barrier. The school environment may be another barrier. Is the school welcoming? Are parents invited to school only when there is a problem? What was the parent's relationship with the school when they were students? These are all things to consider when addressing parent involvement (Davis & Taylor, 2004).

Knowing there is an achievement gap and a disparity of who is going to college and who is not and being aware of what tools and factors are needed to be college ready, organizations, schools, and programs are trying to meet these challenges to lessen the gap.

The Pathways to College Network is a large initiative that is helping communities, schools, and students meet the challenge. After looking at hundreds of studies, they came up with these six principles to guide leaders in making an impact on college access for all (Pathways to College Network, 2004).

1. Expect that all underserved students are capable of being prepared to enroll and succeed in college. All students must be challenged by high expectations.
2. Provide a range of high-quality college-preparatory tools for underserved students and their families.
    a. Require a complete college-preparatory core curriculum.
    b. Make honors and college-credit courses available to all students.
    c. Provide early college awareness programs and broad support services to accelerate student learning.
    d. Make language-accessible college planning and financial aid information available.
3. Embrace social, cultural, and learning-style differences in developing learning environments and activities for underserved students.
    a. Involve families in supporting learning.
    b. Affirm students' social and cultural contexts.
    c. Create environments that support diversity and foster positive intergroup relations.
4. Involve leaders at all levels in establishing policies, programs, and practices that facilitate student transitions toward post-secondary attainment, from:
    a. elementary to middle school;
    b. middle to high school;
    c. high school to college; and
    d. college to work and further education.

5. Maintain sufficient financial and human resources to enable underserved students to prepare for, enroll in, and succeed in college.
    a. Staff schools and programs with well-qualified teachers, counselors, and leaders.
    b. Ensure equitable funding that addresses past deficiencies and meets student needs.
    c. Fund robust need-based financial aid.
6. Assess policy, program, practice, and institutional effectiveness regularly.
    a. Use assessment models that demonstrate whether practices are working for underserved students.
    b. Focus on data that provide feedback for continuous improvement.
    c. Employ a variety of analytical tools, avoiding heavy reliance on any single measure (Pathways to College Network, 2004).

Through the studies researched, it is believed that by implementing these six principles, underrepresented populations will increasingly succeed in entering college. Principle number two correlates with the college ready dimensions stated by Conley. But Pathways to College Network (PCN) goes on to indicate that cognitive strategies, content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness are not enough to ensure that students successfully enter college. Pathways to College Network indicates that a full system made of families, community leaders, teachers, principals, superintendents, outreach program directors, college presidents, and the students is required to make a change. Change starts as early as pre-kindergarten (Pathways to College Network, 2004).

Though college readiness starts before kindergarten, it is what is achieved academically by eighth grade that has a larger impact on college readiness by the time students graduate from high school than what happened academically during high school (ACT, 2008). In ACT's

research of college readiness, it is thought that the students must be ready to enter academic rigor in ninth grade. Monitoring students' progress closely through upper elementary and making sure that students have knowledge and skills by eighth grade will improve college readiness (ACT, 2008).

College Access and Outreach Programs

Students are at risk of not obtaining a post-secondary education if they are from low-income households and are minorities. It is because of these risks that programs and initiatives have been developed and implemented to identify educationally disadvantaged students and help them succeed in school and enter post-secondary education. The federal Department of Education awards grants to private and public institutions of higher education and other organizations to implement precollege programs throughout the country. These programs include the TRIO programs which are Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair, and Upward Bound Math/Science programs (McElroy & Amesto, 1998).

Upward Bound serves high school students in grades 9 -12. One-third of the participants are either low-income or are from families whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree. Two-thirds of the participants meet both criteria. The goal of the program is to have students earn a high school diploma and enter post-secondary education. To do this Upward Bound provides academic, counseling, and tutoring services as well as a cultural enrichment program. Students also attend a five- to eight- week full-time residential summer program at a postsecondary institution.

Talent Search serves disadvantaged students. Services are provided to middle and high school students as well as some high school dropouts. These services include academic, career,

and financial counseling. The goal is for students to earn a high school diploma and enter post-secondary education.

Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and Ronald E. McNair programs are for disadvantaged college students.

Upward Bound Math/Science programs strengthen math and science skills of disadvantaged high school students. They also encourage students to pursue careers in math and in science (McElroy & Amesto, 1998, p. 375).

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Preparation (GEAR UP), not part of the TRIO programs, provides services such as tutoring, advising, scholarships, and mentor services through a discretionary grant program to states with high rates of poverty and low-income students to help those students attend college (The College Board, 2006).

In general, these programs, along with other outreach college access programs, work on the deficit-building model. The programs are designed to counter the effects of negative influences and help fill in for the lack of community and school resources necessary to succeed in college entry (Klopott & Martinez, 2004). The research indicates that strong college access programs have these ten principles in common:

High standards for the program students and staff;

Personalized attention for students;

Adult role models;

Peer support;

K-12 program integration;

Strategically timed interventions;

Long-term investment in students;

School/society bridge for students;

Scholarship assistance; and

Evaluation designs that contribute results to interventions.

High standards for college readiness are reiterated throughout the studies. It is to not accept less of a student nor the student to accept less of his- or herself. When teachers lower their expectations of a student's ability, this can influence a student's performance (Klopott & Martinez, 2004).

Along with these programs and other initiatives, many schools and communities are starting to create a college culture for all their students. In a report written by MacDonald and Dorr (2006), the definition of a college-going culture is, "The overarching goal of cultivating a college-going culture is for all students to be prepared for a full range of post-secondary options through structural, motivational, and experiential college preparatory opportunities" (p. 3).

The report gives nine critical principals developed by Patricia McDonough to create a college-going culture. The principals are: college talk; clear expectations; information and resources; a comprehensive counseling model; testing and curriculum; faculty involvement; family involvement; college partnerships; and articulation (MacDonald & Door, 2006). These seem to be in alignment with Pathways to College, Stampen and Hansen, and Klopott and Martinez's reports. College knowledge where students develop a college-going identity and know the process and jargon of college helps students be a part of the conversation. Clear expectations to what are expected of students and clear goals and course planning help improve achievement. Articulation is the consistent message and seamless experience from grade school through high school that allows students to make decisions based on knowledge and their goals (MacDonald & Door, 2006).

Given the research, there is a consistent message of what is needed for students to be college ready, but there is still a gap of who is going to college and who isn't. CommunicationWorks did an analysis for Pathways to College Network in an effort to help underrepresented students and found some areas where the efforts are weak (CommunicationWorks, LLC, 2002). Findings included insufficient deliberate identification of under-served students and families. More segmenting of populations and targeting of who influences their decision making was needed to reach the target audience.

According to the study, the campaigns were not clear, not compelling, and were not repetitive across all that they did to build a sense of community and purpose. The report gave examples of AIDS bicycle rides and hunger walks. Implementing these types of campaigns would bring a larger awareness and a sense of purpose to the cause.

The message delivery is not woven within popular culture. The college-going message is not dominant in the media, entertainment, or advertising that is grabbing the youth's attention.

Most of the information is delivered directly to the student and then to broader multiple audiences. Parents and educators are at the end of the information distribution. More efforts to put parents and educators up front should be made so not only are they informed but they can influence students' decisions.

Many outreach efforts are vague in their objectives. The objectives should be clear and measurable with timelines of accomplishments.

Measurable effectiveness is limited. Information is based on process outcomes rather than analysis of data to gain knowledge of best practices.

The corporate community is not a part of a sustainable coordinated role to help close the college achievement gap. Corporations may be participating in helping with state standards and accountability systems but efforts on college entrance are low.

Funding for the outreach/awareness campaigns is subjective. The efforts given are based on the state and federal funds available. In a climate where budgets are shrinking, so may the effort.

With the results of their findings, CommunicationWorks made some suggestions. One suggestion was to use social marketing campaigns to develop college aspirations. This may have the biggest impact because it reaches larger audiences (CommunicationWorks, LLC, 2002).

Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

This chapter will briefly summarize the history and values of the Hmong culture and the concerns of the children being at risk not to enter college. The chapter will also summarize college readiness and college access programs and initiatives. An analysis of the coordination of college readiness studies and college access programs with meeting the needs of Hmong students to enhance their chances of successful college entrance will follow. This chapter will conclude with recommendations related to this study and for further research.

Summary

The studies researched show an overwhelming gap between who is going to college and who isn't. Students from low-income families; from families where neither parent has a college degree; and minority students, are all at risk of not going to college. The Hmong population falls into these risk categories. The Hmong are underrepresented on college campuses.

Hmong people are not immigrants. They are refugees. They left Laos because they were no longer safe to stay there. Many lost family members on their journey to cross the Mekong River into Thailand to reside in the refugee camps. The challenges continued as they entered the United States as refugees. Transportation, using daily technology, shopping -- these were all some of the challenges they faced. They did recognize that to overcome some of these challenges, they would need a good education.

Though Hmong people value education and the students tend to spend more time on homework than other ethnic groups, the students struggle to be college ready. One of the barriers is language. Like many students who have English as a second language, they face hardships in comprehending lessons. Since parents tend to have limited English language skills, the communication between school and parent is limited.

Other barriers that Hmong students face are that they tend not to ask questions or ask for help when they are having problems. Many Hmong students won't acknowledge when they have difficulties. This may bring shame to their families.

College graduation rates for the Hmong population are low. This can relate to lack of college readiness. Conley (2005) indicates four key areas of being college ready: (a) developed cognitive strategies; (b) fundamental content knowledge of core subjects; (c) developed application of academic success skills; and (d) college knowledge. To reach students who are underrepresented in college, the college process must start early and by eighth grade students need to be college ready. Being college ready by eighth grade will allow students to take academic rigorous classes in high school that will help them to do well in college.

Research shows that successful efforts of college readiness involve the efforts of many. Programs that involve teachers, principals, superintendants, community businesses, college presidents, families, outreach programs, as well as the students, have a better chance of success and sustainability for that success. Research also shows that the more the college culture is embraced by multiple partners, the more the students are plugged into college preparation. And the more students that are plugged in, the more the gap will close and more students will be represented on college campuses.

Critical Analysis

In analyzing the information written in the literary review, I looked at what the research indicated as strategies or tools to best close the achievement gap. I also analyzed the information as to its effectiveness with the Hmong population.

College access outreach programs have been around since the 1960s war on poverty and the development of TRIO programs. Yet, we continue to see significant gaps in which

populations are graduating from college and reaping the fiscal and health rewards that a college education can bring and which are not. There is a question of whether these programs are working and the problem is that many do not have quantifiable data to see what is working and what is not. The outreach efforts of populations in need are scattered and lack methodology. Many of the federal and state dollars for these programs are being spent on students in high school where research shows that the biggest impact on a student's educational attainment happens before ninth grade. It would make sense to follow the research and start earlier for all students to have a chance to take college preparation curriculum in high school.

Having a full college culture also seems to have a bigger impact than individual programs. If starting at an earlier age where all students are engaged in the same conversation of higher education, we start eliminating the disadvantage of students whose parents do not have college degrees and do not have the information. Currently, students whose parents have college degrees have these conversations in their own circles and the expectations have been set for them. But when we have teachers, community leaders, influential people carrying on the college-going expectations with all students starting in elementary school, the circles get bigger and the comfort level of a college education gets easier.

However, there is a conscious and subconscious barrier that remains in society and in our schools. The expectations for students in not always equal when we look at students from low-income households and at students of color. The research indicates that we are harming our youth when we lower the bar on our expectations. High expectations for all students are needed for our children's success. Changing mindsets, putting systems and people in place early in the elementary years and throughout their educational careers will ensure they have the tools needed to meet the bar and will allow them to succeed.

Using research-based evidence, strategies can be applied to help Hmong students successfully enter college. The Hmong culture values education and the students are, on average, putting in more time on homework. However, they continue to test poorly and are not ready for college-level academics. Expectations may be lowered for these students because of the language barrier.

Hmong students lack academic success skills. Successful students ask for help when they need help and engage in class discussions. Culturally this is a conflict for Hmong students. Stereotypically, Hmong students are quiet and see asking for help as a weakness.

There were two conflicting thoughts on student involvement. One thought was that Hmong students were not involved in school activities and the other study showed that they were. School involvement is seen as a positive for college readiness. It creates a sense of an inclusive community. Students do better when they feel they are a part of their school community.

Throughout the studies, parent involvement was a crucial component for student success. Though Hmong parents tend not to attend school functions, this does not mean that they are not involved. Their culture is very family oriented and extended family also helps raise the children. Parents expect their children to do well in school and want them to go to college. However, most parents have English as their second language and many did not go through the American school system. This may leave the schools as an intimidating and unfriendly place. Most of the information that the parents get from the schools will come from their children directly. So they may not be getting all of the information. How to address this barrier may come from the people who are most influential in the Hmong community. The male elders tend to make the decisions and solve the problem.

Looking at the roles in the Hmong family, strategies can be made in correlation with the research on how to reach the Hmong students. Mothers manage the finances. Teaching mothers about financial aid may help support students in applying for financial aid. Older siblings are expected to mentor their younger brothers and sisters. Including them on college-going plans for their siblings may help with the ongoing guidance.

An organized mass marketing effort is needed to help support college-going efforts. The message is limited and inconsistent. It doesn't have its presence in pop culture. There is not enough accurate information to educate people about all the benefits of higher education and who is at risk of not going and why. If teens were presented this information in more of a cause and awareness of the inequalities along with why they should go to college, they may become more active in closing the gap.

Recommendations From This Study

Recommendations to close the college-going achievement gap that currently exists for Hmong students include:

1. Create a college culture for all students starting in grade school.
2. Create partnerships with primary, secondary, and post-secondary leaders.
3. Apply for federal and state grants to have college access programs available.
4. Develop measurable objectives with timelines.
5. Provide training and college awareness for teachers.
6. Recruit translators to work with families.
7. Create College Ready tutor labs for core subjects starting in fifth grade.
8. Meet with Hmong elders on how best to reach parents with school and college information.

9. Create financial aid informational sessions and include families, especially mothers.
10. Invite older siblings to parent-teacher conferences and college informational sessions.
11. Create a strategic campaign for the general community and the Hmong community that has a clear message about the benefits of college, the process of getting to college, and the current gap in who is going to college.
12. Create a support program for Hmong students.

Recommendations for Further Study

Further research that would help understand and create solutions for college success for the Hmong population should include:

1. Research different American Hmong generations to understand the college-going trend.
2. Research college degree attainment and barriers for Hmong after they have entered college.
3. Research students with learning disabilities and how to help them with college readiness.
4. Research the social and emotional barriers to educational success.

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