College Advising Corps

Final Report (October 2024)

UNC Award # 2000052688

Overview

College Advising Corps (CAC) is pleased to submit our final report detailing our accomplishments during the grant period from October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2024. Throughout this period, CAC made significant strides in strengthening, sustaining, and expanding advising services across all 100 counties in North Carolina. This report highlights our impacts during the 2023-24 school year and offers updates on best practices and recommendations for future efforts.

Program Updates

Adviser Placement

During the 2023-24 school year, CAC collaborated with five university partners to launch our NC Hybrid program, successfully placing 147 advisers across 86 counties. These advisers provided direct support to over 165 high schools, assisting nearly 30,000 senior students and fostering a college-going culture for an additional 114,000 younger students. Approximately 73% of the students served by CAC advisers in North Carolina are eligible for the National School Lunch Program (free or reduced-priced lunches), and 53% identify as people of color. Below is a breakdown of the number of advisers, high schools, and counties served by each university partner.

CAC Partner Programs	# of Advisers	# of High Schools	# of Counties	Tiers Represented
Appalachian State University	23	25	20	Tier 1, Tier 2, & Tier 3
Duke University	20	20	8	Tier 1, Tier 2, & Tier 3
NC Hybrid	11	11	11	Tier 1, Tier 2, & Tier 3
NC State University	22	23	11	Tier 1, Tier 2, & Tier 3
UNC Wilmington	6	6	4	Tier 1 & Tier 2
UNC Chapel Hill	65	81	32	Tier 1, Tier 2, & Tier 3

NC Hybrid Programming

CAC has made significant strides in serving all 100 counties with the launch of our NC Hybrid program for the 2023-24 academic year. This model is specifically designed to reach the state's most rural areas by allowing advisers to commute to their assigned high schools from neighboring counties. This approach has successfully empowered our partners to better meet community needs and overcome past recruitment challenges in North Carolina's rural regions.

Our hybrid programs demonstrate our commitment to innovation, utilizing technology and AI to support advisers. The model retains CAC's near-peer design while enhancing its impact through a blend of virtual and in-school support. Advisers are assigned to a single high school based on their location and commuting capabilities, ideally being on-site two to three times a week. When they cannot be present, technology and AI are leveraged to ensure accessibility for students and their families. Additionally, advisers offer extra services outside school hours, including 24/7 bilingual support tailored to diverse needs, such as assisting students with learning differences.

Hybrid advising is crucial to CAC's goal of serving all North Carolina counties, and we are excited to announce that our programs will expand to 94 counties for the 2024-25 academic year. We are proud of

our continued growth and commitment to providing quality postsecondary advising across all 100 counties in North Carolina.

Impact & Evaluation

Program Outcomes

CAC continues to track "Key Performance Indicators" (KPIs) to assess adviser impact across our programs, and each KPI has been shown to predict college enrollment. Please see CAC's North Carolina KPI results table below.

Key Performance Indicators	North Carolina Outcomes
1+ one-on-one meetings with seniors	82%
Seniors with family/caregiver engagement	35%
Seniors provided FAFSA/financial aid assistance	40%
Seniors with FAFSA completion	46%
Seniors with 1+ college applications	59%
Seniors with 3+ college applications	27%

During the 2023-24 academic year, advisers in CAC's North Carolina Corps achieved the following:

- Met one-on-one with nearly 25,000 seniors;
- Assisted 12,000 senior students with financial aid applications;
- Supported over 17,700 students in submitting at least one college application.

The North Carolina Corps exceeded national averages for both one-on-one meetings and family engagement. Advisers in North Carolina worked an average of 91% of the year, surpassing the national adviser retention rate.

CAC also saw year-over-year improvements across several key performance indicators (KPIs) in North Carolina, particularly in family engagement and the number of applications submitted (both 1+ and 3+ applications). Notably, while CAC advisers nationwide engaged 28% of families, those in North Carolina engaged 35%.

Program Impact

Research shows that students who meet with their CAC adviser are 50% more likely to enroll in college compared to those who do not. Advisers also assist students in creating a balanced list of at least three schools to apply to, which enhances the likelihood of a smooth enrollment in the fall. During the 2023-2024 academic year, advisers helped over 8,000 seniors submit three or more applications.

North Carolina programs recorded a 44% "first-fall" college-going rate, meaning that 7,771 students from CAC schools enrolled in college in the first fall semester after high school graduation, with approximately 90% attending in-state institutions.

CAC also utilizes the AI chatbot, Oli, which provides 24/7 bilingual support for students and families. In the 2023-2024 academic year, Oli actively communicated with students at 16 North Carolina schools, sending reminders about application deadlines, financial aid opportunities, and FAFSA requirements. Our

goal is to leverage predictive analytics from the data captured by the chatbot to anticipate future trends and enhance advisers' ability to manage caseloads effectively while meeting individual student needs.

We maintain a human-centered approach to ensure that students and families trust our use of AI and know we are always available to support them. Research indicates that 70% of students who received messages from the chatbot submitted their FAFSA, compared to 50% of those who did not. These students also scheduled more one-on-one meetings with advisers and submitted college applications at higher rates.

Mitigating Challenges

This academic year, students faced several challenges in accessing and completing the FAFSA. The FAFSA portal, which typically opens in October, was delayed until December 2023, significantly reducing the time students had to submit their applications. Additionally, the portal encountered technical errors that hindered students from completing and submitting their forms. According to the Office of Federal Student Aid, by late March, only about 27% of high school seniors had completed the FAFSA, compared to 45.5% at the same time in 2023.

In response to these challenges, advisers worked diligently to support students. For example, advisers organized full-day events to assist students with completing the FAFSA, college applications, and scholarship applications. As a result, students at CAC schools completed approximately 14,000 FAFSAs this year, an increase of 2,700 since May, raising the completion rate from 38% to 50%.

Recommendations & Best Practices

CAC's work during the grant period has identified key recommendations and best practices for college advising across North Carolina. Below are our suggestions for training school counselors and improving postsecondary attainment goals. By implementing these recommendations, we can enhance the skills of school counselors and foster a more equitable environment for all students pursuing postsecondary education.

School Counselor Training

1. Financial Aid and FAFSA Expertise:
   - Recommendation: Implement regular workshops focused on financial aid, particularly the FAFSA process, where college advisers share their expertise with school counselors. This training should cover common challenges students face, best practices for completing the FAFSA, and strategies for counselors to assist students in navigating financial aid resources.
   - Outcome: By increasing the knowledge base of school counselors in financial aid processes, they can better support students and alleviate the burden on college advisers.

2. Resource Guide for Specialized Populations:
   - Recommendation: Develop a comprehensive resource guide specifically designed for school counselors that outlines available support systems for marginalized groups. This guide should include information on services for students experiencing homelessness, those in foster care, students who have lost a parent, and others facing unique challenges.
   - Outcome: Enhanced awareness and understanding among school counselors will enable them to provide more effective and tailored support to diverse student populations.

3. Training on Trade and Technical Programs:
   - Recommendation: Create training modules for school counselors that focus on trade and technical programs, emphasizing pathways that require certificates or two-year degrees. This training should include information on local workforce needs and how to connect students with career opportunities.
   - Outcome: Counselors will be equipped to advise students with varied career aspirations, ensuring they are informed about viable postsecondary options beyond four-year colleges.

Increase Postsecondary Attainment Goals

1. Collaborative Support Structures:
   - Foster partnerships between college advisers and school counselors to create a supportive network that promotes shared learning and resource exchange. This collaboration can enhance the effectiveness of both roles in guiding students toward postsecondary success.

2. Targeted Outreach:
   - Encourage counselors to conduct outreach initiatives aimed at marginalized groups to ensure they are aware of the resources available to them. This can include informational sessions, workshops, and one-on-one counseling tailored to the unique needs of these populations.

3. Ongoing Professional Development:
   - Establish continuous professional development opportunities that focus on emerging trends in college access, financial aid changes, and the evolving landscape of vocational education. This ensures that counselors remain current and can provide the best advice to their students.

4. Data-Driven Decision Making:
   - Promote the use of data to identify gaps in access to postsecondary education among different student groups. Counselors should be trained to analyze this data and develop strategies that address identified barriers, thereby improving student access and success rates.

Thank You

College Advising Corps is a national leader in supporting under-resourced high school students through its advising programs. Of the approximately 260,000 under-resourced high school students served by the top six college access nonprofits, 77% are advised by CAC. Our innovative near-peer advising model equips students with the tools, resources, and knowledge necessary to pursue postsecondary education. We focus on helping low-income students, those from underrepresented and underserved communities, and first-generation college students to define their career goals, with guidance from advisers who have faced similar challenges.

Thanks to the generous support of the North Carolina Legislature, CAC has refined its program model, expanded in-school and hybrid advising, and invested in critical innovations. We are immensely grateful for our partnership with the Legislature and look forward to continuing to impact thousands of North Carolina students in the years to come.

Appendix A

KPI RESULTS

The below tables reflect the 2023-24 academic year results for CAC's North Carolina university partners.

KPI	App State Results	Duke Results	NC Hybrid Results	NC State Results	UNC-CH Results	UNC-W Results
Percentage of seniors who have met with an adviser at least once	83%	67%	55%	95%	87%	92%
Percentage of families who met with an adviser at least once	45%	25%	13%	35%	37%	56%
Percentage of seniors who submitted 1+ college application	60%	55%	49%	60%	60%	65%
Percentage of seniors who submitted 3+ college application	21%	25%	12%	26%	31%	31%
Percentage of seniors who were assisted with financial aid	43%	30%	26%	42%	42%	58%
Percentage of seniors who completed the FAFSA	47%	50%	41%	48%	50%	58%