Helping Students Find a Good College Match
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Expert Presenters:

Jessica Howell, executive director of policy research, College Board

Lauren Quigley, director of college counseling, Young Women’s Leadership School of Astoria (New York)

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For Some Immigrant Students, Culture Bears on College Choice
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Helping Students Find a Good College Match: What the Research Tells Us

Jessica Howell
Executive Director, Policy Research
The College Board
Postsecondary Undermatch

- Academic undermatch occurs when a student’s academic credentials permit him/her access to a college or university that is more selective than the postsecondary alternative he/she actually chooses.

- **Overview:**
  - How prevalent is undermatch?
  - Why is undermatch problematic?
  - Who undermatches?
  - Why do students undermatch?
  - How can we improve match?
How prevalent is undermatch?

College Access vs. College Choice in the High School Class of 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access to</th>
<th>Very Selective</th>
<th>Selective</th>
<th>Somewhat Selective</th>
<th>Nonselective</th>
<th>Two-Year</th>
<th>No College</th>
<th>Percent Undermatch</th>
<th>Percent Substantial Undermatch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Selective</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Selective</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonselective</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Year</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (by enrolled)</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>16.1*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Smith, Pender, & Howell (2013); based on nationally representative ELS:2004 data.
How prevalent is undermatch?

Type of Undermatch, by College Selectivity Category Accessible to Student

- Undermatch @ 4-yr
- Undermatch @ 2-yr
- Do Not Enroll

Very Selective: 12% Undermatch @ 4-yr, 10% Undermatch @ 2-yr, 78% Do Not Enroll
Selective: 13% Undermatch @ 4-yr, 25% Undermatch @ 2-yr, 61% Do Not Enroll
Somewhat Selective: 23% Undermatch @ 4-yr, 60% Undermatch @ 2-yr, 17% Do Not Enroll
Nonselective: 25% Undermatch @ 4-yr, 75% Undermatch @ 2-yr, 75% Do Not Enroll

Most selective category of four-year colleges to which students are likely admissible

Source: Radford & Howell (2014); based on SAT-takers from high school class of 2010.
Postsecondary Undermatch

- How prevalent is undermatch?
  - Prevalent! ~40% of high school graduates each year.
- Why is undermatch problematic?
- Who undermatches?
- Why do students undermatch?
- How can we improve match?
Why is undermatch problematic?

Students who attend an academically matched college are more likely to complete their degree.

Simulations that move undermatched low-income students to “safety schools” indicate a **10-15 percentage point increase** in the probability of completing a bachelor’s degree.


Going to a college with a 100-SAT-point higher average SAT results in a **5-10 percentage point higher probability of completing a bachelor’s degree**, with the largest results accruing to students with more modest academic credentials, who are disproportionately minorities, first generation college students, and from low- and modest-income families.


For students on the cusp of going into the broad access sector, going to a moderately selective four-year public college system results in a **30 percentage point increase** in bachelor’s degree completion. For low-income students, the effect is 50 percentage points.

Why is undermatch problematic?

Bachelor's Degree Completion Penalty of Undermatch, by Race/Ethnicity and Predicted College Selectivity Access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BA Completion Penalty (percentage points)</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Selective</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Selective</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonselective</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Most selective category of four-year colleges to which students are admissible

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Postsecondary Undermatch

- How prevalent is undermatch?
  - Prevalent! ~40% of high school graduates each year.

- Why is undermatch problematic?
  - Lower rates of college completion, longer time to degree, worse labor market outcomes.

- Who undermatches?

- Why do students undermatch?

- How can we improve match?
Who undermatches?

Undermatch by Socioeconomic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Lower-SES</th>
<th>Higher-SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 pp SES gap in Undermatch rate

9 pp SES gap in Substantial Undermatch rate

Source: Smith, Pender, & Howell (2013); based on nationally representative ELS:2004 data.
Postsecondary Undermatch

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  - Prevalent! ~40% of high school graduates each year.

- Why is undermatch problematic?
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  Who undermatches?
  - Lower-income and first generation students, rural students, students without rigorous high school coursework.

- Why do students undermatch?

- How can we improve match?
Why do students undermatch?

Differences in student outcomes can be traced back to college application behavior.

Source: Smith, Pender, & Howell (2013); based on nationally representative ELS:2004 data.
Why do students undermatch?

How Top Students of Different Incomes Apply for College

A new study found that a majority of high-achieving high school seniors from low-income families did not apply to any selective colleges.

Groups of high-achieving* applicants

- Students who follow the recommended strategy of applying to a range of colleges, including “reach,” “match” and “safety.”
- Students who follow idiosyncratic strategies, like applying to just one very selective college and one nonselective local college.
- Students who apply to no schools that are a fit for them academically.

*In the study, students were considered high-achieving if they could very likely gain admission to a selective college, which translates into roughly the top 4 percent of high school graduates, based on scores and grades.

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

Why do students undermatch?

- **What’s driving different application choices?**
  - Financial considerations
  - Geographic/distance considerations
  - Information asymmetries
  - Culture around college-going
  - Isolation (geographic or achievement)

- **Institutional behaviors that might influence match:**
  - Role of High Schools
  - Role of Colleges
  - Role of Communities
Why do students undermatch?

Descriptive Evidence on High School Undermatch from College Board Data

Source: Hurwitz, Smith, Howell, & Pender (2012); based on SAT-takers from class of 2006.
Why do students undermatch?

Descriptive Evidence on State Undermatch from College Board Data

Unpublished data/calculations. Please do not circulate or cite without permission.
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- Who undermatches?
  - Lower-income students, first generation students, Hispanic students, students without rigorous high school coursework.

- Why do students undermatch?
  - They do not apply to match colleges for reasons related to financial concerns, geography, and information asymmetries.

- How can we improve match?
How can we improve match?

• Correct student misperceptions about how much college costs
  ➢ Online resources (e.g., College Navigator, Big Future, College Scorecard, net price calculators, etc.)

• Improved counseling/mentoring while in high school
  ➢ More school counselors
  ➢ Supplemental advising and mentoring

• Encourage better application behaviors
  ➢ Apply to enough colleges
  ➢ Apply to a broad mix of colleges
  ➢ Provide college application fee waivers make it possible for students to follow this advice
How can we improve match?

- Student-facing efforts more likely to be effective if coupled with efforts by secondary and postsecondary institutions:
  - Access to more rigorous coursework in high school
  - Improved college-going culture in high school
  - Support of cohort models (e.g., Posse)
  - Support of near-peer advising models (e.g., College Advising Corps)
  - Better programmatic outreach by colleges to students at risk of undermatching, for example:
    - Franklin and Marshall College Prep Program
    - University of Maryland Ascent Program
    - Rutgers Future Scholars Program
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- How can we improve match?
  • Better college information and counseling during college exploration and application stage; get institutions involved.
Concluding Thoughts

• College success is about more than academic match; other facets of “fit” matter as well.
  • Academic match and non-academic fit appear to be complementary.
  • “Start with match; end with fit.”

• College match is not about prescribing a specific college; it’s about encouraging students not to foreclose early on good postsecondary options.
  • The goal is for students to have more and better offers of admission and financial aid to choose from, so that they might select the college that maximizes their chances of success.
Additional Resources

- A Review of the Role of College Applications on Students’ Postsecondary Outcomes

- A Review of the Role of College Counseling, Coaching, and Mentoring on Students’ Postsecondary Outcomes

- A Review of the Causes and Consequences of Students’ Postsecondary Choices
Lauren Quigley
Director of College Counseling
The Young Women’s Leadership School of Astoria
College Bound Initiative
The Young Women’s Leadership Network

In 1996, Ann and Andrew Tisch partnered with the New York City Board of Education to open The Young Women’s Leadership School of East Harlem – the first public all-girls school to open in the United States in 30 years.

Their vision was to provide economically disadvantaged girls with a high-quality college preparatory education modeled upon the finest private schools.

In 1998, Young Women’s Leadership Network, a not-for-profit organization, was created to make our programming available to more students. We now have a network of five high-performing public schools in New York City, serving more than 2,200 students.

The success of our girls’ schools has inspired the opening of dozens of single-sex schools nationwide, including affiliates in Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, New York, North Carolina and Texas.
In 2001, CollegeBound Initiative, a comprehensive college guidance program, was created at The Young Women’s Leadership School of East Harlem. CBI now serves more than 14,500 low-income students at 27 high-need public schools in New York City.

**CBI Features:**

- Experienced, full-time Directors of College Counseling (DCCs) on-site in high need public schools.
- Longstanding relationships with more than 100 colleges and universities.
- DCCs work with every student and their parent/caregiver.
- Personalized college application and financial aid support in the 11th and 12th grades.
- Early awareness through college trips, events, and workshops in the 6th-10th grades.
- Serving predominantly low-income students; most will be first-generation college students.
TYWLS Astoria was the third school in our network to be opened. It was founded in 2006 and serves 575 girls in grades 6-12.

**Ethnicity**
- Asian/Pacific Islander – 33%
- Hispanic – 42%
- Black (non-Hispanic) – 6%
- White – 18%
- Native American or Other – 1%

**Statistics**
- Special Education – 5%
- Free/Reduced Lunch – 70%
- English Language Learners – 3%
First Contact

The College Bound office is always open, ensuring I’m able to have contact with students of all ages. But my in-depth work begins with students in their junior year and takes many different forms.

- Classroom Push-in’s
  - English Class, Advisory, or P.E
- Small Group Counseling
- Individual Sessions
- Hosting in-school college representative visits
- Conducting college visits in New York and surround states

Discussion during class push-in’s and individual and group counseling includes signing up for the PSAT and SAT and reviewing results; creating college lists, running test anxiety workshops and mock interviews.
Intake Documents

Many factors help inform a student’s college list, such as academic interests and campus preferences. But students don’t often realize there are many other aspects of their lives that can help or hinder the process.
• Citizenship (students’ AND parents’)
• Household Income
• Family Size

Students must provide extensive intake documentation before we can craft a college list together.
• Demographic Forms
• Family Income Forms
• Tax Documents
One-on-one Meetings

Students have two, hour-long one-on-one meetings during which we create their college list. Each meeting has a different focus.

**Junior Year**
- Spring Semester
- Opportunity Program eligibility
- Academic Interests and Passions
- College Preferences
- Summer “homework”
  - College research

**Senior Year**
- Early Fall Semester
- Changes in GPA or Standardized Test scores
- Solidifying College Lists
- Timeline and Protocol
Parent Involvement

While my office is always open to individual appointments with parents, we host several events specifically targeted at parents to aid in their understanding of the college process.

- **Junior Parent Night and Dinner-** 11th grade parents’ first “formal” opportunity to meet me and outline the college process
- **Senior Parent Night-** The kick-off to senior year! We focus on the timeline of the process and how parents can support their daughters.
- **Financial Aid Night-** Senior parents get an in depth presentation regarding applying for financial aid, scholarships, and work-study.
Cultural Competency

Here at TYWLS of Astoria, over 60 different countries are represented. One of the most important parts of my job is having a deep commitment to understanding my student’s cultural and religious identity.

- Cultural inclusion
  - Catered events
  - Respecting cultural norms
- Availability of translators at school based events
- Maintaining a close relationship with our Parent/Community Liaison to ensure parents concerns are addressed.
1st Generation vs. 1st Generation in This Country

What’s the difference?

Parents who have attended college in another country often feel like they have a better grasp of the college process, even if their student is the first to go to college in this country. BUT many issues can arise in this situation.

- Different educational systems
- More freedom of choice regarding academic interests and majors
- Lack of understanding of the Financial Aid process
- Misconceptions based on their own personal experience
Common College Issues at TYWLS of Astoria

• Parental expectations vs. realistic college/academic choices
  • Name brand colleges
  • State school stigma
• Low income vs. middle income students
• Conservative family expectations
  • Cultural norms
    • Religion
    • Ethnic traditions
    • Social pressures
  • Students “leaving” the family for college
  • Gender roles and responsibilities
For further information, please contact:

Young Women’s Leadership Network (YWLN)
322 8th Avenue, 14th Floor
New York, NY 10001
www.ywln.org

Lauren Quigley, Director of College Counseling
Lquigley@the-cbi.org, 718-267-2839 x1190
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Required Reading from Education Week:

**Spotlight on College Readiness and Access**
The path to college comes with many unique challenges for students. In this Spotlight, examine the digital divide in the college admissions process, see how districts instill higher education ambitions with early outreach and early-college models, and discover how schools are preparing students for the academic and financial demands of college.

**Related Story:**
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