

INSIGHTS

UIC College Prep (UICCP), a campus of Noble in downtown Chicago operated in partnership with the University of Illinois, was frustrated with a discrepancy that it observed in measurements of its students' achievement. UICCP students were earning district-leading scores on the college entrance exams, but the staff was dissatisfied with their college persistence rates: only 59 percent of UICCP's 2013 high school graduates who enrolled in a 4-year college were continuously enrolled through the Spring of 2015. While this was right at the average for the district as a whole, it didn't serve the school's ambition to have 75 percent of their graduates earn bachelor's degrees.

STRATEGIES

UICCP decided to make structural changes to provide its students with the resources and environment they needed to persist through and graduate from college.

UICCP's leadership, influenced by University of Chicago Consortium research indicating that high school GPA is more predictive of college graduation than standardized test scores, decided to focus their attention on strengthening students' grades. They pursued a "mastery-based grading system" that encouraged teachers to assign grades based on students' mastery of topics covered in the curriculum.

UICCP seniors enroll in a college seminar course in which they work on their college applications, financial aid papers, and eventually college choices. Each student is assigned to an instructor who provides detailed and differentiated college guidance to about 60 students and their families. This seminar gives seniors time to make very careful and intentional choices about applying to institutions where they will succeed.

Every teacher at UICCP serves as an advisor as well, taking on a group of 20-25 students at the beginning of their freshman year, and meeting with them every day for four years to provide both academic and personal support. This system means that when students reach their senior year, they will have a teacher on campus who knows their academic history and interests personally and can provide deeply informed guidance on the college selection process.

RESULTS

UICCP saw great gains in its students' high school grades and college persistence:

Following UICCP's implementation of a mastery-based grading system, the average GPA of a UICCP freshman rose from 2.2 in 2008 to 3.0 in 2017. Through improvements to the grading system, GPA and grades better reflected students' academic growth. With stronger grades, students' college acceptance prospects improved and they matriculated to institutions more capable of supporting them through college graduation.

UICCP's strong individualized support for college applicants influenced high school success as well as postsecondary prospects. From 2012 to 2016, UICCP's high school graduation rate rose from 75 percent to 85 percent and its college enrollment rate among graduates rose from 78 percent to 87 percent.

For the UICCP Class of 2015, Noble's internal data shows 68% of students who started at a 4-year college were continuously enrolled at the same college through Spring 2017. At that same point in time, 78% of the entire graduating class was enrolled in either a 2-year or 4-year college. 59% of all graduates from that class were enrolled in a 4-year college in Spring 2017.