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Capstone Project

What barriers hinder Granger High students from completing the AVID program?

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Problem Statement

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) helps a high percentage of high school students get accepted to college and complete a four year degree. AVID focuses on the least served students who desire a college degree: students who are marginalized because of their socio-economics status (SES), race, gender, and academic performance. Many barriers face students who dream of going to college and AVID assists them as they navigate these barriers.

2005 – 2006 was the first year that Granger High School utilized the AVID program. The AVID site team at Granger is searching for ways to recruit and support students in the AVID program. Many AVID students at Granger seem frustrated and wonder how this program is going to benefit them. This Capstone Project focused on the barriers that Granger High students face as they prepare for college in the AVID program. A better understanding of these barriers will assist future students as they prepare for college.

Ironic but true, it is difficult to implement programs, like AVID, that are created for the benefit of students. Often, criticism of students and stereotyping of their behaviors feed mistaken perceptions and foster the status quo:

Studies of comprehensive school reform suggest that such efforts often fail because of educators' unwillingness to examine the root causes of underachievement and of failure among students from low-income and racially or ethnically diverse backgrounds and because of their tendency to locate the problem within students, families, and communities (Garcia, 2004).

I have witnessed the socialization and higher education access issues that Granger students face, especially students of color. They must fight through issues of white privilege that permeate the honors and Advance Placement (AP) courses, and result in systemic barriers for students of color. Rather than fight openly for change students of color often become covert resisters of systems that marginalize them. Sadly, their resistance can hinder the achievement of their personal expectations and dreams (Denevi, 2001).

Guiding Framework

All students struggle as they navigate educational systems and figure out how they work. However, there are many students whom the system does not serve. They are marginalized systemically through meritocracy and white privilege. In other words, many students face inequities and barriers in educational systems that pull them away from higher education. Research helps expose the barriers students face. This project looked for and identified unique barriers for AVID students at Granger High. Nine elements of effective outreach (Tierney, 2005) provided a lens for identifying the barriers: race, family, peers, counseling, mentoring, academics, co-curricular, timing, and cost.

Nine Elements of Effective Outreach

Race

Culture influences how education is organized and implemented. The dominant culture that organized and implemented current educational systems is the Anglo Eurocentric culture or the White race. However, only half of the students at Granger High identify with that dominant race. Culture and race frame life and socialization such that

educational systems privilege a particular culture and race deficit stereotypes become the status quo.

The cultural (race) deficit model contends that minority cultural values, as transmitted through the family, are dysfunctional, and therefore cause low educational and occupational attainment. The model explains that deficient cultural values include: present versus future time orientation, immediate instead of deferred gratification, an emphasis on cooperation rather than competition, and placing less value on education and upward mobility (Solorzano, 2001).

Family

The types of family knowledge, beliefs, and practices are diverse at Granger High. When considering the task of preparing for and completing a college degree the family plays a crucial role in a student's socialization regarding higher education. As schools tackle the task of navigating students through their systems it becomes easy to conclude that their families are to blame for perceived deficiencies. Educational systems need critiquing and change in ways that redefine family engagement. "Most families know very little about high school course offerings...and are less equipped to be effectively involved" (Tierney, 2005). This is due to inherent systemic socialization issues, not because families do not care about the education of their children. Educational systems are structured to privilege high-socio-economic families, and low-socio-economic families are uninformed about college-relevant social networks (Yonezawa, 1997).

Many conclude that students fail in school or do not succeed in college because they lack internal intellectual abilities. Some believe that they fall short because they lack

the motivation or drive to do what it takes. Others have blamed genetics, culture, class, and family as sources of deficits in students (Valencia, 1997). These notions of deficit thinking are oppressive. The reality is that systems, grades, tests, segregation, and laws have historically marginalized individuals and families.

In education, we have programs of ‘compensatory education’ to build up the skills and attitudes of the ghetto child, rather than structural changes in schools...As we might expect the logical outcome of analyzing social problems in terms of deficiencies of the victims is the development of programs aimed at correcting those deficiencies. The formula for action becomes extraordinarily simple: change the victim. (Ryan, 1971)

Educational systems should not blame students and their families for failures. They should believe in all students as they find their voice and change the system for more equitable opportunities.

Peers

Learning and education in American life are social activities. Therefore whom a student identifies with is crucial to the student’s socialization. Students who are systemically marginalized struggle when they hear ideas suggesting that the inequities they experience are caused by luck, fate, God, or themselves. These notions can cause resentment, lack of control, and self destructive behavior. This behavior distances students from their families, culture, and community (Yosso, 2006). It is very common to hear high school students say that friends are the most important thing to them. When a student joins a peer group they adopt the roles, comparisons, developments, and

socializations of that group. These issues have an impact on a student's preparation for college (Tierney, 2005).

Counseling

When high school counselors visit with students they make inferences about them. What a student hears from a counselor concerning classes and college opportunities has a lasting impression. Counseling can make systems of privilege visible. What classes and opportunities counselors tell students about can hinder or foster their academic achievement (Tierney, 2005).

More should be done to build schools that are connected to communities and emphasize high performance for each student in a passionately committed and loving way (Scheurich, 2003). This can be fostered by looking for the deep societal, cultural, historical, and economic forces that have created inequities. Counselors can respond with strategies that reflect the cultural values, traits, and socialization of students (Gay, 2002).

Mentoring

Mentoring occurs when one individual assists another as a personal tutor through an implementation process (Gandara, 2004). Mentoring is one method adopted by many organizations to assist individuals in transitory experiences. With the help of mentors students can better understand what they face and why they have doubts and struggles. Students with low socioeconomic status are at risk of adopting personal views that blame themselves for inequities and demonstrate notions of inability and doubt (Tierney, 2005). What if all students could understand how systems are flawed and how marginalization has occurred historically? What if their differences begin to become their strengths and their deficits become their abilities? What if all students learned to be proactive versus

reactive and embrace conflict rather than avoid it? What if students who have been traditionally marginalized become “empowered with school and community members to envision, define and work toward a more humane society that removes all forms of injustice” (Brown, 2004, p. 98)? Mentoring has not been empirically proven to accomplish such transformations, but some are claiming its ability to assist in the process (Tierney, 2005).

Academics

There is a strong relationship between academic preparation and college enrollment. The highest percentage of high school students who identify as academically prepared for college come from white middle class high schools (Berger, 2004). When a student exhibits success in academics there is a strong predisposition towards college (Tierney, 2005). Understanding the academic rigor and success required is important to each student’s determination to go to college. However, marginalized students are less likely to be placed in rigorous courses (Tierney, 2005) Students of color apply for admissions to college at a lower rate than white students. “White students are more likely to reside in suburban neighborhoods and therefore have better access to educational advantages that aid in making a successful transition into higher education” (Berger, 2004).

Academics are one of the greatest barriers keeping students from attending college. Assisting students through an academically rigorous class schedule is crucial to any college outreach program (Tierney, 2005). An effective outreach program allows all students the opportunity to prepare themselves for college. It is frustrating to see the greatest cost and focus placed on schools that already socialize students to pursue higher

education. Transformative education should occur in communities and schools that have been financially neglected and socially left behind (Neas, 2004).

Deficit stereotypes of students of color are prevalent today. Many spawn racist remarks that cite students' work ethic and lack of desire for education as the reasons they do not go to college, rather than critique the systems and institutions that have fostered the status quo. Glenn Beck a politically conservative CNN reporter made this comment degrading Black Americans, "Real success can be achieved by anybody in America if you just embrace work ethic, decency, and education" (Beck, 2006). In other words, Beck is saying that the system is not broken; Black Americans are. Academic college preparation will not occur if educational systems see students in deficit ways.

Co-Curricular

Substantial research suggests that participation in certain voluntary non-schooling activities, such as student government, or athletic teams, can positively affect high school students' academic attitudes and accomplishments and therefore, indirectly, their prospect for enrollment in a college or university (Tierney, 2005). Many co-curricular activities contributed to students' desire and belief that they can go to college. Typically those who participate in co-curricular activities are also in community, religious, and family functions that socialize them toward higher education. An effective outreach program identifies the privileges of those who do participate in co-curricular activities and challenge those clubs, groups, and teams to adopt ways to include all students rather than those who are traditionally benefited. The danger in this is that many co-curricular groups are the ones that foster the status quo. For example, at Granger the student officers, honors society, Peer Leadership, and cheerleaders dominantly come

from a white middle class status. These students have the privilege, opportunities, funding, and support of parents, administrators, advisors, and community. Students who desire equitable opportunities could start their own activist groups that create change in positive ways (Marshall, 2006). There are many creative ways students can get involved in activities that will benefit their college preparation. AVID has a responsibility to create co-curricular opportunities for marginalized students so they can perceive connection and belonging in their educational system.

Timing and Cost

When a student gains insight about college preparation determines their ability to prepare academically and financially. Many marginalized students go through high school without any information regarding the timing and cost of college. Many students at Granger High are the first student to attend college in their family. When families are not involved timing and cost issues can practically go unnoticed. Many students do not enroll in college because they missed the deadline, forgot to take the ACT, or never knew when those things should be done (Tierney, 2005). Effective outreach programs do not forget the importance of timing and cost and how they relate to students who hear and learn this information exclusively from those helping them in the outreach program.

Critical Race Theory

A theory that assists in analyzing the nine elements of effective outreach is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT identifies elements of marginalization that occur in society (Villalpando, 2001). CRT recognizes that the white race is the most dominantly privileged race in American life. CRT expresses critical skepticism towards color blindness and meritocracy because they favor the white race:

Colorblindness – the refusal to “see” race- is for many Americans a non-negotiable element in a non-racist creed. A key article of that faith is the belief that all Americans share a common situation. According to those who adopt a colorblindness perspective, drawing attention to racial boundaries for any reason is artificial and divisive: we are all simply “Americans...” Refusal to acknowledge color will sometimes mean refusing to recognize the obstacles facing people of color or to see that, depending on the context, different ethnic and racial groups may have distinct needs and interests (Thompson, 1999).

CRT analyzes the historical and contextual challenges that students of color face due to institutional policies. CRT insists on the recognition and experiential knowledge of people of color. CRT works toward eliminating racism and allowing more equitable educational systems for all students.

CRT was utilized in this project by revealing the added layers to each barrier because of race. For example, a white female AVID student may face the barrier of peers who are not academically supportive. However, a female Pacific Islander facing the same barrier might face isolation and cultural confusion. The white female student has a greater chance of finding other white female friends with similar academic pursuits. In AVID there are ten white female students and there are only two female Pacific Islanders. If the Pacific Islander wants her peers to be academically supportive she will more likely need to reach out to non-Pacific Islander friends. Every barrier has an added dimension when looking at race and AVID’s students of color exposed this reality.

History of AVID

Advanced Via Interpersonal Development (AVID) or in the Latin *avidus*: (eager for knowledge) was first implemented as a program in 1980 by Mary Catherine Swanson. She began the program in her own classroom at Clairemont High School in Mission Valley, California. The first students in AVID were 32 freshman in Swanson's English class. According to Moran (2005):

High schools historically have been gatekeepers of a meritocracy, sorting students by their report cards. High performers follow a college preparatory track, and the rest gravitate toward general education, remedial classes or vocational courses...Instead of trying to prevent struggling students from dropping out by giving them repeated doses of basic skills, Swanson proposed putting them into tough courses and giving them extra help to pass the classes.

Swanson created AVID with the hopes of preparing B, C, and D students who wanted to go to college but were not making the grade to go to college. AVID students are encouraged to enroll in AP courses. In their AVID class they learn organizational and study skills, work on critical thinking and asking probing questions, get academic help from peers and college tutors, and participate in enrichment and motivational activities that make college seem possible. Their self-image improves, and they become academically successful leaders and role models for other students. AVID has the potential to change the belief system of an entire school by showing that low-income students and students of color can achieve at the highest levels and attend college.

AVID targets students who are capable of completing rigorous curriculum but are falling short of their potential. Usually AVID students are the first in their families to

attend college, and many are from low-income and/or minority families. In the AVID program nationally 50% of the students involved are Latino/as. Another 20% are black, and 20% are white. The remainder of the ethnic breakdown comes from Native American, Pacific Islander, multi-racial, Filipino, and Asian (www.avidonline.org).

AVID has an established record of bringing out the finest in students, and in closing the achievement gap. Although the United States Supreme Court outlawed segregation in public schools half a century ago, the achievement gap looms over us. According to Guthrie and Guthrie (2002), 89% of AVID students persist in college and 85% are on track to graduate in four to five years. AVID started in one location in 1980 and in 2006 it operates successfully at over 2,300 locations throughout 36 states and 15 countries around the world.

There are different steps within AVID that endeavor to match the nine elements of college preparation described by Tierney (2005). Race, family, and peers are factors in students' acceptance into AVID. AVID identifies and discusses the difficulties of being marginalized by a system that privileges a particular group over others, and provides students with tools for navigating barriers. AVID strives to educate the entire school community on the fallacies created by traditional meritocracies in educational systems (Swanson, 2006). When counseling students AVID takes a critical look beyond models of deficit thinking and unfolds and builds on the assets that individuals bring to education. AVID implements a tutoring process where college students act as mentors for high school students. Academically, AVID pulls students out of unchallenging courses and enrolls them in classes with academic rigor for the particular student. Within the AVID class students review notes and work with tutors as they learn to stretch and prepare for

college course work. AVID students experience co-curricular activities as they participate in class presidencies, after school activities, and community involvement. AVID assists students in gathering information regarding the timing and cost of college: visiting college campuses, providing financial aid and scholarship information, and preparing for college entrance exams.

Issues of College Preparation at Granger High

Granger, Granite, and West High schools paved the way for AVID's implementation in Utah (Erickson, 2006). At Granger the AVID program is funded through the Granite School District's Gear Up Program. It is hoped that AVID will take flight at Granger as students believe in themselves and teachers come to believe in the students. Students are nervous about the work that is ahead of them and teachers need to understand the barriers students face so they can better inform them how to navigate the terrain.

Much can be learned through research about students who are currently in high school. Howe and Strauss (2000) described the behaviors and desires of students eight to twenty-eight years old:

As children of the Baby Boomers, the Millennials have been conditioned to want structure, low risk, teams focused on singular objectives, defined outcomes, and instant gratification – the very opposite attributes to what will be needed for a constantly changing society. The Millennials expect life to provide standard answers and often get confused by the need to determine their own moral and ethical standards and a world where “standardization” as the norm will be a thing of the past. That is why learning how to combine a creative mind with strong

principles of character will continue as a key objective of higher education in the future. (Smyre, 2005)

Although these ideas about students are relevant they focus on those privileged by current educational systems. There are also issues more unique to Granger, some of which have been encountered by others in comparable situations. It would benefit Granger's implementation of AVID to understand the research and learn the experiences of others who have changed educational systems from an arena of false meritocracy to a more equitable space for all students.

Granger has a diverse student body with a variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Granger's student body is 58.83% white, 27.48% Latino/a, 5.67% Asian, 9.47% Pacific Islanders, 1.53% Native American, and 2% Black American (www.graniteschools.org). Granger has a student body of 1,449 students. There are 309 students enrolled in AP courses and 105 of them are students of color. The faculty and staff at Granger are not required to reveal ethnicity; therefore Granite School District does not have that data. However, the faculty, staff, and administration are almost all white. There are ten AVID site team members at Granger and two of them are people of color, one Black and one Native American. There are fifty AVID students at Granger: five are Asian, two are Pacific Islander, 18 are Latino/a, five are Black, and 20 are white.

The majority of administrators, teachers, and students operate on a colorblind notion. This means that the multiplicity of culture is minimized into, "We are all from Granger and we see all students as the same." When this occurs many students are neglected and marginalized because the color that defines equality is white. Research

shows that those who do not understand or resist structures that foster sameness often become frustrated and disconnected. For example, Lee (2004) wrote:

The conditions of students' lives are influenced by race and racism, but students are not simply passive victims. They resist the forces of racial inequality in multiple ways... Their use of strategic essentialism illustrates that identities can be used to challenge and disrupt inequality ... conformity and academic success are strategies for resisting racial stereotypes and gendered inequality. And contrary to the rhetoric of cultural deficiency... families of color continue to resist by providing counter-narratives of possibility. These stories of resistance provide some hope that racial inequalities in our schools will not go uninterrupted or unchallenged.

When educational systems begin seeing the differences of students of color as assets the students begin to believe in themselves. Developing this belief is one reason AVID exists. Race, families, and peer groups constantly define the parameters students bounce between as they try to find their way (Tierney, 2005).

AVID seeks to help all students find their voice by believing in them, helping them become academically competent, by encouraging them, and by treating them not as a member of a group, but as individuals with unique skills, talents, and passions. (Swanson, 2006)

As Granger High and AVID continue to develop equitable ways to assist students in their academic pursuits all students will be seen as assets, instead of deficits, and differences will be seen as opportunities, not excuses. Granger High has the capability of breaking

the achievement gap and becoming a high school that academically prepares all students who desire a college education.

Research Question

What barriers hinder Granger High students from completing the AVID program?

Researcher as Instrument

I attended Granger High as a student and now I teach seminary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at the seminary building adjacent to the high school. I am a first generation college student. I am the youngest of five children. My sister and three brothers all attended college briefly but none of them stayed longer than one year. When it was my turn to go to college I lacked examples and understanding of what it required. In high school I did not take college preparatory courses. I believed that a high grade point average was most important in the admissions process. When I took the ACT test I performed poorly, yet I still was accepted to college. Even though I lacked socialization for higher education in my youth I believed that the opportunities to go to college were there for my taking. I struggled in many areas including money, study habits, and institutional college “know how.” However, my experience was a majoritarian story. Through hard work and determination my dream became a reality: I graduated and became a seminary teacher and am now pursuing a doctoral degree in education at the University of Utah. Educational systems are organized to benefit people with my white privilege, family, religion, and gender. I did face many challenges stemming from my low socioeconomic background, lack of higher education knowledge, and my family work ethic which prioritized jobs over education. I understand that there are barriers that hold people back from higher education on a societal level and I believe it is inaccurate to

blame a lack of higher education on people's motivation or desire. Access issues to higher education are systemic, not simply biological or personal (Jones, 2005).

Because of my experience of going to college and completing my degrees I became interested in the stories of other people. What was hard for them? Why did they stay in college? Why did they get out? Why did they not apply for college? I became interested in socialization and systemic organizations that mold people's lives. I also watched many of my seminary students choose not to go to college. During my course work at the University of Utah I learned ways to understand these trends. I studied with interest Social Justice and how it applies to Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Theory. In short, I began seeing how educational systems are organized to benefit a privileged society. I began seeing the inequities and injustices that haunt our governments and institutions. I realized I saw others through a colorblind lens, meaning I was looking past the layers of inequities and privileges.

I was at a high school reunion talking to a friend who is a Tongan female. She served in student government positions throughout high school. She was popular, hard working, and motivated to succeed in life. When I told her I was working at Granger and how much I enjoyed being at our old high school, she informed me that she would hate it. She said that Granger never did anything for her. I felt hurt and frustrated. I was hearing a counterstory (Yosso, 2006) and realized that even though her grades and accomplishments were greater than mine, I was the one who received the privileges and opportunities of the system. She resented a system that fostered my success and continues to offer me opportunities to serve and belong. She told me that she went to the University of Utah out of high school and quickly realized that she was in no way prepared to

navigate the University. The barriers she faced included course work she had never encountered, family differences, cultural and religious expectations, and a high school that never offered her a chance to understand the deep societal, cultural, historical, and economic forces fighting against her. I wondered what I could do so that educational systems could become more equitable for all students. When I read about AVID in the newspaper (Erickson, 2006) I knew that this was one way I could help. I believe that participating in the AVID program is a way for me to be an agent of change and an advocate for social justice. I believe that public education should give all students a chance - as it gave me. This requires that the system begin seeing students for their individuality and believing in their potential and success in equitable ways.

Participants

This project analyzed the stories of students in Granger's AVID program, focusing on the barriers they experience as they prepare for college by videotaping conversations with these students. I picked ten students from the AVID program who wanted to participate. To recruit students, I personally went to the AVID class and talked about my project and my desire to understand the barriers that students face. One student is in her third year of AVID (two years at Granger, and one year in California). Six students are in their second year and three in their first year. One of the first year students dropped out of AVID half way through the year. Eight of the study participants are female and two are male. All participants come from a low-socio-economic background and are first generation college bound. I selected six students of color because their stories offered different perspectives on the barriers. Each student who participated in the filming of the video completed a form which indicated their interest in the project, their

ethnicity, gender, and whether they are a first or second-year AVID student. Those who participated also signed an informed consent form stating their story can be used in a video that will be used to train AVID teachers, students, tutors, and parents/guardians. All the participants also had a parent/guardian sign the informed consent form. This document was approved by Granite School District (Appendix 1). Linda Bryant is the chair of the AVID program in Granite School District. By her request this video was made for the benefit of all high schools in the Salt Lake Valley implementing the AVID program. Students' experiences inform administrators and teachers of the cultural and racial inequities students face and help those implementing AVID to serve all students and avoid deficit judgments.

All participants preferred to use their first name rather than a pseudonym. No student wanted their face or voice visually and audibly changed to maintain anonymity. Each student agreed that the stories they shared can be included in the video. No student requested the removal of any comments or stories. The students realized how their stories can help others take control of their own education and become agents of change. They were all anxious to share their story. Each student filmed was aware of why they shared their stories and how they could benefit as well as others like them. At no time during the filming did I perceive any risk or vulnerability towards the student during an interview. At no time during the filming did a student say they were uncomfortable or ask that the filming be stopped. This qualitative research project required the students to share real experiences, not sensationalize or demean any individual or group.

Maricela

Maricela is a Latina student in her second year in AVID. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico. She speaks Spanish and English. She is a first generation college bound student. Maricela is excited about the AVID program, but is skeptical of actually completing a college degree because she believes that, “Colleges are for Americans.”

Flor

Flor is a Latina student in her second year in AVID. Her family immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Flor speaks Spanish and English. She is a good student and desires a college degree. She worries that her responsibilities at home might keep her from college. Flor had a baby last year and her family is helping her stay in school and get an education.

Lisa

Lisa was born in Utah and describes herself as Black and Mexican. She prefers to classify herself as Black American because of her physical attributes. Her siblings however, look more Mexican. Lisa gets frustrated always having to explain her ethnicity to teachers. She is Granger’s only third year AVID student, because she had AVID in California before moving back to Utah. Lisa works two jobs and is driven to go to college.

Sasha

Sasha was born in Utah but raised in Atlanta. She is a Black American and a first year AVID student. She recently moved back to Utah to live with her Mother. She has experienced many situations that have exposed her to the injustices of life. Sasha says that many things make her angry and she does not know why. However, listening to her

story reveals and justifies her emotion. Sasha hopes to become a lawyer or enlist in the military. She is skeptical about AVID and wonders if it is making a difference in her college preparation.

Jose

Jose is a first year AVID student. His parents moved from Mexico to California and then to Utah. His mother graduated from college in Mexico and is a chemist; however, she is unable to use her degree in Utah. Jose's father attended college but did not graduate. He speaks highly of his parents' education and his siblings' accomplishments. He expresses gratitude to AVID and all his teachers. Jose sees himself as a leader who effectively influences his friends in their academic pursuits.

Lipeti

Lipeti is Samoan. She participated in AVID for half of last year, and then dropped out. Her culture and family are the most important things in her life and her academic success has distanced her from them. Lipeti is the youngest child and feels pressure from her family to succeed in college. Her parents came to Utah so their children could go to college, but none of them have made it. Many of Lipeti's siblings dropped out of high school. Lipeti describes the struggle between pleasing her parents with good grades and feeling isolated from her Samoan friends. She wants both, and is frustrated with these responsibilities and expectations.

Tasha

Tasha is a second year AVID student. She is White and first generation college bound. Tasha gets frustrated with her parents' expectation that her grade point average is not high enough. She strongly believes that she will go to college and her family will

help. Her friends frequently ask her to skip class; however, she does not let their behavior interfere with her goals. Tasha has complementary things to say about her mother who keeps her on track.

Colby

Colby is a White second year AVID student. His parents did not go to college, but they financially support him and his schooling. Colby is the youngest in his family and his parents seem highly motivated to get their last child to college. His biggest barrier is friends who use drugs and regularly skip school. They are influential in his daily life. He admits his friends are not on a college bound course and he worries about losing them when he goes to college. Colby is in a band and wants to own his own music store. Recently, Colby dropped out of AVID and his parents moved him to a different high school.

Ryane

Ryane is a White second year AVID student. She described many distractions in her life that keep her from achieving her academic potential. Her sister had a baby in high school and she anticipates having a child by the time she is eighteen. Ryane admits she is jealous of her friend who is pregnant. Her father left her family at a young age and she distrusts her step father because of molesting charges towards her step sister. Ryane wants a college degree so she can be rich and famous.

Noelle

Noelle is a White second year AVID student. She lives with her mother and has never known her father. Noelle has gone to schools in Florida, New York, and Utah. She wants to know how to change her economic and societal situation. Noelle does not want

other people to know about the struggles she faces. She sees AVID as a source of answers and solutions. Noelle wants to go to college to learn.

Data Collection

The filming took place at Granger High School with another teacher present at all times. The interviews were taken in four or five intervals focusing on different aspects and content. These intervals were spread throughout several weeks. The interviews and questions followed the curriculum and purpose of AVID. With the cooperation of the AVID instructor interviews were conducted during the AVID class. Each interview interval lasted approximately fifteen minutes to keep students focused and minimize their time away from the AVID class.

The questions I asked to gather students' stories came from the literature and other research that has illuminated potential barriers to effective outreach programs. The questions were adapted from the literature in *Preparing for College* (Tierney, 2005). The list of these questions can be found in Appendix 2. The significance of each topic and question is explained in the literature review. After the personal interviews were completed I filmed two AVID classes and asked similar questions. Although these participants are not named in the video, they signed and agreed to the same consent form as the main participants.

Data Analysis

As I analyzed the interviews I pulled out key stories and phrases that demonstrated the barriers Granger's AVID students face. I categorized these barriers in the video. The purpose of the video is to inform future AVID students, teachers, tutors, parents/guardians, and administrators what students at Granger are facing that hinders

their enrollment, participation, and success in the AVID program. Each person who watches this video will be asked to answer, “What can I do?” The purpose of the video is to identify barriers so others can be educated and informed of the realities students face. Teachers and administrators can see each student’s assets and contributions instead of stereotypical deficits or colorblindness. This video will also help students recognize the barriers they face and how they can use AVID as a tool to give them courage to stand up and find their voice. The training video is almost forty minutes and will be used at schools implementing the AVID program.

As a white male researcher I understand that I represent the race and gender that educational systems are structured to benefit and assist. The purpose of my project is not to tell students of color what they need to do. It would be unethical for me to tell others what their problems are and what they need to do about it. This project was designed so that students can share their experiences in ways that challenge systems that have marginalized them because of socio-economics and race. I believe that these barriers must be exposed and that my effort to let students share their experiences can create doors where there have been walls.

The video will assist teachers, administrators, families, and students as they implement the AVID program. It reveals the barriers students at Granger face as they apply the AVID program towards their college ambitions. AVID wants to help students who have been marginalized by systems of meritocracy and this project can benefit all who desire to change the status quo and become agents of change. Granger can become a school that prepares all students in equitable ways. I believe this project reveals the need for AVID so each student is given tools to successfully prepare for college. This can only

be accomplished if AVID rejects all forms of deficit thinking, racist stereotypes, and white elitism which will offer equitable college preparation for all students.

Findings

This section briefly describes each barrier and how it relates to the students in Granger's AVID program. The video contains the bulk of the findings content, while this paper summarizes the findings and is intended to be a supplement to the video.

Many Granger students face inequities in life and in the educational system. This project helped expose the barriers that are unique to AVID students at Granger High. Out of the nine elements of effective outreach (Tierney, 2005) six are evident as continued barriers to student success in AVID: race, family, peers, counseling, mentoring, and academics. Family is classified as a barrier because of the students' perception. Families are not acting as barriers, but some students see them as such, often blaming their families for their struggles. Their responses indicated strong family support; however, when addressing issues of academics and higher education experience they blamed their families. Three barriers that AVID seems to be successfully resolving at Granger are: co-curricular, timing, and cost.

Co-curricular

During the interviews it was evident that AVID has created an appropriate co-curricular environment for all students.

If extracurricular activities can be a means of bringing ... students more into school engagement and increasing their chance of future school success...those activity programs may foster important personal, interpersonal, and intellectual

skills in students that can help them remain in school and successfully advance in postsecondary educational studies. (Shieh, 2002)

Granger's AVID program has filled this need for many students by engaging them in activities, fieldtrips, and socials that foster appropriate academic involvement. Although AVID students are not student body officers, cheerleaders, or Peer Leadership Team members, they are actively involved. Gear Up is the program that funds AVID at Granger. Gear Up provides AVID students with field trips and college campus visits. AVID students plan, prepare, and take on leadership roles in these activities. Maricela noted, "Because of my after school activities I see myself as a leader."

Timing and Cost

When a Granger High student participates in the AVID program they are provided with information regarding the timing and cost of college preparation. AVID students are regularly informed about ACT testing, scholarship applications, financial aid, and job opportunities to work with college students. AVID tutors come from the University of Utah and students ask them questions. The AVID class meets with the Career Counseling Center once a term and they show the students the information they need. Linda Bryant is the director of AVID and Gear Up for Granite School District and she visits the schools regularly offering information about scholarships and higher educational opportunities.

AVID gets students to enroll in the program in the ninth grade and follows them throughout their college preparation. Many students had limited and/or no information regarding the timing and cost of higher education until they participated in AVID. In fact, many students said that this information was the biggest perceived benefit of belonging to the AVID program.

Race

Consistent with the tenants of CRT this project insisted on the recognition of experiential knowledge of people of color (Villalpando, 2001). In the remaining six barriers it is evident that students of color have added layers to decode as they attempt to navigate a system that was not created for their success. AVID's goal is to assist students as they navigate an educational system that has not traditionally benefited their college preparation. Although race is only one barrier, using CRT as a lens to view each element, the privilege of the white race in the American educational system is clear.

When interviewing white students it was evident that they received information and opportunities that students of color did not, such as: honors classes, transcript information, after school activities, and college requirements. When I asked Colby and Tasha if they knew in ninth grade their grades counted on college transcripts they responded, "Yes." When I asked Maricela and Flor if they knew in ninth grade their grades would be included they said, "No." Lisa and Sasha informed me that they had to push administrators to get into honors and AP classes while their white classmates were approached and guided into the more rigorous courses. One AVID teacher informed me that AVID should not focus on students of color, but should enroll the current honors and AP students at Granger. His reasoning was, "The current AVID students are not your typical college bound students and Granger's honors and AP students would accept the help more readily." Granger's AVID program has fifty students and thirty of them are students of color. Out of 309 students in the AP program, 204 are white. The student body comprises 47.17% students of color. Granger needs to focus more on their students of color, not less.

Throughout all barriers it is evident that race has an effect of the barrier. In other words, students of color have an added layer in each barrier. In the video this fact is recognized as each student of color shares their experience. It is important while watching the video to recognize the added barriers to students of color in the educational system. Granger High School has a diverse student body and racism is evident in the responses of the students of color that I interviewed. Racism is the inherent superiority of a particular race (Merriam-Webster, 2002). Whites who show a desire for academics find that the educational system works to their advantage. Stereotypes and societal prejudices leak their way into the halls and classrooms at Granger. Maricela and Flor informed me that, “college is for Americans.” Lisa and Sasha revealed to their AVID class that college will work for them, “if they act white.”

The mission of AVID is to ensure that the least served students can complete a college preparatory path. Students who are not members of the privileged race experience racism everyday. White people, for the most part, are oblivious to racism. Colby stated that, “minority students believe they are the type to do labor jobs...they have the potential to go to college if they just push themselves.” It is not evident to white students that the problem is systemic so they blame the work ethic of students of color.

Family

“The traditional practices of White middle-class parents are often treated as the standard of what counts as (family) involvement” (Tierney, 2005). Many students seemed to blame their family for their lack of educational experience. However, most students also expressed the anticipation and hope their parents had for their educational success. Students described caring homes that reward and encourage academic success. Some

seemed to demonstrate a “last hope” notion: “if I do not get to college then I have failed my family.” Students and their families have experienced the socialization reality of higher education benefiting high socio-economic families. Most of the students I interviewed were the youngest child in families where each older sibling, like the parents, did not make it to college. Students of color described situations of immigration, countless hours of labor jobs, and financial sacrifices to keep them in school. AVID needs to do more to help students understand their family culture, family expectations, and family involvement. AVID can assist by showing students how families participate in their education beyond the end of year social (Tierney, 2005). Family is a barrier if the students perceive their family as such. Families with a low socioeconomic status, and parents of color, “support their children’s schooling with ‘invisible strategies’ behind the scenes that are not recognized by the school, such as verbal encouragement and financial sacrifice” (Tierney, 2005). Each student recognized these sacrifices and their parental support, but still seemed to blame their family for their lack of understanding and academic knowledge.

Peers

Each student I interviewed expressed a frustration with peers who are not preparing themselves for college. The AVID students seemed to be a lone example among their friends. They spoke of friends who are truant for many hours during school. Students are faced with drugs, teen pregnancy, and failing report cards. Students described an internal battle between being accepted by their friends and being involved in academics and college preparation. When I asked the students if they could have friends and prepare for college they said, “Not really,” “It would be hard,” and “I need to make

new friends.” Students of color experienced a change of friendship groups that resulted in non-acceptance and loneliness from their culture. It appeared for them to be a constant attempt to balance between family expectations, cultural acceptance, and academics. This balance seemed almost impossible for Lipeti. She desired to have a mentor, someone who could give her some answers, or help, and she said that being accepted by her Samoan friends is the most important thing.

Counseling and Mentoring

I have combined these two barriers because students responded similarly to them. The students replied that information regarding college preparation has come from AVID. They spoke of teachers who have fulfilled this role. However, there is a common theme of distrust or lack of communication between teachers and students. Several students reiterated that they do not seek teachers’ help with college preparation. Many students said that they do not, and will not, ask for teachers’ help on assignments. Sasha told a teacher that she was having a few problems at home and needed some help on an assignment and a few days later the Department of Children and Family Services came to her home. Lisa said the same thing occurred to her. Ryane acknowledged, “If I ask for help I will feel stupid, like I do not belong in class.” Noelle admitted, “It’s like I don’t have the right questions and I don’t know where to look.”

AVID students need peers who have successfully entered college and are on track to graduate. Granger has not had AVID graduates, so students’ skepticism regarding the program is high. Many of the college tutors who come to Granger attended White middle class high schools. Lipeti acknowledged, “I need someone who knows what I’m going through.” Students who come from low socioeconomic areas are at risk of adopting

personal views that blame themselves for inequities and demonstrate notions of inability and doubt (Tierney, 2005). Students revealed a dichotomy between believing they could attend college and accepting the status quo, like their parents and siblings. It is hard for them to trust others when they are struggling to trust themselves and doubting their own abilities. Students described a need for teachers and tutors who understand the inequities they face and know how to assist them in their efforts to work the educational system to their benefit. Cobby acknowledged, "I do not want to be in AVID if all they tell me is how I'm not getting it." The students want to believe that they can get to college. They know the system has not worked for them, they desire an understanding of how to change it. When that is not clear they are skeptical of the information they are given. For example, several students asked, "How are tutor groups really helping?" and, "What do our AVID binders have to do with getting to college?"

Academics

Academic preparation is one of the greatest barriers keeping students from attending college. The students I interviewed acknowledged frustration with their academic pursuits. They know they have the ability and resources to get good grades, but their environment and socializations have not prepared them. Each student described a struggle to get the work accomplished and have the time, help, and energy to change habits. Some seemed aggravated with stereotypes and deficit comments regarding their laziness and desire. Sasha revealed verbal attacks at home regarding her inability to graduate and get to college. All the students spoke of the reality that parents and siblings fail to help with the academic rigor they are experiencing. While listening to their stories, it was clear to me that they are working hard and wondering when it will pay off. Many

students work thirty hour weeks in jobs outside the home. Lisa and Sasha help pay the family bills. They are in honors and AP classes for the first time. At the top of these responsibilities they are attempting to change the mind set that society, stereotypes, and economics have established for them since birth.

Conclusion

Granger's AVID students blamed themselves, family, friends, and teachers for their lack of academic preparation. They did not demonstrate an understanding of the historical and sociological barriers that educational systems create. More can be done to help Granger students recognize the systemic barriers that exist for low socioeconomic status students and students of color. The students of color described deficit stereotypes and racist remarks that criticize work ethic and lack of desire for education. Students of color at Granger experience all forms of racism: overt comments, insinuated prejudices, and systemic racism. These realities coupled with the need for academic preparation create an overwhelming burden. Each student wanted to believe that these remarks were untrue, but their fear of failure and the realization that they are becoming like their parents and siblings scares them from even trying (Gandara, 2004). "Academic success is equated with 'acting white,'" (Tierney, 2005) at Granger and it should be the goal of AVID students to change that false equation. AVID was created to assist the least served students and the Granger students need a clearer understanding of the systemic privileges of the education system and how to bend that system for their college preparation. Learning these skills in high school will better prepare them for success in college. This is one reason that nationally AVID graduates have such a high college completion rate (Guthrie, 2002).

Recommendations

The AVID program is much needed at Granger High. The mission and methodologies that AVID teaches have been shown to be effective tools for battling the barriers that students face. AVID can assist Granger as it works to become a low socioeconomic high school that gets its students to college. I do not believe that AVID will erase systemic racism or elitist privilege, but it can assist in helping students navigate the barriers they face as they prepare for college. AVID works because it puts power into the hands of students and gives them a platform for sharing their voices and revealing systems of privilege and methods for getting that system to change.

Granger is still in the implementation phases of AVID. The students are struggling to see how AVID's methodologies are preparing them academically and to push a system to work on their behalf. Students are currently seeing AVID as a cog in a machine that will look good on a resume and possibly give them a scholarship. AVID is not meant to be a program to mechanically produce student widgets. AVID's purpose is to give space for all students to discover their own voice and their own potential. It would be easier for AVID to tell the students what to do and what is expected; however, the transformative process takes time and students, teachers, and tutors are learning this process together.

Based of the findings from this project, I want to make a few specific recommendations for Granger's AVID site team. The recommendations are: teach the students about racism, especially systemic racism, let the students discover the support of their family, hire tutors who act as mentors, and be adamant regarding academic preparation.

Race

It was intentional that race was the first barrier I analyzed and that utilized CRT as a lens for understanding all of the barriers. Race and culture are central to conceptualizing the “underpinnings of personal, social, and systemic factors that interact in complex ways to mediate access to college” (Tierney, 2005). Most college outreach programs do not address the cultural identities and needs of students. AVID is not a program that should reframe the question, “How do we get students of diverse backgrounds to think and act like middle-class Anglo students?” (Tierney, 2005) My recommendation is that the AVID site team, especially teachers and tutors, read about and understand systemic racism. I recommend Scheurich and Young’s (1997) article on Coloring epistemologies. This article explains the layers of racism: individual, institutional, societal, and civilizational racism. As the article states,

One of the worst racisms...for any generation or group is the one that we do not see, that is invisible to our lens – the one we participate in without consciously knowing or intending it...people do not have to be racist – or have any malicious intent – in order to make decisions that unfairly harm members of another race. (Scheurich, 1997)

After reading the article it is important that the AVID site team engage in appropriate conversations about racism so questions can be answered and understanding achieved. These conversations should not be a one time occurrence. In order that they occur it would be suitable to have a qualified guest speaker attend the AVID site team meeting and offer other literature, answer questions, give ideas, and insights regarding

systemic racism. As the AVID site team understands the realities of racism they will be better suited to assist students that are navigating the educational system.

Family

The way family is conceptualized in the minds of students is important to their beliefs about themselves (Tierney, 2005). The AVID program at Granger needs to implement a family component that goes beyond minimal participation. AVID must help each student recognize the support of their family, however that family is defined. AVID should not let the White middle-class practices define the standard for family involvement (Tierney, 2005). Students should value the verbal encouragement, work hours, and immigration experiences of their family. They should see these sacrifices as opportunities, not excuses. This component is difficult because society does not recognize these efforts as family involvement in education. As students learn to change their deficit notions about their families, they will change those notions about themselves. I believe AVID can be a place to begin changing that perception. An article that can assist further in this understanding is the *Evolution of Deficit Thinking* (Valencia, 1997). It explains that schools systems need to stop changing the child and begin changing the system so children are seen as assets, not deficits. As AVID students begin seeing their family in positive ways the blaming and excuses towards their family will become less. As AVID facilitates the process of changing the students' perception of their families the students will be better prepared to help themselves.

Mentors

A great component of the AVID program is the college student tutors. However, if the tutors begin seeing themselves as the teacher, they cease to fulfill their role. Several

students acknowledged the need to have more examples of people who have overcome similar barriers and are pursuing a college degree. AVID tutors should be this example. However, because most of the tutors come from a middle class high school, there is a disconnection between some of the students and the tutors. My recommendation is that tutors take on more of a mentor or cheerleader role. Tutors should be required to read Scheurich and Young (1997) and Valencia (1997). Efforts should be made to hire tutors who are college students of color. This possibility will increase once Granger gets AVID graduates into college, who can return to the program in the mentor role.

Academics

Academic preparation has the clearest empirical support for its contribution to college enrollment and completion (Tierney, 2005). Most of AVID's efforts are geared toward appropriate academic preparation. However, students view most of these efforts as needless, such as binders and notes. The AVID students complain about these efforts and their effectiveness. It is clear that at Granger the relationship between AVID's methodologies and students' academic preparation is weak. Efforts should be made to increase students' understanding of the academic transformation that is required, rather than systematic obedience to binders and the number of note pages produced.

Sasha and another student spoke of enlisting in the military and several want two year trade degrees rather than four year college degrees. I recommend that the goal for each AVID student should be a four year university. If an AVID student chooses something different they should be commended for their choice, however; AVID's goal should be towards the university. Many students from Granger choose a job over education. When they have experienced low income situations most of their life it is hard

to pass up employment opportunities. AVID should help students discover their ambitions and learn how education can enhance their opportunities. Academics are more than means to a job and AVID students would benefit from discovering the possibilities each field of study offers. Guest speakers can visit the AVID class and speak on the potential education brings beyond a career. If employment is the only relevance to a degree then it will be easy for some students to accept a job that could cut their educational pursuits short.

Watching the Video

The barriers this project reveals are real and difficult to overcome. My main recommendation is to ask Granger's AVID site team to watch the video and seek to understand the stories of AVID students and the barriers they describe. As each site team member watches the video I recommend they take Cornell notes. The Cornell note taking method is taught to every AVID student and they are required to take notes in this format in every class. At the bottom of every Cornell notes is a place to reflect and summarize. After watching the video and taking notes, take time to write questions and then write a reflective essay answering this question. "What will I do as an AVID site team member to help all students overcome the barriers they are facing?" I would also recommend that each participant briefly share with the team what they are going to do (Appendix 3).

What Will I Do?

This project has meant a lot to me and my education at the University of Utah. After filming, editing, and finalizing this training video I have become more dedicated to listening and understanding. As an educator I want to help others as they pursue knowledge and live their lives. I want to expose systems of privilege that marginalize

students and foster racism. I believe that listening to others and unpacking my own privilege is crucial for a transformation to occur. This project has increased my awareness of injustices that exist in American life. This project has helped me ask more questions rather than give unsupported answers. When dealing with faculty members who spawn stereotypes and deficit remarks I am encouraged to ask them questions and offer literature to read that reveals the oppression of their views. I will continue to study and learn cultural ways of teaching that foster the assets of all cultures. I will present my video and training to the Granger AVID site team. My hope is that other AVID site teams will want to see the video and make changes in ways that benefit all students.

Appendix 1**Interested in participating in a video?****Barriers preparing for college at Granger High**

If you are interested in being interviewed about your personal experiences regarding college preparation please fill out this form and return it to the AVID teacher next time you meet.

You will be filmed answering questions about your experiences related to college preparation. This film will be used to inform teachers, administrators, families, and students about the barriers that exist in preparing for college. As barriers are understood educational systems can change and individuals will be benefited. Your experiences are real and important to discovering your voice. As the AVID program seeks to assist you in your college preparation understanding these barriers will help yourself and others.

Name _____

Age _____

Ethnicity _____

Circle the one that applies

Year in AVID – First / Second

Gender - Female / Male

Signature of Student _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____

Appendix 2

Interview Questions and Topics

Culture

- Where were you born?
- How long have you lived in Utah?
- Tell me about your parent's education?
- Why did you or your family move to Utah?
- What are the strengths of your culture?
- What do you like most about your culture?
- What challenges have you faced because of your culture?
- What has your culture taught you about men/women?
- Where do you feel the most support?

Family

- How has your family been involved in your schooling?
- In what ways are your parent(s) or guardian(s) involved?
- What about siblings, cousins, grandma's, or grandpa's?
- How do they help with AVID?
- What aspirations does your family have for you?

Peer Groups

- How would you define your peer group?
- What qualities does your peer group embrace?
- What hazards does your peer group face?
- How do you see your peer group influencing you?

- What backgrounds does your peer group come from?
- How has AVID become a positive/negative peer group?

Counseling Experiences

- What things have teachers or counselors said to you that made you believe/disbelieve that you could go to college?
- What classes or experiences in school have you had that helped you believe/disbelieve that you could go to college?

Mentoring

- What mentors have you had and how have they helped in your education?
- Did these mentors help you navigate a system through resistance or compliance?
- Did these mentors come from your situation, culture, race, or socioeconomic?
- How were they effective/ineffective?

Experience with Academics

- Were you successful in academics in the past?
- What contributed to your success/frustrations?
- What was your hardest class and why?
- In what ways do you learn best?
- Give me an example of when you clicked with a class and why?

Co-curricular Activities

- What co-curricular activities are/have you been involved in?
- What did you enjoy about the activities you helped with?
- Did you see yourself as a leader?
- Why or why not?

Timing and Cost

- When did you first feel you were being prepared for college?
- How have you financially prepared yourself for college?
- How has your family helped?

Appendix 3

Cornell Notes

AVID: Barriers to Success

Date:	Name:
<i>Questions</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>What will I do?</i>	

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