Senior Seminar for College Success

A successful Senior Seminar will prepare high school seniors for college by acclimating them to all aspects of the college application, selection, orientation, and enrollment process. The seminar is designed to guide students through those stages in “real time” as they’re actually experiencing them throughout their 12th grade year. By high school graduation, students will be prepared for the academic, financial, and emotional demands of college through intensive discussion and activities pertaining to these issues.

The major goals of the seminar are to prepare students for the work of getting into college and completing all of the logistical steps involved—this is Conley’s aspect of “guidance” providing “access” to college ([2007](http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el200704_conley.pdf)). These lessons should occur in “real time” as the tasks are occurring and the actual deadlines are coming up all throughout the academic year. More important, though, are the lessons in college preparation relating to mindset, attitude, and college culture. These lessons are what Conley defines as “academic” or “success” lessons, and should be given all throughout the year. We believe that the success lessons are the most important for preparing students for the socioemotional transition to college. These are the hardest skills to attain, and they can only really be learned experientially, using the growth-mindset approach, where students’ progress in these lessons is gauged through their actual experience in such matters.

It is important to emphasize that this curriculum is designed to address the socioemotional aspects of academic success first and foremost. While at least forty-five high schools have their own versions of senior seminars that cover college-preparation tasks, the valuable contribution of the curriculum we’re offering here is to provide a socioemotional framework for a seminar that emphasizes both (1) Growth Mindset and (2) Stereotype Threat. We believe that instruction in a Growth Mindset approach early on—helping students to see their minds as malleable (rather than fixed), and their problem-solving abilities as able to grow and adjust with continued practice—is essential to helping students succeed in the face of the new challenges they’ll face in college. We believe that students’ ability to challenge and overcome Stereotype Threat—the harmful mental constructs that are tied directly to identity-based stereotypes—in all the various forms that may impede their ability to succeed in college, is directly tied to the embracing of a Growth Mindset. On the one hand, the seminar will help students to complete the tasks association with college selection, application, and academic preparation. On the other hand, and even more importantly, the seminar will empower students to succeed in college by showing them new and constructive ways to perceive their own abilities to solve problems and overcome challenges.

The seminar is divided into four sections, each corresponding to a different academic quarter and correlating to a different major stage in the college-preparation process:

* Choosing a College
* Applying to College
* Preparing for College
* Understanding College Culture

While each of these sections is designed to stand alone, and the task-related content is intended to correlate with the various stages of the college application and preparation process, instructors may choose to use any of the curricula that they see fit all throughout the academic year. The discussion topics, class activities, and homework assignments herein are merely suggestions, and instructors may choose to adopt or dispense with any of them according to their needs.