Higher Education Minority Gap

Cabrillo’s S4C partners with College Spring

Nonprofit offers free SAT prep and college counseling

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APTOS — When sunshine and beach days beckon, spending five weeks in a Cabrillo College classroom learning about the SAT and college admissions may not sound like an ideal summer for the typical high school student.

But these are not typical high school students.

Forty-four incoming seniors from six Santa Cruz County high schools were hand-picked by their school counselors to participate in the College Spring program and receive free college counseling, SAT preparation and mentorship from UCSC students. These high school students demonstrated not only financial need, but also high academic potential.

College Spring, a San Francisco-based nonprofit directed at closing the minority gap in higher education, partners with local entities across the Bay Area and Los Angeles. This partnership with Santa Cruz County College Commitment (S4C) at Cabrillo College is the program’s first foray into the Central Coast. S4C, a county collaborative aimed at college and career readiness, has tentative plans to expand the partnership to serve 120 students across the county next July.

“This is an experiment for us, but it doesn’t feel like a risky decision,” said Ray Kaupp, executive director of S4C. “Historically by going through this class, a student would expect to score 180 points higher (on their SAT).

We’ll see what our results are for our community, but that’s a pretty impressive track record and they’ve done it with thousands of students.”

College Spring’s theory is that higher SAT test scores and college admissions guidance will help low-income students get into better colleges. That may only be part of the larger puzzle, however. Graduating and being ready to start a career is the ultimate goal, which requires skills beyond just the technical part, according to Kaupp.

“One of the things we’ve heard from the community is that our grads aren’t ready to start careers,” Kaupp said. “(A portion of college readiness is) what some people call soft skills, the idea that you do what you say you’re going to do, you show up on time for stuff, you’re reliable, you’re trustworthy, you know how to work with other people and know how to function as a human.”

“I think it’s a place where we need to be doing the most work.”

Chris Gerro, an incoming senior at UCSC, works as a mentor for College Spring. “I’m enjoying my experience so far,” Gerro said. “In high school I was involved in AVID (a similar program) so the things I went through, I feel similar.” Gerro said he plans to be the first in his family to graduate college next June. Others in his family have started college, but didn’t graduate.

“I definitely had determination, so I probably would have gone to college, but without (that program) I probably would not have gotten into UCSC.”

Damaris Garcia, a student at Harbor High School, also plans to be the first in her family to graduate college. She moved to Santa Cruz from Oaxaca, Mexico, with her family 10 years ago. She plans to become a psychologist.

“I think (College Spring) is really helpful,” Garcia said. “(With mentor Chris Gerro) we’ve talked about the myths about the admissions process, and if we have a failing grade, it’s like don’t worry, it’s OK you can still go to college.”

Garcia has the support of both her parents, both of whom work as cooks in local restaurants. “They’re always making sure what they can help me with, they’re there,” Garcia said.

Garcia’s mother, Gloria Martinez, talks to her daughter every day about the importance of college.

“I’m so proud of her because she’s doing her best,” Martinez said.

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