

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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Morehead State University

April 4, 2022

TRIO COLLEGE NAVIGATOR: COLLEGE PREPARATION SITE

Abstract of Capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
Ernst and Sara Lane Volgenau College of Education
At Morehead State University

By

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Morehead, Kentucky

Committee Chair: Dr. Lenora J. Justice, Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

April 4, 2022

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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

TRIO COLLEGE NAVIGATOR: COLLEGE PREPARATION SITE

College preparation resources to support academic and college success have the potential to decrease challenges students often face when preparing for college. TRIO programs, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, were introduced in the 1960s as part of the fight on the war on poverty to make the college experience more accessible to low income and first-generation students. The TRIO College Navigator is a college preparation site that seeks to address barriers that might exist with high school students wanting to go to college by providing them with best practices for navigating college preparation and academic success. The TRIO College Navigator includes, but is not limited to, information grouped in the following four modules: High School Success, Navigating the College Process, Navigating Financial Aid, and College Success.

Resources bridge the gap of underserved student populations by taking into consideration the values and beliefs of predominately low-income communities. Careful consideration was taken in developing resources to address barriers that these high school students face when deciding on going to college.

When implemented, the TRIO College Navigator will be available for all ninth to twelfth-grade participants in the Morehead State University Upward Bound Programs. To participate in these programs, students are required to meet federal income guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Education or be first-generation.

First generation means that neither parent has completed a four-year college degree.

While the focus will be on low-income and first-generation students (LIFG), the TRIO College Navigator has the ability to positively impact student populations outside of the target student population and the 17 targeted school districts which are Bath, Boyd, Carter, Elliott, Fleming, Harrison, Johnson, Lawrence, Lewis, Mason, Magoffin, Menifee, Montgomery, Morgan, Nicholas, Robertson, and Rowan counties.

KEYWORDS: Barriers, TRIO, Success, College, Preparation

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Fred and Wendy Isaac: You have always been my greatest supporters. Thank you for always believing in me. Your love and support got me through some tough times, giving me the strength I needed to shoulder the demand of this doctoral journey while working full-time. You deserve so much more than the words on this page. I love you both to the moon and back, and I will be forever grateful for all that you have done for me.

To my “Power Rangers” (aka Team EdTech): Thank you for countless hours of telling me things would be okay, and for the encouragement through this entire process. You have been one of the greatest group of people I have ever met, and I am honored to have met you. In this journey, you have become like family – a safe space to laugh and to vent. I will cherish our friendship for life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who has played a part in helping to turn my dream of completing my doctorate a reality. While I can't list everyone, there are several people who deserve acknowledgement for their role in this journey. To my brother Derek, as your Big Brother, I am so proud of you and thank you for always screaming the loudest and for being by my side for every milestone. To my nieces Madison and Alissa. Uncle Baba loves you very much and thank you for sharing your time. I will forever be grateful for all the love and support you have given me. I hope this accomplishment makes you proud of me.

To my Upward Bound family, you have supported me since day one when I was a scared high school freshman making sense of world. You are the reason I had the confidence to complete my doctoral journey. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I sometimes didn't and for giving guidance over the year. Thank you for the countless hours of laughter, encouragement, love and support.

A huge thank you to my doctoral committee. Dr. Bailey and Dr. Hughes, thank you for your time and dedication in assisting me with the creation of this capstone. To my doctoral chair, Dr. Justice, words could not describe how much I appreciate having you in my circle. You are a mentor, a coach, and one of the most caring professors I have ever had. Your dedication to my success and encouragement over the years has made this journey a blessing. Thank you for all you do!

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is the core of the capstone?

Low-income and first-generation students (LIFG) are often faced with challenges that make college seem like a distant dream, not the least of which is a lack of self-confidence when it comes to feeling academically, socially, financially prepared for higher education. The core of this capstone project seeks to address the achievement gap by focusing on college and career readiness by providing LIFG high school students with robust how-to guides based on best practices for navigating college preparation and academic success via an easy-to-use website. The development of this capstone is a result of the gaps in college readiness observed in my students during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Looi et al. (2010) suggest that “One of the fundamental challenges for 21st century learners is not only what they learn, but also how and when they learn” (p. 2). Thus, this capstone project, known as the TRIO College Navigator, provides students with a resource to aid in navigating the college process throughout high school. The TRIO College Navigator includes four modules explained more in depth throughout this capstone:

- High School Success
- Navigating the College Process
- Navigating Financial Aid
- College Success

The TRIO College Navigator can make the college admissions process more accessible for students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds by making the college admissions process clearer, provide academic support, and provide next steps in addressing barriers that many families see as a challenge with pursuing higher education. This project focuses on students who are classified as being either low-income, which is defined by the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE), as an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount, or first-generation, meaning that neither parent has obtained a four-year college degree (OPE, 2020). Providing resources to this targeted group is intended to be a guide to assist them through the college process and address barriers that could potentially hinder success (Saenz et al., 2015). Consequently, the TRIO College Navigator focuses on developing a clearer overview of the college experience, as well as academic support while in high school. This is achieved through the development of how-to guides that provide skills, tips, and tricks to prepare students for college while also building transferable skills to compete in a global economy.

In addition, the TRIO College Navigator could potentially address barriers with guides on how to read curriculum maps, how to research college admission requirements, how to understand the cost of attendance information, as well as how to understand the key dimensions of the financial undertaking that is associated with going to college such as resources for understanding student aid reports and award letters. Inclusion of these materials can help increase performance with the rigorous

courses they will take while in college by helping them to understand where they are in the college process and provide early intervention strategies to support college completion. Guides are designed to bridge the gap of underserved student populations by taking into consideration the values and beliefs of predominately low-income communities. Careful consideration is taken in developing resources to address barriers that high school students face when deciding to go to college.

Who is the capstone meant to impact?

This capstone project targets ninth through twelfth-grade participants in the Morehead State University Upward Bound Programs representing seventeen school districts: Bath, Boyd, Carter, Elliott, Fleming, Harrison, Johnson, Lawrence, Lewis, Mason, Magoffin, Menifee, Montgomery, Morgan, Nicholas, Robertson, and Rowan counties. In order to participate, students are required to either meet federal income guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Education or to be a first-generation college student. First generation, more specifically, means that neither parent of the college student has completed a four-year college degree.

Tate et al. (2015) indicates that low-income and first-generation students (LIFG) have historically less guidance and resources to support educational attainment and career development. Lack of resources and opportunity prevent many students from going to college out of fear. LIFG students often lack confidence when it comes to feeling prepared for college due to the lack of supportive guidance needed to understand and move through the process and address other barriers that could hinder success (Saenz et al., 2015). For these reasons, the design of the TRIO College

Navigator is centered on LIFG students but has the potential to impact the entire student population of ninth through twelfth--grade students in the targeted districts' school communities.

LIFG students are the most underserved and least informed population when it comes to financial aid and scholarship opportunities and often struggle with navigating work and paying for school (Engle & Pell, 2008). Data provided by The Center for First-Generation Student Success showed that 66% of first-generation students enrolled in post-secondary education were employed in addition to going to school full time (RTI International, 2019). According to data provided by U.S. Census Bureau (2021), only 15.4% of adults over age 25 in our targeted school districts have completed a bachelor's degree (BA) or higher, while only 22.6% of adults over age 25 in the target area have an associate degree or higher. The BA completion rate in the target area is 8.8% lower than the state average of 24.2%, and 16.7% lower than the national average of 32.1%. The AS completion rate is 9.9% lower than the state average of 32.5%, and 18% lower than the national average of 40.6%.

The potential impact of this capstone project goes beyond the classroom. Many families are hesitant for their children to go to college due to the financial barriers and debt that students will likely acquire. Among Kentucky's low-income students, immediately enrolling in college after graduating from high school is down 14.9%, and this trend is expected to continue to decline over the next several years due to the economic consequences of COVID-19. (Kentucky Labor Force, 2021). The

TRIO College Navigator includes information to provide a better understanding of the financial undertaking associated with obtaining a degree as well as the student's likelihood of going to college due to financial struggles faced within their communities.

The impact of this capstone can potentially also reach school counselors, college coaches, administrators, and parents because the information is online and available at any time. High school guidance counselors, P-12 teachers, and college coaches can effectively incorporate the TRIO College Navigator into materials provided to students seeking support in preparing for college. In addition, P-12 teachers can provide consistent, reliable guidance to their students using the site as a supplement for increasing college access resources in low-income communities.

How will the capstone project be implemented?

Creating the TRIO College Navigator

A prototype of the TRIO College Navigator site was completed using Google Sites. The domain (tricollegenavigator.com) allows for easy access for TRIO programs that could potentially use the resource in the future development of the site. For the capstone project, 34 individual guides and 41 pages were developed across the 4 main categories, with an additional page devoted to a College Lingo glossary. Below is a site map to highlight the included materials in the TRIO College Navigator. Please see page 13 for a list of figures.

I. Splash Page

(a) Site Navigation

II. High School Success

- (a) High School Success Splash Page
- (b) Postsecondary Education: Overview/What is your Why?
- (c) Reading a HS Transcript

III. College Process

- (a) College Process Tools Splash Page
- (b) Finding the Right Fit
- (c) College Entry Exams
- (d) Kentucky Public Universities
 - i. University at a Glance Pages for each University (7)
- (e) College Applications
 - i. College Applications Splash Page
 - ii. Applying to Colleges
- (f) Picking your Top Choices
- (g) Transferring from a 2-year to 4-year institution

IV. Financial Aid

- (a) Financial Aid Splash Page
- (b) What is Financial Aid
 - i. What is Financial Aid Splash Page
 - ii. Available Financial Aid
 - iii. Federal Student Aid Overview
- (c) FAFSA

- i. FAFSA Splash Page
 - ii. Pre-FAFSA Completion
 - iii. FSA ID
 - iv. Understanding Verification
 - v. FAFSA Completion
 - vi. FAFSA Next Steps
 - vii. Understanding Student Aid Reports
 - viii. Understanding Award Letters
- V. College Success
 - (a) Finding Support (Where do I go if I need help)
 - (b) Course Registration
 - (c) Commuter Tips
 - (d) Tips for Perfecting the College Essay
 - (e) Sample Resume
 - (f) Sample Cover Letter
- VI. College Terms to Know
 - (a) College Lingo

The design and development of the above pages within the TRIO College Navigator use cloud-based services through Google Workspace for Education using Google Drive and a registered domain for access (tricollegenavigator.com). This platform was chosen due to access being readily available for students to access the site across multiple devices (Android, iPhone, MacOS and Windows). It also allowed

the ability to limit usage to those who have the link to access it since Upward Bound participants of the Morehead State University Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math Science programs have access to Google Workspace for Education through secured channels.

Beta-testing

Once the site was generated and content was successfully uploaded, the site was beta tested by administrative staff for the program. Testing included navigating through the site to determine any potential issues and looking for additional areas of need in the content. Modifications were made throughout this process to ensure usability, quality of content, and that interfaces were working properly at time of submission for committee and chair feedback. This data is for the purpose of potential modifications to the TRIO College Navigator. Assistance was used only for improvements to the site and to ensure proper launch of the capstone project.

The TRIO College Navigator will first be available to all ninth through twelfth-grade participants in the Morehead State University Upward Bound Programs. The site will be beta-tested for at least one academic year to gather information about potential updates, new guides, and support. Guides from the TRIO College Navigator will be incorporated into school visit lessons to supplement instruction. Students will be trained prior to provide them a overview of the site. User feedback will be incorporated in updating the site annually. In the future, a presentation will be developed and given at state and/or regional conferences hosted through professional organizations, Kentucky TRIO Programs (KYTRIO), and

SAEOPP (Southeastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel) to market the site to other TRIO programs within an eight state service region (KY, TN, GA, FL, NC, SC, AL, and MS).

Why were this capstone and related strategies selected?

With over ten years of experience working with LIFG students, I understand the impact advocates can have on the success of these students. As a LIFG student, I would not be where I am today if it were not for having someone to advocate for my success. My experience working for a federally-funded TRIO program, as well as being a program alumnus, pushes me to want to improve the quality of resources available to these students while in high school. Developing resources for this population could potentially increase awareness of the barriers that low-income and first-generation students face with higher education and provide support to bridge the gap of students going to college unprepared.

TRIO

TRIO programs began with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 with the introduction of Upward Bound, a federal program designed to fight poverty faced in the United States. “TRIO” became a term used to represent the original three programs introduced through this act. These programs were Upward Bound (1964), Talent Search, introduced in 1965 through the Higher Education Act, and Student Support Services, introduced as an amendment in 1968. Today, there are eight total TRIO Programs, which includes the original three and includes the addition of Veterans Upward Bound (1970), Educational Opportunity Centers (1972), Training

Program for Federal TRIO Programs (1976), McNair (1986), and Upward Bound Math Science (1990) (Office on Postsecondary Education, 2020). Congress mandates that two-thirds of the students served by TRIO programs must be a double qualifier, meaning that they are both low-income and first-generation.

College Transition

The transition from high school to college is often a culture shock for many students and can influence a student's overall success in college. First-generation college students are especially vulnerable during this period since they may not have had the same college preparation experiences as their multi-generational peers. First generation students lack the built-in supports associated with having parents who have already completed the college process. Interventions are designed to improve college readiness by providing transitional support, academic preparation, college, and financial aid information; psychosocial and behavioral supports; and development of a growth mindset that empowers first-generation persistence and resiliency in their first years of college. The better prepared a student is for college, the more likely they will have a successful college career, while also completing their degree within a reasonable timeframe (or at all, in some cases). Data provided by Council on Postsecondary Education (2021), shows that in the 2019 - 2020 academic year, 75.5% of students from low-income (LI) households successfully completed their first year of college and moved on to their second year of college.

The capstone provides resources to support intervention efforts in first generation students. For example, the High School Success section of the site

provides guides that focus on introducing students to the importance of postsecondary education and how to read a high school transcript to stay on track for getting into college. In the Financial Aid section, students are given materials that expose them to the various types of financial aid, how to properly read an award letter/student aid report, and completion of the verification process. College Process stresses the importance of maximizing the college application by writing a personal statement that showcases their individual strengths. Finally, the College Success section helps students understand transitional resources available to them. Examples mentioned above are interventions in college advising and are critically important due to a lack of availability for experts and mentors to provide support and advice to LIFG students.

Early Interventions

Researchers such as Hicks (2003) show a need for college preparation resources for pre-college high school students, especially those who are LIFG. Family involvement often creates a general expectation on LIFG students to feel obligated to help their families financially due to their socioeconomic background. In addition, many LIFG students feel that they are stepping over the line and “going above their raisin’” when it comes to completing a college degree. Due to the lack of built in supports that are associated with parents who complete a 4-year college degree, the development of the TRIO College Navigator provides resources in areas of weakness that high school students have with in transitioning to college to increase the level of support.

Focusing on academic and social preparation, financial responsibilities, self-confidence, and other barriers that could hinder the success of students transitioning to college could diminish the stereotype that LIFG students do not perform as well as other students due to their economic upbringing. While there are limited resources able to predict academic performance, student retention gaps could potentially be addressed by introducing interventions supporting college transition preparation earlier in high school.

Redefining College Transition

Transitioning from high school to college is challenging and exciting at the same time. Helping students develop skills needed to understand basic information like how to read a syllabus, how to choose the right classes, how to effectively manage the use of one's time, and how to navigate the financial aid process like completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or completing verification from the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) can potentially help students deal with psychological challenges that often arise early on during the transition phase, many of which many have lasting impacts. By calling attention to these skills, more students could potentially see obtaining a college degree as a realistic goal. Early identification of these challenges can also help educators and school administrators implement interventions that could ultimately increase rates of high school graduation and college retention.

McClafferty et al. (2002) recommends that schools create a “college culture” which promotes college access starting as early as kindergarten (p.105). Students are

progressively further introduced to the concept of higher education over time.

Opening up the idea of college as something obtainable by all students is a start toward bridging the gap in generational poverty by helping students see more options to consider after high school. Redefining academic standards and college transition removes the barrier that many low-income families face when making decisions about their student(s) going to college.

Student Barriers to Success

Students with the motivation to attend college are there to receive a degree and increase their chances of getting a well-paying job and advancement. However, just like with everything in life, the journey to obtain a college degree is not always the easiest journey. This journey is sometimes filled with obstacles. In a study by Jury et al. (2017) discussion of the psychological barriers that students face is often associated with their socio-economic status and may include such challenges as emotional experiences, identity management, motivation, and self-perception (pp. 25-28). Although the identification of the need for support began in 1964 with Lyndon B. Johnson's establishment of TRIO programs in response to the war on poverty, student barriers associated with first-generation college students have only recently been brought to the attention of lawmakers and researchers. The TRIO College Navigator could potentially solve these barriers with the inclusion of guides to understanding key dimensions of high school and college success.

Reducing Imposter Syndrome

According to Jenkins et al. (2013) LIFG students face a different type of obstacle known as impostor syndrome or “academic acculturative stress” which is defined as “stress that students in lower socioeconomic statuses face when entering the academic culture of higher education” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 130) LIFG students often feel that they do not belong because they can’t generalize the college experience and lack family support in seeing the importance of postsecondary education. LIFG often have to make life-altering decisions much quicker than their second-generation counterparts and, for many these decisions are connected with an unrealistic need to fit in with their peers. Increasing awareness of higher education allows them to see what resources are available to them and to understand that college is an option for them. Resources provided through the TRIO College Navigator have the potential to directly address the psychological, academic, and financial gaps first-generation students face before going to college, thereby helping to alleviate or reduce the impact of “imposter syndrome.”

Low-Income and First-Generation Populations

As previously stated, according to the U.S. Department of Education, a student is considered low-income if their family's taxable income for the preceding year does not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level as established by the Census Bureau. As of January 13, 2021, federal low-income levels for TRIO Programs range from \$19,320-\$66,990, based on the number of members in your household, ranging from one to eight. Households with more than eight members will add \$6,810 for the 48 contiguous states, the District of Columbia, and outlying jurisdictions; \$8,520 for

Alaska; and \$7,830 for Hawaii (OPE, 2020). For example, according to Office of Postsecondary Education (2020), a student with four members living in their household must not make more than \$39,750 to be considered low-income. A student is considered “first-generation” if neither of the student’s parents or legal guardians have completed a four-year degree.

The obstacles and economic hardships faced by many LIFG students decreases their success in obtaining a college degree. Conversely, their determination and drive are what sets them apart. Low-income families face greater levels of economic hardship that directly impact the student. Bragg (2006), Falcon (2015), and Mccarron et al. (2006) highlight the need to improve support for LIFG students, as research as shown a direct correlation of the impact that families have on first-generation students.

Low-income and first-generation students (LIFG) are faced with many barriers and challenges and often lack self-confidence when it comes to academic preparation for college (Saenz et al., 2015). The TRIO College Navigator gives students guidance to help them succeed in high school while increasing their likelihood of completing a post-secondary degree by including resources to address many of the barriers that make the idea of going to college seem far out of reach. Guidance is essential in assisting students in increased awareness of college access resources. For example, the site offers help to address the hardships that many students face when it comes to paying for a college degree. Resources in the site provide students with a general understanding about searching majors and colleges

that will make the most of their financial investment in order to give them their best chance for success. LIFG students often have a general understanding of the pathway they want to take but lack the clear vision of how to get there. By providing resources through the TRIO College Navigator we are creating a road map in getting them to the finish line of completing a college degree in a reasonable timeframe. LIFG students are less likely to enroll full-time due to the need to maintain a job for financial security (Falcon, 2015). It is important to advise LIFG students on finding the right fit for college by providing foundational skills in understanding course selection, financial aid information, and addressing the mentality that college is not a realistic option for them due to their economic background. Tips for time management is also incorporated throughout to allow transparency in completion of a 4-year college degree while maintaining financial security. Understanding how to read documents presented to them allows these students to present the information to their families and begin the dialogue of the importance of going to college.

Why should we support LIFG Students?

LIFG students face unique challenges that often form significant barriers to future success in life. These challenges are financial, educational, social, and psychological. The issues build up over the course of a student's academic career, leading to what has now become well-known as the "achievement gap."

The transition from high school to college is a major turning point in one's academic career. We must support LIFG students during the period so that they don't get left behind – they don't fall into the cycle of poverty because they don't have the

education needed to get a higher paying job, for example. So that they have the information and self-confidence needed to make smart choices in life and continue to work toward completing a college degree.

Low-income and first-generation students represent significant underserved student populations, but that does not take away from their academic potential. Studies conducted by Bragg (2006), Falcon (2015), and Mccarron et al. (2006) highlight the need to improve support for LIFG students as they often do not have the resources available to be successful in higher education. The lack of guidance and resources could negatively impact their success when navigating higher education. In addition, because of the lack of support, timing may become a major factor in student success.

LIFG students often have lower expectations about college, affecting their grade point average as well as their likelihood to obtain a higher degree. LIFG students also have higher dropout rates and often take longer to complete a college degree than their second-generation counterparts (Mitchell, 2018). Providing underserved populations with support and resources goes beyond directly impacting the quality of life for LIFG students. By increasing college access for low-income communities, we are helping to prepare the next generation for competing in a global economy. The success of LIFG students can impact them directly by increasing their employability and financial potential. Their success may also have indirect impacts, as the skills and information they gain are applied back into their communities. This

could ultimately help improve the quality of life for others by providing resources and support through service to their communities.

Engaging students early and often empowers them to stay motivated despite the hardships they have been dealt and gives them their best chance to compete in a every changing global economy. It is important for schools to examine resources available through College and Career Readiness curriculum to identify areas where these students fall short in order to provide them with the support needed to give them a practical approach to obtaining a college degree while also bridging the gap in LIFG students going to college.

In summary, timing, financial aid, need to work, confidence, and lack of support are often challenges my students face while in high school and could potential be a major challenge for them when they are enrolling in college. Students that I serve typically are “double qualifiers,” meaning that they are both low-income and first-generation. In addition, many of our students are “triple qualifiers,” meaning that they are also at academic risk due to not scoring proficient or above on state assessments. This capstone was conceived due to the need to address financial burden, present positive outside influences, and provide guidance as a motivator for academic success through the development of the TRIO College Navigator. Providing a clear outlook for my students, understanding their backgrounds matched with their drive to fight adversity puts them at the greatest need for support.

Importance of College Readiness

College and Career Readiness (CCR), involves predicting a student's success rate and likelihood of going to college. Petty (2014), Royster et al. (2015), and Schwartz et al. (2019) argue the challenges that many students face are due to lack of clear guidance and a misalignment of CCR standards to school-wide curriculum.

College Readiness Framework

Conley (2010) defines key dimensions for determining college readiness which include college knowledge, academic behaviors, and content knowledge. Conley describes college knowledge as “contextual skills and awareness. The privileged information necessary to understand how college operates as a system and culture” (p. 40). Academic Behaviors are defined as the “range of behaviors that reflects greater student self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control of a series of processes and behaviors necessary for academic success” (Conley, 2010, pp. 39–40). Content knowledge is described as “overarching academic skills,” (Conley, 2010, pp. 35–39).

In addition to CCR, there are also the Pre-College Curriculum (PCC) requirements to consider, including understanding how to read high school transcripts, what colleges look at when reviewing test scores and transcripts, and how colleges determine whether a student will be successful in rigorous college coursework. According to the Kentucky Department of Education, PCC requirements include English, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Sciences, Foreign Languages, Visual Arts and Humanities and Rigorous Electives such as AP or Dual Credit coursework. These guides also provide a foundation for discussion with high school guidance

counselors in determining future scheduling of courses to meet PCC requirements for college admissions.

Why should we support College Readiness?

Studies conducted by researchers such as Byrd & MacDonald (2005) and Baker et al. (2017) suggest that college readiness goes beyond just being academically ready for college. Many first-generation students face challenges that hinder them from success due to the biases many LIFG families have about higher education. The TRIO College Navigator helps address these barriers by giving students tools for dealing with many concerns of first year college students. Just as Petty (2014), Royster et al. (2015), and Schwartz et al. (2019) argue, the TRIO College Navigator aligns college readiness curriculum to assist students in navigating high school and building critical thinking skills that will help them be successful when they get to college. For example, guides on understanding where to find support, reading high school transcripts, what information to look for when finding the right schools, understanding financial aid awards and cost of attendance are giving students a more practical view of the college admission process, financial undertaking, and preparing them for post-secondary success.

TRIO College Navigator

Guiding Questions

The TRIO College Navigator includes resources designed around transitional support in determining college success. The TRIO College Navigator is broken down into four components: Goals/Expectations (What should the student know and be able

to do to be college ready), Outcomes and Measures (What measures can be implemented to determine if a student will be college ready), Support (What information is needed for the student to plan his/her future college and career success), and Resources (What resources are needed for the student to plan for college).

TRIO College Navigator Design

Research by Petty (2014), Royster et al. (2015), and Schwartz et al. (2019) concluded that students face challenges with college readiness due to a lack of clear guidance and a misalignment of CCR standards to school-wide curriculum. This capstone aims to address this by developing how-to guides to assist school administrators in fostering a “college culture” to prepare students for life after high school. Guides on the site are broken down into 4 categories that build upon each other: high school success, college process, financial aid, and college success. Each section provides TRIO participants with next steps to work toward the goal of generalizing the college process.

The TRIO College Navigator focuses on David Conley’s Framework for College Readiness, which allows students to gain a better understanding of the college process by recognizing the importance and purpose of college. In addition, students could potentially gain “positive perceptions and aspirations about college, prepare academically for college admission, and set short/long term goals that support college readiness.” (Conley, 2010, p. 2). This framework aligns with McClafferty et al. (2002) concept of developing a school wide “college culture.” to highlight early

interventions and meet them where they are with access to resources that develop college ready critical thinking skills. Due to the content being cloud-based using Google Drive, Google Sites, and other applications through Google Workspace for Education, information can be easily accessed while also being easily updated as new information or additional need presents itself. This allows students to download information from the site for offline access while also being able to be shared across multiple platforms.

Development and Implementation

Develop a Prototype

The development of the TRIO College Navigator site began with the registering the domain (tricollegenavigator.com); drafting the wireframe for the site prototype; and determining the platform that would host the site. Google Sites was chosen because schools in the target area use Google Workspace for Education, and students and teachers are therefore familiar with the tool. During prototype development, the site's information architecture was organized around four main modules: High School Success, College Process, Financial Aid and College Success. These modules were chosen based on services provided to students who participate in TRIO programs to assist TRIO personnel in making resources more accessible to students. A glossary was added to assist students in understanding college terminology due to a lack of understanding for the ins and outs of the college process, and understanding resources available to them.

Development of Content

Content for the TRIO College Navigator was selected based on the target schools that are served through the Morehead State University Upward Bound Programs. Areas in which students struggled, especially when they were more isolated and on their own during the height of the pandemic, were examined and taken into consideration when creating a resource that is easy to follow as users progress throughout high school into college. Content starts with the splash screen that presents the categories under which guides are grouped. Each section has its own splash screen that contains tips for making the most of their experience through each set. For example, in the first section, “High School Success,” students can view a high school transcript, learn about pre-college curriculum (PCC), with each portion explaining how colleges look at each part of their transcript to determine success in college.

Students from the target region: Bath, Boyd, East Carter, Elliott, Fleming, Harrison, Johnson, Lawrence, Lewis, Magoffin, Mason, Menifee, Montgomery, Morgan, Nicholas, Robertson, Rowan, and West Carter, come from areas that are either at risk or considered extremely disadvantaged counties. Therefore, content was geared towards showing the importance of college, what to consider or look for in colleges, and giving them the courage to apply for colleges that may seem out of reach for them.

Prototype Testing

Troubleshooting unforeseen issues was the next stage of development. Each page was tested by program staff for accessibility, flow of content, and links were

tested to ensure proper connections between the site and content were achieved. Usability, design, and content quality were also reviewed during this testing phase. Feedback and insights from TRIO professional staff gathered during this stage confirmed that the top-level elements of the prototype were solid operational and that the proposed wireframe structure would properly support further layers of content. This feedback also allowed for the addition of the College Terminology glossary.

Feedback from Committee/Final Steps

The capstone ends with the finished prototype. Each page was designed to provide a starting point for future updates and increased site access. After the prototype development, my doctoral committee will provide feedback and guidance through a doctoral defense. This feedback will be incorporated before final submission to the university.

Intended Impact of the Capstone

The intended impact of this capstone is to provide transitional support to students from severely economically impoverished areas of the state, including students who have been impacted heavily by COVID-19, in order to help them understand that college is within their reach. The project seeks to pave a direct path toward success for these students by giving them the information and tools they need for life beyond high school. Research conducted by Edgar (2019), concluded that motivational factors that influence student performance and learning abilities can be best understood by implementing interventions to increase motivation and retention rates in college. In addition, early interventions can increase awareness of factors that

contribute to at risk students having a harder time with transition from high school to college (Edgar, 2019, p. 3). The project is targeted toward schools in rural parts of Eastern and Central Kentucky, many of which are nestled deep within the Appalachian Mountains, as well as LIFG high school students in Morehead State University's service area (e.g., Bath, Boyd, East Carter, Elliott, Fleming, Harrison, Johnson, Lawrence, Lewis, Magoffin, Mason, Menifee, Montgomery, Morgan, Nicholas, Robertson, Rowan, and West Carter.) Impact can be made through quality content that ensures students are prepared with appropriate critical thinking skills needed to navigate the world of postsecondary education.

As the site works to increase awareness of the barriers that many families face when their children want to go to college, content focuses on student success, engagement, and understanding of the purpose of postsecondary education. By understanding this purpose and strengthening critical thinking skills through use of the site, this has the potential to increase students' ability to become independent.

TRIO Professionals (Talent Search, Student Support Services, and Upward Bound/Upward Bound Math Science) can also be impacted by this capstone. The TRIO College Navigator is a public site and is accessible for free. Since the main goal of TRIO programs is to make college more accessible to all, having a shared space for additional resources that can grow and evolve to serve more populations of students may help TRIO professionals with professional development. Collaboration with TRIO programs across the SAEOPP region can allow for resources to be suggested for future impact of the site's development.

The larger TRIO community can be impacted as well, providing the possibility for future resources that span beyond Morehead State University. The development of this capstone project can be the foundation for improved college readiness resources and provide additional support in the war on poverty. This project can continue the legacy that was started with the introduction of TRIO programs by championing educational change. This influence goes beyond the classroom because it gives students the confidence they need to implement change within themselves by stepping outside their comfort zones to make their dreams a reality. Increasing college access for low-income communities gives students the chance to break generational poverty, as they apply the critical thinking and decision-making skills in ways that reinvest back into their communities, thus improving the quality of life for others.

Limitations of the Study

When implementing technology-based or web-based resources you must consider the communities the tools are intended to serve. For example, access to reliable Internet service was taken into consideration when developing the site through Google Workspace for Education because the targeted low-income areas generally have less access to high speed Internet and fewer hotspots (Meheral, S. et al., 2021). Consequently, the site needs to be mobile-friendly as many of my students complete coursework on their phones and other mobile devices and ensures that the resources are accessible to all users. Technology can be provided to students who do not have access to avoid the possibility of compensatory demoralization. In addition,

given the considerable technology barriers that many students face, especially in Eastern Kentucky, a limitation to this study might be that resources may also need to be available in formats not dependent upon Internet and/or computer use in order to ensure equal opportunities for students to access the TRIO College Navigator tools. Another limitation to this capstone is generalization, as this capstone is intended for students of the Morehead State University Upward Bound Programs and limited to Morehead State University. Another limitation to this capstone is the platform upon which the site was built. There are several web platforms available that could easily house the TRIO College Navigator resources. However, this project was built using Google Sites because schools in the target area use Google Workspace for Education and that platform was the easiest for users to access. Finally, the content selected for this capstone is a limitation because it is geared toward a specific group of students. Please note: The situations mentioned do not apply to every student in the target area; and each program would have different needs, student populations, and barriers to address.

Reflections

“Around here, however, we don’t look backwards for very long. We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things... and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.” -Walt Disney

Being a first-generation student from Eastern Kentucky, I never thought I would ever earn my bachelor’s degree, never mind writing a paper as part of the last leg of my doctoral program. After this capstone, I am reflecting on the process it took

to get me through this capstone project. While it has been challenging at times with the development of the site and resources contained within it, I now think about Instructional Design and Educational Technology with a much greater appreciation from where I started.

I came into this program optimistic and full of ideas of what I thought I was going to build. This optimism led me down the path of wanting to create something aimed towards college and career readiness. Through several conversations, feedback from professors, and assistance from my cohort, my capstone quickly evolved into what is now known as the TRIO College Navigator, a site to help students in reach their full potential as they navigate through challenges they face while in high school that could eventually lead them to success in college.

While I had my doubts at times, this capstone took me outside of my comfort zone and proved to me that I was worthy of standing with all the candidates that took this journey before me. This project allowed me to incorporate my abilities and passion for technology to provide a resource for my students, drawn by the reason why I started my educational journey: To help the next generation find their own path. I learned that consistency and quality is more important than quantity. It was hard throughout the process due to amount of research available to support College Readiness as this is a fairly new concept explored in Education.

Along with understanding just how important consistency is to the overall design of the TRIO College Navigator, I now understand just how much of an impact educational change has on Educational Technology. Impacting student success and

developing college access materials to assist students participating in TRIO programs is like achieving a great accomplishment while providing asynchronous resources to students who may not have access to reliable Internet in their communities.

Researching materials for this capstone project made me realize just how much of a need there was for resources to assist students in developing decision making and critical thinking skills as they navigate the ins and outs of the college transition process and financial aid.

As I developed multiple pages for the capstone, I realized that I needed to shift focus and develop the most important pages to launch the site. Over the course of three years and dealing with a pandemic, my focus remained on supporting TRIO students by adapting to student needs and concerns through remote learning college access and resources. Completing a doctoral program through all of this has made me learn that you have to take things day by day and stay positive that things will work out and that eventually you will make it to the finish line. There was a lot of trial and error in developing the content for the site but ultimately it made me a stronger Academic Coordinator and put my leadership abilities to the test. I have poured my heart and soul into this capstone project and struggled at times, but I am proud of the work I have accomplished. This has been an experience that will change my life forever and I am beyond grateful for the experience.

Capstone Project

The capstone was designed and completed using Google Workspace for Education and Google Sites. Google Workspace for Education was available to me

through my position as an Academic Coordinator for the Morehead State University Upward Bound Programs. It is also the platform that the schools in our target area use. Data for the development of the resources came from Morehead State University, Federal Student Aid, KHEAA, and Original Designed Resources. The capstone was built to allow for offline accessibility for students without access to reliable Internet.

TRIO College Navigator Design

For the capstone project, 34 individual guides and 41 webpages were developed across the 4 main categories with an additional page devoted to a “College Lingo” glossary. Each category and sub-category has a splash page featuring suggestions and tips that students could incorporate into each guide that followed. The design was focused on highlighting included materials in the TRIO College Navigator. All figures included in this section show what each of the pages listed in the provided site map look like. A list of figures is also provided on page 3.

- I. Splash Page
 - (b) Site Navigation
- II. High School Success
 - (d) High School Success Splash Page
 - (e) Postsecondary Education: Overview/What is your Why?
 - (f) Reading a HS Transcript
- III. College Process
 - (h) College Process Tools Splash Page
 - (i) Finding the Right Fit

(j) College Entry Exams

(k) 7 Kentucky Public Universities At a Glance Pages

- i. University of Kentucky
- ii. University of Louisville
- iii. Northern Kentucky University
- iv. Western Kentucky University
- v. Murray State University
- vi. Morehead State University
- vii. Eastern Kentucky University

(l) College Applications

- iii. College Applications Splash Page
- iv. Applying to Colleges

(m) Picking your Top Choices

(n) Transferring from a 2-year to 4-year institution

IV. Financial Aid

(d) Financial Aid Splash Page

(e) What is Financial Aid

- iv. What is Financial Aid Splash Page
- v. Available Financial Aid
- vi. Federal Student Aid Overview

(f) FAFSA

- ix. FAFSA Splash Page

- x. Pre-FAFSA Completion
 - xi. FSA ID
 - xii. Understanding Verification
 - xiii. FAFSA Completion
 - xiv. FAFSA Next Steps
 - xv. Understanding Student Aid Reports
 - xvi. Understanding Award Letters
- V. College Success
- (g) Finding Support (Where do I go if I need help)
 - (h) Course Registration
 - (i) Commuter Tips
 - (j) Tips for Perfecting the College Essay
 - (k) Sample Resume
 - (l) Sample Cover Letter
- VI. College Terms to Know
- (b) College Lingo

While the TRIO College Navigator is not limited to the examples listed above, this general information will assist in high school and college success, and it can be expanded upon to meet the individual needs of students as the information is universally focused on developing skills that would be of benefit to being successful both in high school and in college coursework. The concept for the TRIO College Navigator is designed around breaking the barriers that many low-income and first-

generation students encounter when it comes to the college process. Therefore, the design is user-friendly and student driven. The user experience is one of the main focuses of the capstone project and takes into consideration suggestions from Tractinsky (2000) that suggests in order to promote student learning, you must provide a correlation between content and aesthetics to engage the user and promote frequency of use (See Figure 1).

Structural Design

Studies by Chaparro et al. (2003) suggest that design “must begin to look not only at the inherent usability of the site, but also its perceived usability.” Since the targeted audience for this capstone is young adults (ages thirteen to eighteen), I wanted to ensure that the user experience would be one that would keep their attention while also being appealing to parents who may not have the same level of understanding of technology-based resources. Information can be easily accessed from entering the site. Information is stored in Google Drive so that program staff, parents, and students can have access to information available on the site. Upon entering the site, students are greeted with a splash screen with the main menu located on the left-hand side (Figure 1) With useability and functionality in mind, Figures 2 - 34 give samples of some of the navigational content of the capstone project.

TRIO College Navigator Figures

Figure 1

TRIO College Navigator Splash Screen



The home page for the TRIO College Navigator greets users with the site menu. Users can access the materials by clicking on the links on the left-hand side. Once they click the first section (High School Success) they are taken to a splash screen for that section (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

High School Success Splash Screen

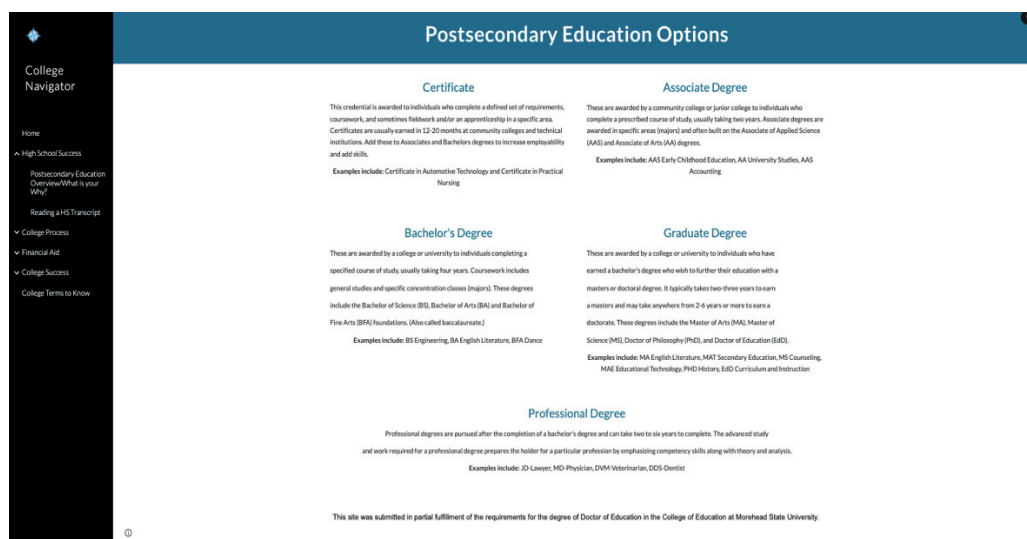


The High School Success Splash Page (Figure 2) greets users with an introduction to the resources available in that section. Each splash page is set up this

way to allow for consistency and so that students know what the contents of each set of guides are. Content Pages are included in the main menu to show what resources go with each category. Students can look through each page by clicking the link on the menu (See Figure 3).

Figure 3

Benefits of Postsecondary Education Page



The Benefits of Postsecondary Education Content Page (Figure 3) is designed to include the purpose of why students should pursue a postsecondary degree. There is a description of each type of degree/program (Associates, Bachelors, Graduate, Professional, and Certificate) with examples of each type.

Figure 4

How to Read a HS Transcript Page

College Navigator

- Home
- High School Success
- Postsecondary Education Overview/What is your Why?
- Reading and Transcript
- College Process
- Financial Aid
- College Success
- College Terms to Know

Isaac, Brandon Matthew
 Student Number: 0991922 Grade: 10
 123 Hollow Bottom Way, Morehead, KY 40351
 Generated on 1/24/2022 10:53:24 AM Page 1 of 1

County High School Transcript
 School Code: 7503 Tel: 606/783-2611 Fax: 606/783-0114
 150 University Blvd. Box 783 Morehead, KY 40351

Student Information

Student Number:	0991922	Grade:	10
Birthdate:	07/20/2001	Gender:	M
Examiner:	Crystal Aubrey D		
Expiration Date:			

2019-2020

Course:	0400	County Middle School	Grade:	8	Weight:	1.0000	Credits:	1
Grade:	8							
2019-2020								
2020-2021								

2020-2021

Course:	0400	County High School	Grade:	9	Weight:	1.0000	Credits:	1
Grade:	9							
2020-2021								
2021-2022								

2021-2022

Course:	0400	County High School	Grade:	10	Weight:	1.0000	Credits:	1
Grade:	10							
2021-2022								
2022-2023								

ACT Composite

Section	Score	Percentile
English	34	90
Math	32	85
Reading	30	80
Science	28	75
Writing	26	70
Composite	30	75

Pre-College Curriculum (PCC) Requirements

Required | **Recommended**

Weighted and Unweighted GPA
 Your weighted GPA gives more value to your advanced and AP classes. That way your GPA doesn't suffer because you made a decision to challenge yourself. Not all schools calculate weighted GPAs on your transcript and some schools only calculate weighted GPAs, so check your transcript to see what yours is.

Class Rank
 Class rank shows colleges in how competitive you are within your high school. This shows how you performed here by measuring you compared to students who likely came from the same community and take similar courses. Again, not all high schools give out this information.

Academic Trends
 Colleges will be looking at how your grades change over time. If your grades dip now, many will wonder what caused the dip, however, you take the initiative and they recognize that shows college readiness that you are addressing what caused the dip. Grade one down and then a few up would be great.

Elective Courses
 Sometimes a college or university will look at your electives to get an idea of your talent and/or passion. The more you know about what you like, the more you can focus on that. This might be a great option for college preparation.

Attempted vs. Earned Credits
 The section shows you how many HS credits you have attempted as well as how many you have successfully earned credit for. It is very helpful when determining PCC completion.

Test Summary
 Many colleges and universities look at test scores to determine placement in programs of study. Not every high school transcript will have test scores listed on them.

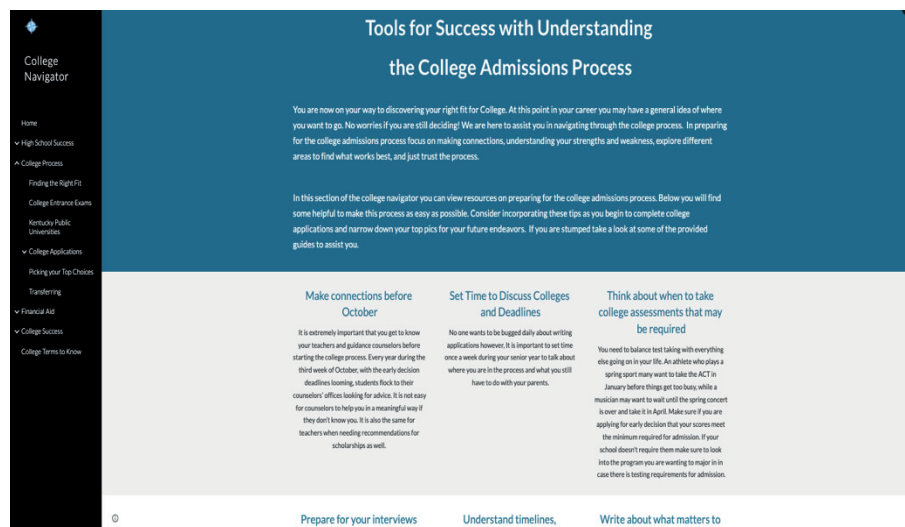
Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Credit Courses (DC)
 AP and Dual credit courses look great on transcripts. Not only could you potentially earn college credit, but you'll also be exposed to rigorous coursework. This will demonstrate to admissions committees that you're willing to take challenging classes.

Rigorous Coursework
 Your transcript says a lot about you and will usually show the level of rigor of your courses. AP and advanced classes will be noted so that colleges can see how you are challenging yourself. It is important to make sure you are taking the right courses to be accepted into college. Pre-College Curriculum (PCC) is the standard at most colleges/universities. Compare the classes that you have taken, or the classes you are currently in, to the provided chart below. Are you set to graduate with the PCC requirement? If not, you can speak with your guidance counselor to ensure you are enrolling in the PCC requirements.

The How to read a HS Transcript page (Figure 4) breaks down the various components of a HS Transcript for students with information about pre-college curriculum, benchmarks for the ACT, Understanding for Rigorous Coursework and how it translates to college applications and admissions. Each component of this guide breaks down the transcript section by section to give students a comprehensive view at what colleges look for in applicants.

Figure 5

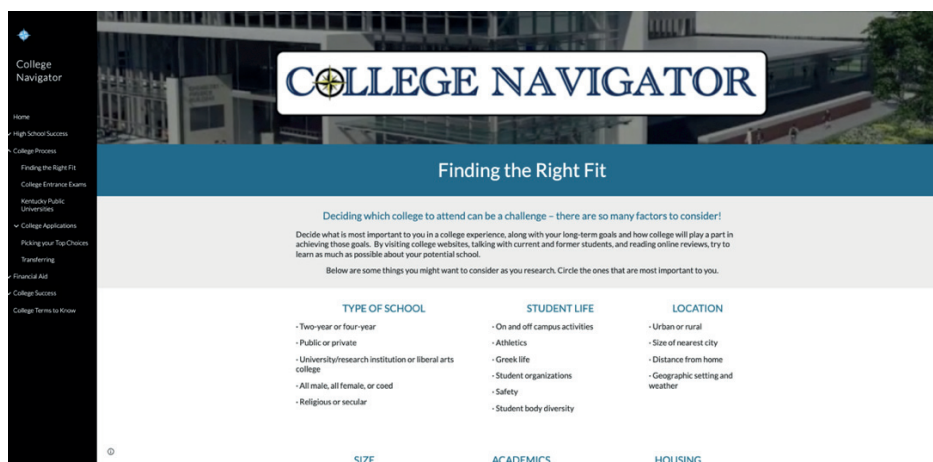
College Admissions Splash Screen



Just like the previous Splash Screens, The College Admissions splash screen (Figure 5) features tips and introductions to the section's guides and resources. In this section, students begin the process of navigating through the college admissions process starting with finding the right fit (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Finding the Right Fit Content Page



The main goal of the College Admissions section is to expose students to the steps of researching, applying for, and getting admitted to a postsecondary institution. Emphasis in these next few figures (Figures 7 and 8) are also in this them of college exploration.

Figure 7

College Entrance Exams Content Page

Taking or Re-Taking College Entrance Exams

The ACT is a college admissions test. Many colleges and programs use ACT scores in their admission decisions, although some do not, you will need to make sure and check the requirements for the colleges to which you're applying. ACT scores also have an impact on scholarship eligibility. Also, universities often use your ACT score in specific subject areas to determine freshman year course placement, particularly for math as well as admission into certain programs of study (Ex. Education, Nursing, Vet Tech.)

Research your major at your chosen institution in addition to admissions requirements to ensure you have achieved the scores you need.

Below are the ACT Benchmarks

ACT Subject-Area Test	The ACT Test Benchmark
English	18
Mathematics	22
Reading	22
Science	23

Source: <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/about/act-and-reasonable-requirements/act-benchmarks.html>

ACT Breakdown

ACT Questions tend to be more straightforward than most college entrance exams. Scores range 1-36.

The ACT consists of 4 sections with an optional writing section: English, Reading, Math, and Science.

ACT English consists of questions dealing with rhetoric/grammar and usage. (75 questions; 45 minutes)

ACT Reading consists of 4 Reading Passages (40 questions; 35 minutes)

ACT Science tests your critical thinking skills (40 questions; 35 minutes)

ACT Math consists of questions dealing with advanced math concepts: Arithmetic, Algebra 1 and 2, Geometry, and Trigonometry (60 questions; 60 minutes). You can use a calculator for this portion of the exam.

For many low-income and first-generation students, especially those in our targeted high schools, state assessments are often a point of concern. When instructing students on finding their right fit, it is important to also provide support in understanding ACT benchmarks as many of the programs of study, for example, Nursing or Education, require a certain ACT or Entrance Exam in order to take upper division courses in those areas. This guide provides a breakdown of the ACT Benchmarks and examination.

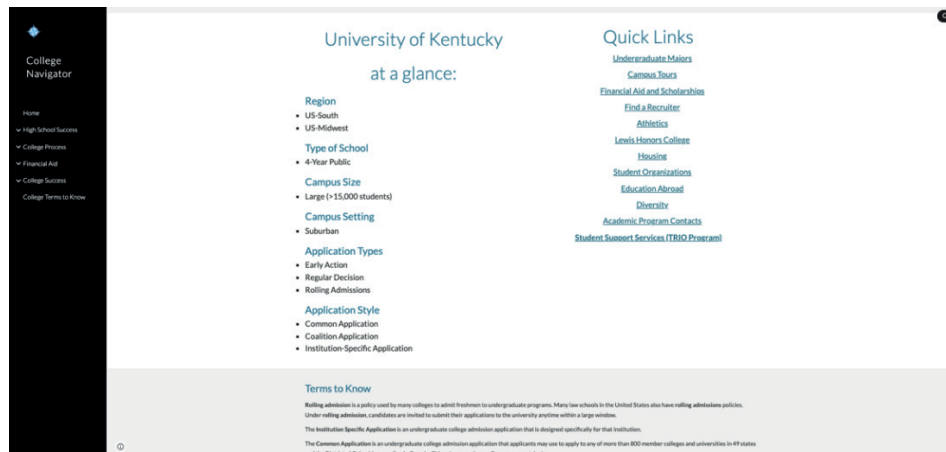
Figure 8

Public Universities Content Page



Figure 9

University at a Glance Content Page

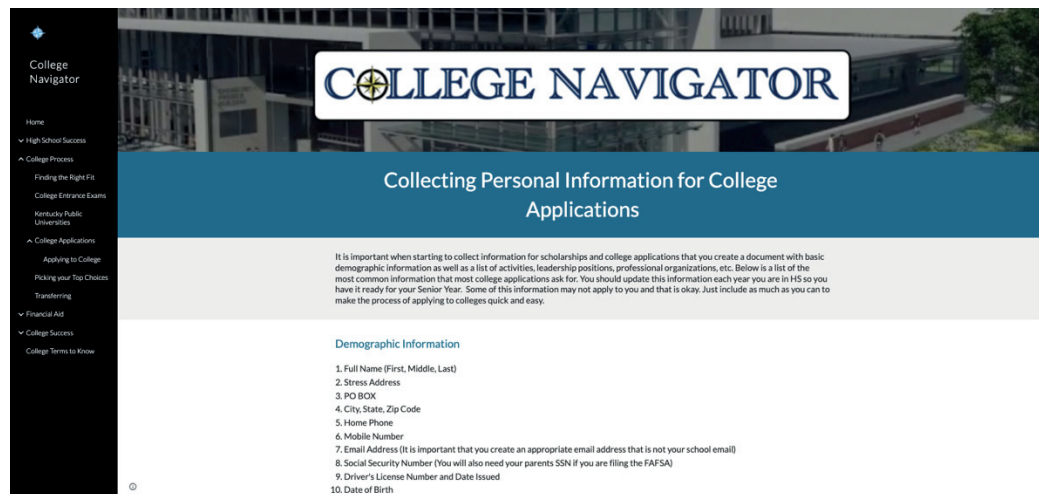


When it comes to College Exploration, something that I have noticed with the students we serve in Upward Bound is that our students pick colleges because they had a relative attend, rather than looking at the size, student-faculty ratios, ACT scores, and acceptance rates of public universities in the state of KY and beyond. The Public Universities Page (Figure 8) and the University at a Glance sub-pages (Figure 9) give students an opportunity to understand the demographic information of seven

of the top eight public universities in Kentucky. The example provided (Figure 9) shows the University at a Glance page for the University of Kentucky. Morehead State, University of Louisville, Murray, Eastern Kentucky, Western Kentucky, and Northern Kentucky Universities are also included on the site.

Figure 10

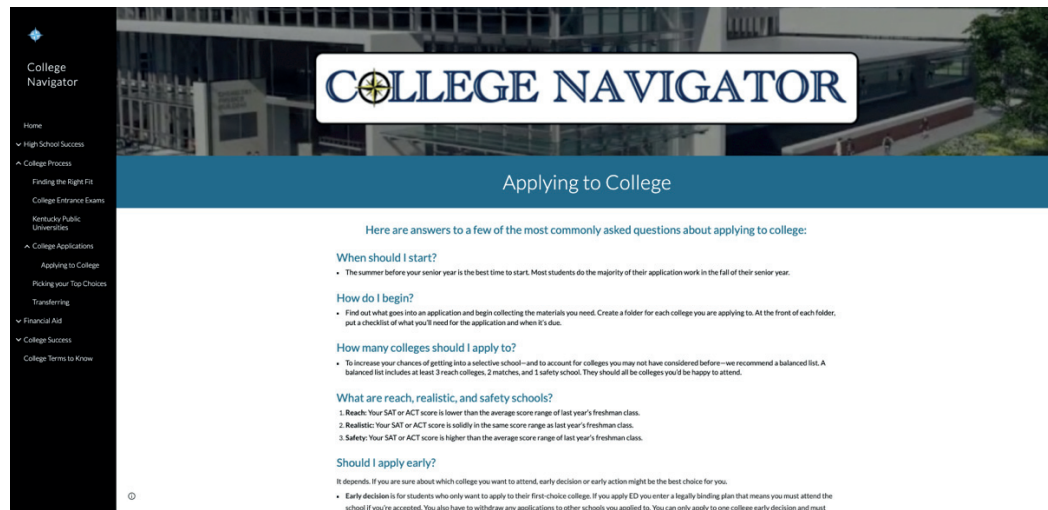
College Applications Content Page



The College Applications page discusses information needed to complete most college applications, including Morehead State University's online application. It encourages students to begin thinking about the information they need to submit to begin the admissions process. In addition, this guide helps students begin the search for letters of recommendation which can be valuable when applying for colleges and scholarships.

Figure 11

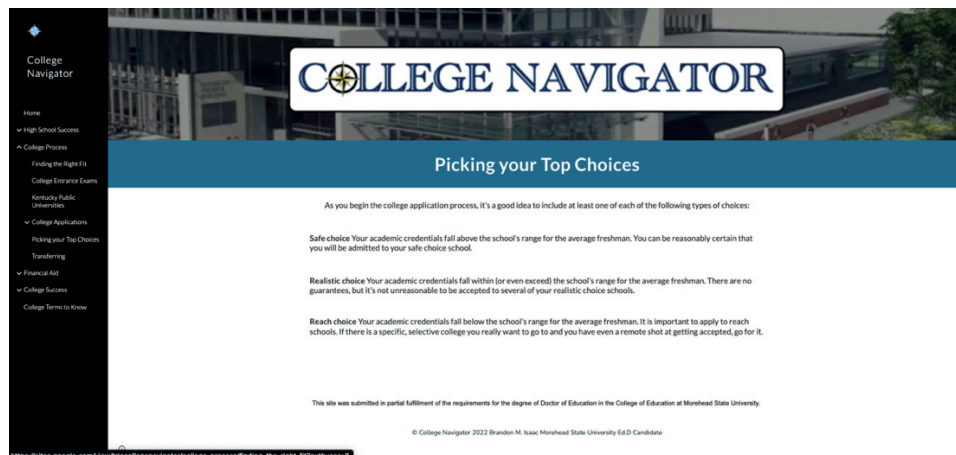
Applying to College Content Page



The Applying to College Content Page (Figure 11) gives information about the right times to apply for colleges, and information about the various types of college applications (Ex: Coalition, Universal, and Common App). Users have access to information about what to expect through the process as well.

Figure 12

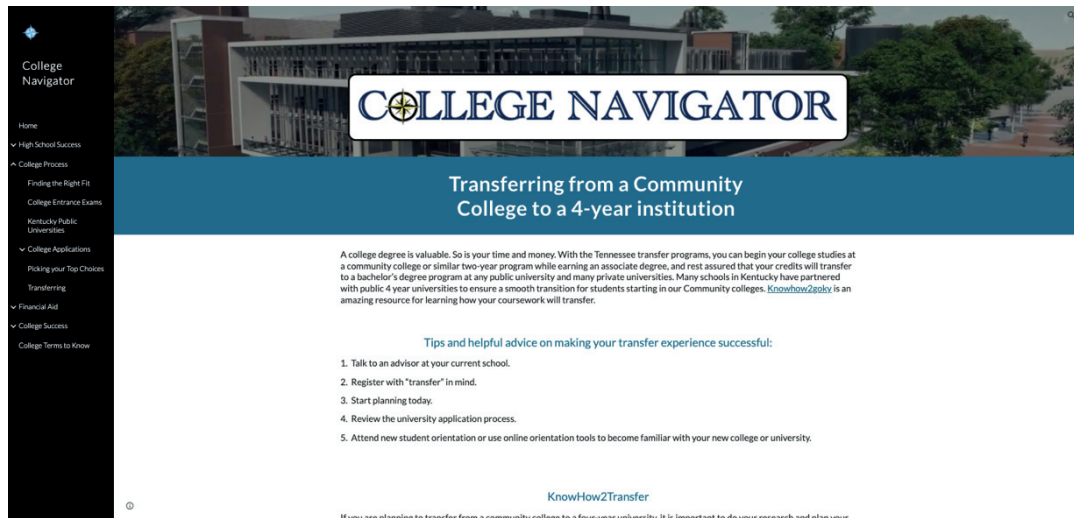
Picking Your Top Choices Content Page



This page is a concept that came about when students in our program began looking at the colleges they want to apply to. I noticed that students were avoiding colleges because they felt they were out of reach. Students are taught the Safe, Reach, and Realistic method in this guide. “Safe” colleges are colleges where you meet the requirements (testing, HS GPA, etc.) but there is no guarantee that you can get in. For example, the University of Kentucky would be considered a public university that a student might choose as a safe choice because the school has early decision, early action, and rolling admissions procedures. Students apply and wait for a decision. “Realistic” schools are schools that a student knows s/he can get into with current test scores and admissions index. Morehead State University would be an example of a realistic choice because many LIFG students go to Morehead State due to its affordability and easy to follow admissions process. “Reach” schools are schools like as Ivy league institutions (Princeton, UCLA, Harvard) schools that have higher standards for admission but are not necessarily impossible to get into. Many of these institutions admit LIFG students because they see the potential of these students to go beyond their socioeconomic backgrounds and succeed. Students are encouraged in this guide to research schools in these categories when creating their list of top picks.

Figure 13

Transferring From a 2-year to 4-year Institution Content Page



Participants go through tips and tricks for transferring from a two year community/technical college to a four year public university. Information is included in the Transferring from a 2 to 4-year institution content page (Figure 13). Links to knowhow2go's transfer tool connects students with steps in determining how their coursework will transfer to ensure they are taking the right courses to complete their postsecondary degree.

Figure 14

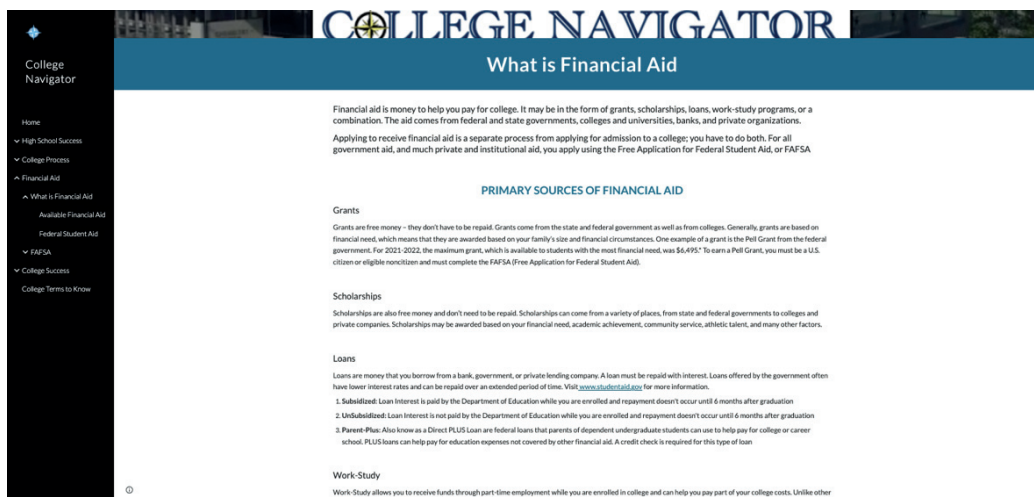
Financial Aid Splash Page



The Financial Aid section of the TRIO College Navigator begins with the splash page (Figure 14). In this section students are given information on how to maximize their experiences dealing with the financial side of applying for colleges. Understanding the types of loans, completion of the FAFSA, taking out just what is necessary when paying for college is covered on this portion of the site.

Figure 15

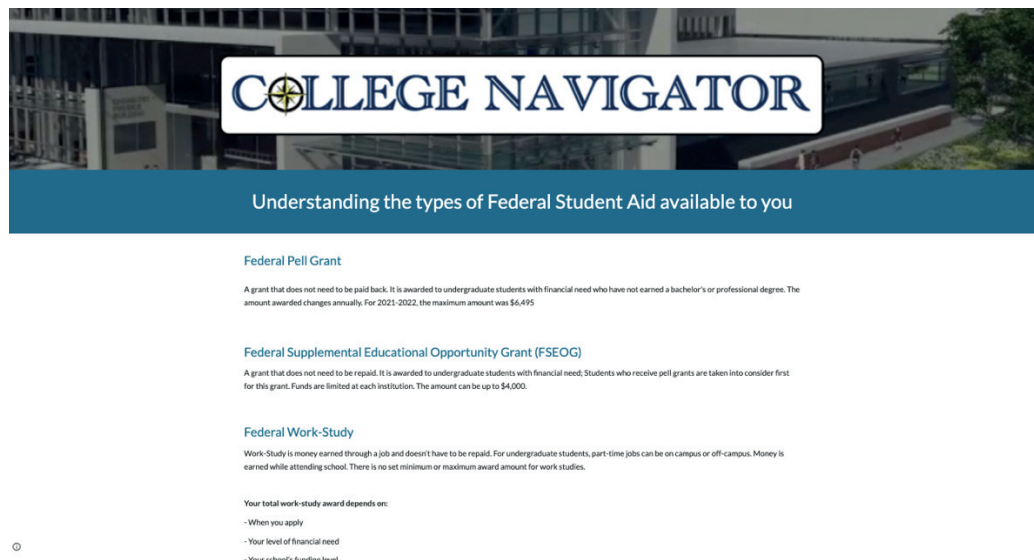
What is Financial Aid Subheading Splash Page



Participants are introduced to the different sources of financial aid available (Figure 15). Information covered through this guide includes work study programs, community assistance, institutional aid, grants, and scholarships. In the next section, (Figure 16) students get a more detailed overview of Federal student aid.

Figure 16

Understanding Federal Student Aid Content Page



The Understanding Federal Student Aid page (Figure 16), introduces students to the various forms of federal student aid. Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and Work-study programs are examined in this section. Information about subsidized and unsubsidized loans is also included to help students begin thinking about the financial undertaking of obtaining a postsecondary degree.

Figure 17

What is Federal Student Aid Content Page

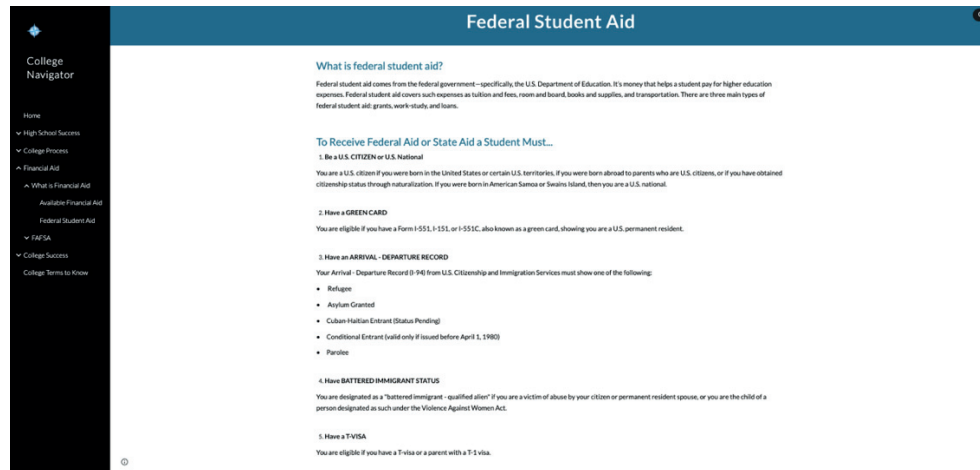
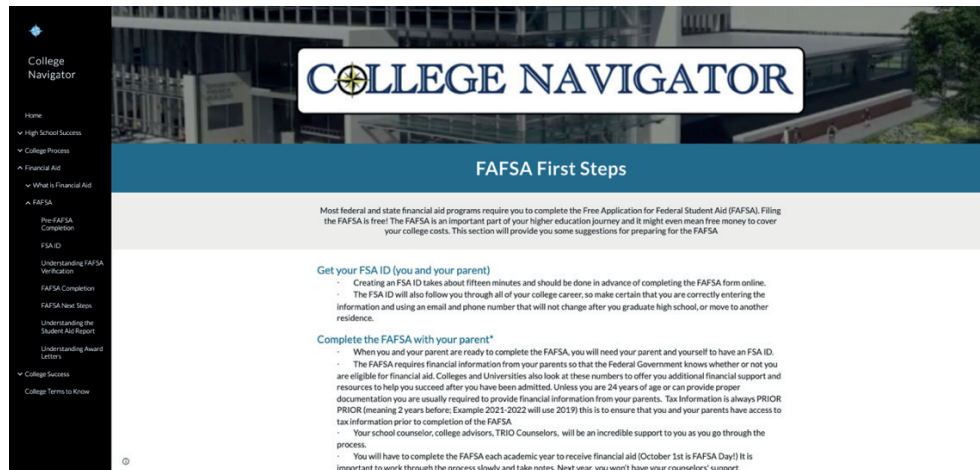


Figure 17 is an overview of Federal Student Aid and eligibility guidelines.

The resources available in this section walk students through the process of applying for federal student aid, and addresses several scenarios that many students face when applying for aid (for example, Undocumented Students, Special Circumstances, shifts in living situations). There is also a link to connect users to the eligibility page of Federal Student Aid for additional information.

Figure 18

FAFSA First Steps Content Page



Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (Figure 18), is often a challenge for high school students served in Upward Bound. The guide includes frequently asked questions and walks users through the first steps in completion of the FAFSA. This section helps increase awareness about gathering information early and ensuring that an applicant has all the required documentation on hand before completing the FAFSA.

Figure 19

Pre-FAFSA Complete Guide Content Page

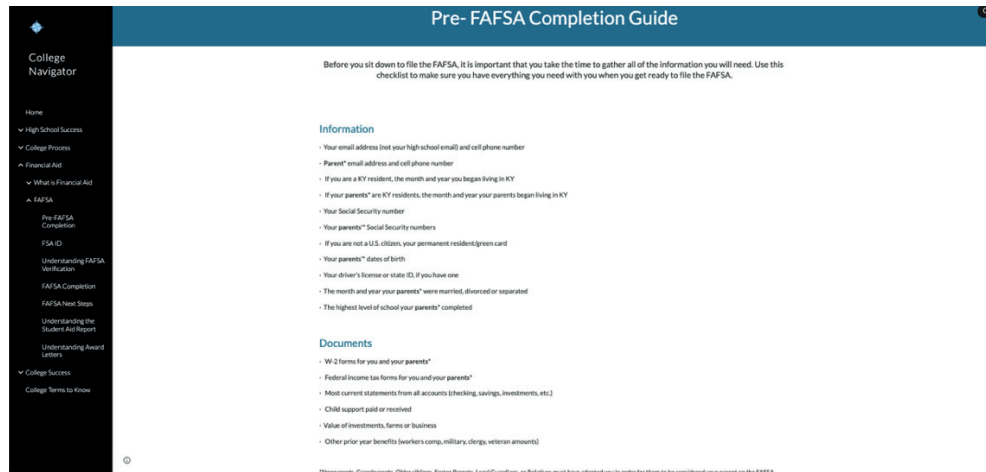
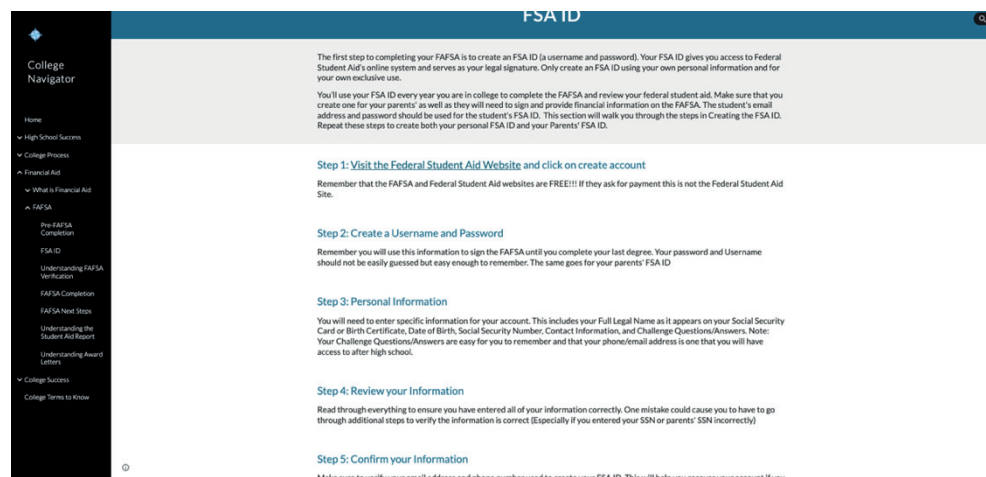


Figure 20

FSA ID Content Page



Continuing along the theme of preparing students for the completion of the FAFSA, the Pre-FAFSA Completion guide (Figure 19), and FSA ID (Figure 20), walk students through the process of creating the FSA ID and getting the correct documentation to ensure there are no mistakes made on the FAFSA Form. Figure 19

is a common practice, and advises students to follow the necessary steps to complete the process in a timely manner.

Figure 22

FAFSA Completion Content Page

The following statements will determine your independent status for the FAFSA. If you can answer YES to any of these questions then you are considered an **INDEPENDENT** student and will not need to provide parental information. If you answered NO you are a **DEPENDENT** student and will need to provide parental information.

- I will be 24 or older by Dec. 31 of the school year for which I am applying for aid
- I am serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces
- Since I turned age 13, both of my parents were deceased
- I was a dependent or ward of the court since turning age 13
- I am married
- I am a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces I was in foster care since turning age 13
- I am homeless or at risk of being homeless
- In the upcoming school year, I will be working on a master's or doctoral program (e.g., MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, graduate certificate)
- I now have or will have children for whom I provide more than half of their support
- I have dependents (other than children or my spouse) who live with me and I provide more than half of their support
- I am currently or I was in legal guardianship
- I am currently or I was an emancipated minor

Who is considered a Parent on the FAFSA

The following graphic will assist you in determining whose information you need to file the FAFSA. Go through each section and answer the questions.

Who is not considered a Parent on the FAFSA

Unless they have adopted you legally:

- Widowed Step Parents
- Grandparents
- Older Brothers or Sisters
- Foster Parents
- Legal Guardians
- Aunts or Uncles

Adapted from Federal Student Aid "Do I have to provide my parents information on the FAFSA?" infographic. studentaid.gov

Figure 23

FAFSA Next Steps Content Page

Review Your FAFSA Confirmation Page

After you complete the FAFSA form online and select "SUBMIT", you'll see a confirmation page like the one below. This is not your financial aid offer. You'll get that separately from the school(s) you apply to and get into. Your school(s) calculate your aid.

The confirmation page provides federal aid estimates based on the information you provided on your FAFSA form. It's important to know that these figures are truly estimates and assume the information you provided on the FAFSA form is correct. To calculate the actual amount of aid you're eligible for, your school will take into account other factors, such as the cost to attend the school. Additionally, these estimates only take into account federal aid and not outside scholarships or state and institutional financial assistance you may also be eligible for.

Review Your Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

The information you report on your FAFSA form is used to calculate your EFC. It's very important to note that the EFC is not the amount of money your family will have to pay for college. Instead, the EFC is an index number used by financial aid offices to calculate your financial need.

The formula they use is: $\text{Cost of attendance} - \text{Expected family contribution} = \text{Your financial "need"}$

Each school will do its best to meet your financial need. Some schools may meet 100 percent of your financial need, and other schools may only meet 10 percent—it just depends on the school and the financial aid they have available that year. You should complete the FAFSA form annually because there are many factors that can change from year to year.

Be on the Lookout for Your Aid Offer(s)

The FAFSA form is made available on October 1st. Even if you submit it early, that doesn't mean you'll get an aid offer right away. Each school has a different schedule for awarding and paying out financial aid.

Remember that your school disburses your aid, not the "FAFSA people" (Federal Student Aid). Contact your school's financial aid office for details about when they send out aid offers. If you want to report significant changes in your family or financial situation, contact your school's financial aid office. This is known as special circumstances and financial aid offices will use professional judgement to determine if your situation warrants additional assistance.

The FAFSA Completion Guide (Figure 22), and the Next Steps guide (Figure 23), continue to walk students through the information necessary to apply for Federal Student Aid. Participants are given information on determining dependency status, determining which parent's information to enter in the online FAFSA application, understanding the procedures for after completion, viewing the confirmation page for verification and to check for accuracy of the information that was submitted to Federal Student Aid is presented in this guide. In addition, the page covers steps for making corrections, reading through the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), and knowing how to determine whether additional institutional verification documentation is required.

Figure 24

Student Aid Report Content Page

The screenshot shows the 'Sample SAR' page from FAFSA.gov. A dark sidebar on the left contains the 'College Navigator' menu with options like Home, High School Success, College Process, Financial Aid, and more. The main content area is titled 'What is the SAR?' and explains that the SAR summarizes information submitted on the FAFSA. Below this, a sample SAR form is displayed with several orange callout boxes providing additional information:

- What is the SAR?** (Top right): The Student Aid Report (SAR) summarizes the information you submitted on your FAFSA and provides information about financial aid eligibility based on that information. A sample SAR is shown above.
- What information does a SAR contain (and not contain)?** (Bottom left): The SAR won't tell you how much financial aid you'll get, but if you...
- What am I supposed to do with my SAR?** (Bottom middle): When you get your SAR, review it carefully to make sure it's correct and...
- How and when will I get my SAR?** (Bottom right): After you submit your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), you'll...

Figure 25

Financial Aid Award Letter Content Page

College Navigator

- Home
- High School Success
- College Process
- Financial Aid
 - What is Financial Aid
 - FAFSA
 - Pre-FAFSA Completion
 - FSA ID
 - Understanding FAFSA Verification
 - FAFSA Completion
 - FAFSA Next Steps
 - Understanding the Student Aid Report
 - Understanding Award Letters
 - College Success
 - College Terms to Know

Understanding Your Financial Aid Offer

1. Your estimated cost of attendance includes direct costs of tuition, fees, room and board if you are living on campus, as well as indirect costs which are assumed expenses. While you will only be billed for direct costs, you may obtain financial aid up to your total cost of attendance.
2. The awards in this section are considered GRANT because it includes scholarships and grants that do not have to be repaid. The amounts listed represent the maximum amount you could be eligible for, assuming you meet all eligibility requirements and enroll in at least 12 credit hours each term.
3. Other financial aid options to help you cover your expenses may include loans. If you are eligible for a Direct Subsidized or Unsubsidized loan, the maximum award will be listed here. You may choose to borrow some or all of that amount. Direct student loan payments can be deferred until six months after graduating or leaving college, but interest will accrue on unsubsidized loans.
4. Your Estimated Balance is the estimated amount that will need to be paid by means other than gift aid and loans.
5. Another option to help cover your educational expenses is need-based Federal Work-Study. The Work-Study program provides employment opportunities to various offices on campus and in community service agencies. You will be paid at an hourly rate and receive paychecks every two weeks for the hours worked. In most cases, Federal Work-Study will not be credited to your student account.
6. CollegeTown University offers both 10-month and 12-month payment plans. Payment plans are calculated by semester and subject to change. You need to sign up for a payment plan each semester. Contact the financial aid office to find out if there are any required fees or interest.
7. You must accept all grants, scholarships, and student loans by logging into your student portal and accepting your aid for both terms. You must do this each year you are enrolled.
8. If you have questions about anything related to your

Sample Financial Aid Offer

CollegeTown University

1. Estimated Cost of Attendance		Total
Estimated Cost of Attendance	\$24,000	\$24,000
Direct Costs	\$12,000	\$12,000
Indirect Costs	\$12,000	\$12,000
Room/Board	\$8,000	\$8,000
Books/Supplies	\$2,000	\$2,000
Transportation	\$2,000	\$2,000
Other Educational Costs (e.g.)	\$2,000	\$2,000
Financial Aid	\$10,995	\$10,995
2. GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS		
Federal Pell Grant	\$5,000	\$5,000
State Grant	\$3,000	\$3,000
Scholarship	\$2,995	\$2,995
University Scholarship	\$0	\$0
LOANS		
Federal Direct Subsidized Loan	\$5,750	\$5,750
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan	\$5,245	\$5,245
5. Estimated Balance	\$13,005	\$13,005
6. WORK-STUDY		
Estimated Work-Study	\$400	\$400
7. PAYMENT PLAN		
Estimated Monthly Payment	\$1,099.50	\$1,099.50

8. ACCEPTING YOUR FINANCIAL AID AWARD
Log into your CollegeTown University portal to accept, decline, or partially accept your financial aid award within 30 days of receiving this offer.

9. If you have any questions or concerns related to this award letter, please contact the financial aid office.

The financial aid sections of the TRIO College Navigator is intended to build upon each other in order to expose students to the various components involved in completing the FAFSA, verification procedures, and checking for accuracy. In the Student Aid Report (Figure 24) and Award Letter (Figure 25) sections, students walk through the process of reading a student aid report and college award letter for financial aid packages. Selection for verification is pointed out, cost of attendance, and how to determine which colleges are offering them the most financial aid to pay for their degree.

Figure 26

College Success Splash Page

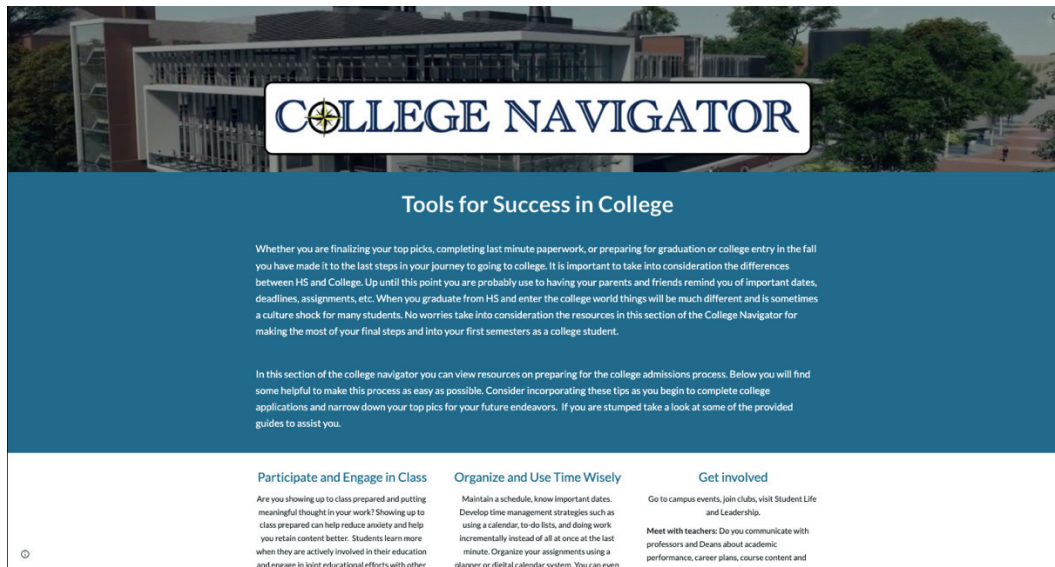


Figure 26 begins the College Success section of the TRIO College Navigator site. Materials in this section are intended to help students understand transitional supports and available resources at college and universities.

Figure 27

Finding Support on College Campuses Content Page



The Finding Support (Figure 27) guide title “Where do I go if I need...” breaks down the various departments commonly found on college campuses and resources for finding support for issues related to academics, student life, financial aid, campus involvement, student services, and student assistance. Information about Student Support Services, a TRIO program for students in postsecondary education is also listed in this portion of the site.

Figure 28

Course Registration Content Page

Course Registration

College Navigator

- Home
- High School Success
- College Process
- Financial Aid
- College Success
- Finding Support
- Course Registration**
- Commuter Tips
- Tips for Perfecting the College Essay
- Sample Resume
- Sample Cover Letter
- College Terms to Know

What to consider when looking at course offerings and registration

It is important that when choosing courses for your major that you take into consideration the types of courses that are available to you.

When registering for courses for the semester, meet with your academic advisor to figure out the classes you need to take. Review your program evaluation to ensure you are on track with your major/minor. Typically students enroll in 12-15 credit hours each semester (4 to 5 courses) to graduate within the 4 year time frame. Some majors may require longer time frames for graduation and that is okay. This is why it is important to speak with your advisors to ensure you have the best course of action to meet your needs. That is considered full-time, but be sure to check if any of your scholarships require more hours.

Course Lengths

A college class usually only meets 2-3 per week. You will want to use non-class time for reading and assignments. For example, Morehead State University in Morehead KY operates on a MWF and TTH schedule. Classes that meet on MWF meet for 50 minutes each day while TTH courses meet for 75 minutes. There are some courses that only meet once a week and those typically last for 120 minutes to accommodate instruction time.

When building your schedule...

When you are building your schedule, be realistic. If you are not a morning person, try to avoid those times. Make sure to leave time to get from class to class and to eat meals. Aim for a mix of classes of those that require a lot of reading versus those that do not. Schedule your work hours based on your class schedule-not the other way around.

Types of Courses

General Requirements: Classes that differ from those that require a lot of reading. These are also known as General Education Courses.
Ex: Math, Humanities, Science, Foreign Language

Major Requirements: Courses that are required for your declared major or program.

Course Formats

Labs: Usually paired with lectures, these sessions are hands-on learning tasks.

Lectures: What people think when they think of college-a professor speaking in front of a big room and students taking notes.

Seminars: These advanced courses usually focus on a specific topic, with professors or visiting experts lecturing and students having discussions and doing presentations.

Course Registration (Figure 28), can be challenging for many students due to the range of course options available to students. In this guide, participants go through the various types with examples listed below. This guide also integrates understanding course catalogs, course override procedures, various course lengths, and the importance of creating a schedule that supports postsecondary completion.

Figure 29

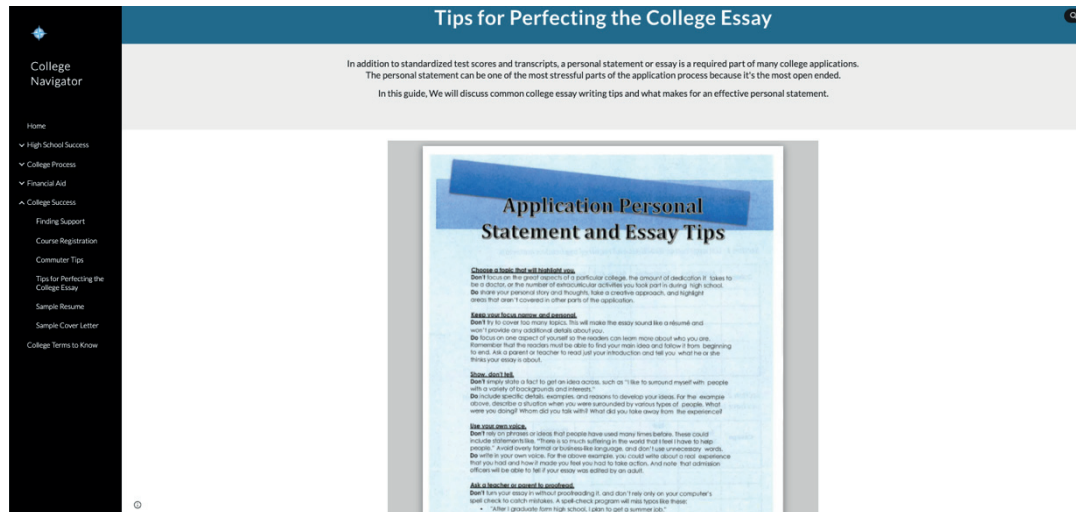
Commuter Tips Content Page



Participants are given a guide (Figure 29) to maximizing their time when enrolled as a commuter student (a student who travels to and from a college/university and does not take advantage of campus housing). Each section of the provide guide through Google Drive gives students tools and tricks for success in balance classes with travel times.

Figure 30

Perfecting the College Essay Content Page



A major component of college applications and scholarship essays is the personal statement and essay portion. In the provided guide (Figure 30) students walk through the necessary components and steps in perfecting a personal statement and making the most of academic writing.

Figure 31

Resume Basics Content Page

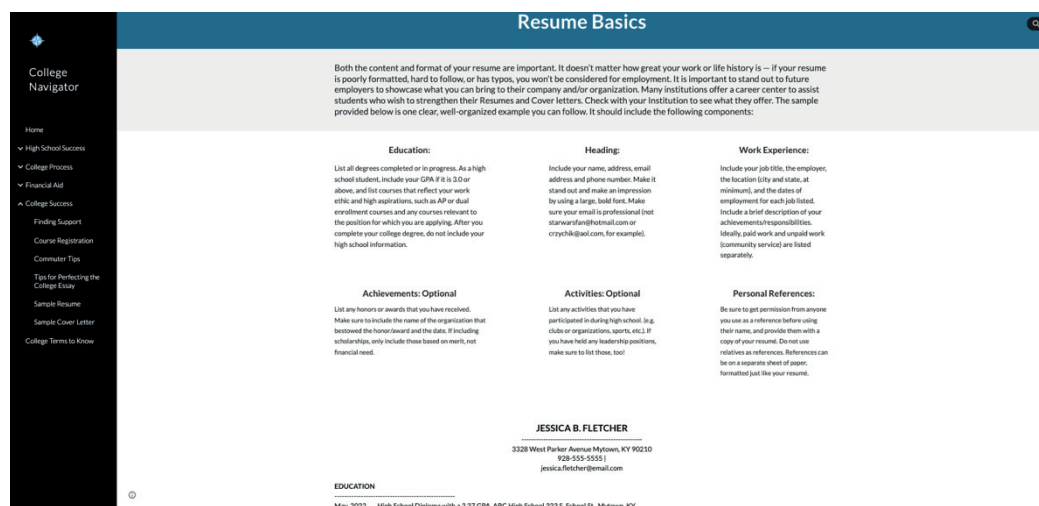


Figure 32*Cover Letter Basics Content Page*

Students are given information about work study programs. For many of my students the need to work often plays a major factor in their level of participation and my level of support to them. In Resume Basics (Figure 31) and Cover Letter Basics (Figure 32), students are given examples of a Resume and Cover Letter and are provided with discussion of each component and its relevance in obtaining a part-time or full-time position. The examples in both guides act as a template that students can use to begin building their career portfolios or applying for work studies/ part-time positions while in college and can be used to transition into a document used for applying for their future careers after college.

Figure 33*How to Read a Course Syllabus Content Page*

College Navigator

Home

High School Success

Postsecondary Education Overview/What is your Why?

Reading and Transcript

College Process

Financial Aid

College Success

College Terms to Know

SYLLABUS FOR FY101021, FIRST YEAR SEMINAR, FALL 2021

MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY

Division of Academic Affairs Division of Student Services

Office of Undergraduate Education Office of First Year Programs

1: Course # and Department Information

This section of a course syllabus lists the course you are taking (FY1011, the section number for the course 1021), Course Title (First Year Seminar, Semester you are taking the course (FALL 2021) and the Institution in which you are taking the course (Morehead State University). This is extremely helpful in college because it will help you ensure you are in the right classes on your first day of college/high school.

2: Instructor Contact Information

In this section, you will be able to find the name of your instructor (Brandon Isaac), their contact information (email, phone numbers, etc.), and their office hours.

Office hours are a time set aside by your professor to meet with students. You should take advantage of this access to your professor.

3: Course Description

In this section, you will find information regarding your course. Typically this includes an overview of what the course will be about. In addition prerequisites, credit hours may be included in this section. It is important to read through this information to ensure you are preparing yourself for the workload for the semester.

4: Student Learning Outcomes

In this section, you will find a list of goals and learning objectives that the professor will want their students to meet. Some professors may include a table listing the goals, learning objectives, and assessments.

5: Required Materials

In this section, textbooks and materials that are required for your course will be listed. Textbooks can refer to print or digital books and course materials may refer to different items such as calculators, clickers, computer software, etc. In most cases, textbooks and course materials can be purchased from your school's bookstore or online through a vendor (i.e. Amazon). If not, the professor will indicate where the required materials can be obtained. You can attend class on the first day and ask about course requirements if you are wanting to ensure you are

Course Description

For First Year Seminar to ensure that your students at Morehead State University emphasizing strategies to achieve the academic, social, personal, financial, emotional and physical well-being that leads to college-level success and completion. This course fosters a sense of belonging and purpose, encourages engagement in the curriculum and co-curricular life of the university, addresses the expectations of the university and its faculty, and helps students develop and apply skills to college-level meetings, critical thinking, and financial literacy. The course satisfies the core requirement for general education.

Course Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Describe the structure of Morehead State University and develop and apply skills that contribute to college-level success and completion.
2. Develop positive relationships with peers, faculty, and staff.
3. Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.
4. Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.
5. Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.
6. Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.
7. Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.
8. Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.
9. Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.
10. Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.

Required Materials

Students will require reliable and consistent access to the internet during the course. Course materials will be posted on the Blackboard learning management system, and students will complete assignments on Blackboard as well.

Grading and Assessment

You will demonstrate your progress in achieving the course's student learning outcomes (SLOs) listed above through your work on quizzes, reflective writing assignments, presentations, small and large group discussion activities, and other assignments appropriate to the course.

Please note that because this is a general education course (which means that it is part of a set of courses required of all MSU students that teach basic information to all well-educated people should know), your progress on SLOs 1a and 1b (as measured by the assignments described below) will be reported to the University.

Your final grade will be determined based upon your performance on these assignments as follows:

Reflexive Writing Assignments

Throughout the course you will be assigned various reflective style essays to write. These essays will be posted on Blackboard, and scored using common rubrics.

Quizzes

Throughout the course you will complete quizzes (on Blackboard) which reflect the course content covered in class and through assigned readings.

Projects or Participation Activities

Your professor will assign various in-class and out-of-class participation projects or activities, some of which will be completed in teams with your classmates. Attendance in class (either in person or virtually) will be required in

Understanding how to read a course syllabus (Figure 33) is designed to expose students to the expectations of a college course, understanding required materials, student accommodations, emergency procedures, attendance policies and walks them step-by-step through each portion including understanding the course calendar. Suggestions for how to organize information is included in this guide.

Figure 34

College Lingo/Terms to Know Content Page

College Terms to Know

Knowing the difference between a college or university, Bachelor's vs. Associate's, Undergraduate vs. Graduate studies can help you better navigate the college process. Understanding the lingo in higher education early on can set you up for success as a college student. While this list is not complete, it is the foundation for understanding the basics of postsecondary education.

A-D

2+2 Program: A program of study in which a student starts out completing general education coursework at a community or technical college over two years and then transferring to a college/university for the remaining year to complete a 4-year degree. Some colleges offer 2+2 programs where students are taking course at their local institution while also enrolled with a public university. This is different than concurrent enrollment as it has the option to transfer should they choose too.

Academic Advisor: The person at a college or university who helps students decide what classes to take, what major to pursue, etc. An advisor is similar to a high school guidance counselor.

Add/Drop Period: Most institutions will have an Add/Drop or similar period at the beginning of the semester. This is a time period during which the student may make changes to his schedule without any academic or financial consequences. The period may be only a few days or maybe as long as two weeks. Students may want to check with their academic advisor before making a major change to their schedule. Students should also be careful about adding a new course after too much time has passed and they may have missed vital material at the beginning of the course.

Admission requirements: Students wanting to attend a college or university must meet certain requirements to be considered for admission, such as achieving a specified ACT or SAT score, reaching a certain high school grade-point average and/or rank in class, taking specified high school courses, etc.

Alumni: This is a group of people who have graduated from a college or university.

American College Test (ACT): is a standardized test to determine a high school graduate's preparation for college-level work. It covers four areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning.

Associate's Degree (AS): An undergraduate degree awarded by a college or university upon successful completion of a program of study, usually requiring two years of full-time study. An associate's degree is typically awarded by community colleges; it may be a career or technical degree, or it may be a transfer degree, allowing students to transfer those credits to a four-year bachelor's degree-granting school.

Award Letter: Notice from a school that indicates the amount and type of financial aid that the school is willing and able to provide the student.

Bachelor's degree (BA): degree awarded after the completion of 120-130 hours of coursework. Some students may pursue a BS which is a Bachelor of Science degree.

Bursar: a person who manages the financial affairs of a college or university.

Campus Safety: This can be a department such as the University Police but may often include fire safety. The main focus is the security of the physical grounds as well as the students that utilize the university.

College Lingo/College Terms to Know (Figure 34) is a comprehensive guide that exposes students to the different terminology used in college. Participants are given terms in alphabetical order ranging from departments, degree programs, academic support, transitional terms, and more to prepare them to research and make sound decisions when selecting schools and navigating through college websites to find support/resources available to them.

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