Advocacy Overview

[College & Alumni Report Card Goals](#goals)

[Vision](#vision)

[Criteria for Success](#criteriaforsuccess)

[Key Players](#keyplayers)

[Key Messages](#keymessages)

[Key Pitfalls](#keypitfalls)

[Norms](#norms)

[Key Timeline](#keydeadlines)

[Better Lesson Site Map](#betterlessonsitemap)

[Resources](#resources)

**Goals:** [(back to top)](#_top)

End of Year:

* 100% of seniors matriculate to their 'best-fit' colleges

Interim:

* 100% of 3.0 GPA/1000+ SAT will interview for their top schools\* (between one and three) as advised by their college counselor (\*NOTE: Some colleges do not require and/or do not offer interviews. All colleges in this category are exempt from this goal).
* 100% of advocacy outreach by the college office will be complete (strategic advocacy to colleges via phone calls, in-person rep visits, emails to colleges, or student interviews with college reps) for 100% of seniors

**Vision:** [(back to top)](#_top)

Advocacy is a key, but often overlooked, component of the college application and matriculation process. Students play a key role in communicating and connecting with admissions officers at colleges to which they applied to express their strong interest in the school. In addition to ensuring that students submit high-quality applications with strong supporting letters of recommendation, the college counselor also advocates in a variety of ways on behalf of each student. The purpose and goals of advocacy differ depending on the time of year and stage of the application process, but advocacy can support a scholar in landing at a school where they are statistically much more likely to be successful and graduate.

Given the competitive application environment, one key role of the college counselor is to advocate on behalf of their students. They need to do this for a few reasons:

* + To best “brand” their students
  + To best “brand” their school
  + To explain any grey areas (dip in grades, inconsistent academic performance, low test scores, lack of extracurricular activities, or family circumstance) on a scholar’s application
  + To convey the scholar’s interest and/or fit for a particular college
  + Explain things that should not be put in writing (difficult family situations, complex financial situations, legal status, etc.)

The four primary focus areas of advocacy are **engagement, admissions, financial,** and **matriculation.**

* **Engagement (August-December):** In this stage, a college counselor is looking to excite and/or engage a student to consider a college that they may not be familiar with and/or not really like for uninformed reasons. Ideally, engagement strategies start no later than spring of junior year through the fall of senior year.
  + Vehicles for Advocacy: Diversity overnights, connecting to AF staff members, connecting to AF board members, strategic fall campus visits, visits to the high school from college admissions representatives
* **Admissions (September-March):** In this stage,college counselors connect with college admissions reps to preview potential applicants to their college. In many cases, the counselor is getting the college excited about the future applicant and increasing the scholar’s name recognition with that college. In addition, a counselor may ask some questions about the applicant’s candidacy to ensure the student is a good match for the school. Finally, if the student isn’t a ‘perfect match’ (i.e. does not meet admissibility requirements and/or has a hole/dip in their application), the counselor calls to advocate for admission despite those potential deficits.
  + Vehicles for Advocacy:College rep visits,professional email outreach, college counselor phone calls to college reps, college counselor phone calls to opportunity programs contacts, student interviews with college reps/alumni reps
* **Financial (December-May):** Once students have been accepted and receive financial aid packages, they must compare the final cost to attend at all schools to which they’ve been accepted. In the event that there is a financial gap, a college counselor can advocate for adjustments to the financial aid package.
  + Vehicles for Advocacy: College counselor phone calls to college reps, college counselor phone calls to financial aid office, submitting financial aid advocacy letters (family situation, independents, financial hardship, non-custodial parents), student phone calls/letters to financial aid offices
* **Matriculation (February-July):** At this final and extremely important stage of the process, students and families can be overwhelmed, scared, or even angry about one of the biggest decisions they’ll make in their educational career. In order to make an informed choice, college counselors work to ensure that students and their families visit campuses, connect with key influences, and have all necessary information to make an informed choice.
  + Vehicles for Advocacy: Accepted applicant weekends, campus visits, meetings with AF staff members of the same alma mater, meetings with AF board members of the same alma mater, emails written on behalf of scholars by board members and/or AF staff members.

**Criteria for Success**: [(back to top)](#_top)

To date, there is no rubric for advocacy.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | | **Key Players:**  [(back to top)](#_top) |
| **O** | College Counselor | * College Counselor * Seniors * Alumni Counselor * Dean of College * Network Support Team College * Board Members * AF Staff Members |
| **A** | Dean of College |
| **P** | College Counselor, Dean of College, Team College Network Support, Board Members, AF Staff members |
| **I** | Alumni Counselor, Team College Network Support |
| **C** | Alumni Counselor, Team College Network Support, Principal |
| **S** | All college counselors at AF will advocate for students in the college application process. |

**Recommended Policies:**

**Q: How do we determine whether or not we advocate for a student? What are the factors to consider when making that decision?**

It is important to review each student’s profile to determine the type and amount of advocacy needed across the four strands: engagement, admissions, financial, and matriculation. For example, a college counselor might be recommending new schools to a number of students requiring him/her to find the most strategic ways to get the students excited about a particular school, especially if it’s a less familiar option. In another situation, a scholar might be a strong fit for the culture of a school but may not meet all of the academic requirements that would make it likely for the student to be accepted. In this case, the college counselor would need to make a case for the student to an admissions representative on their behalf. The counselor would also have to help the scholar effectively advocate for him/herself. At the same token, it is important that college counselor use their advocacy support judiciously and strategically in order to build and maintain credibility with colleges. When a college admissions rep gets a call from an AF counselor that a scholar would be a great fit at their school, we want the college to take that recommendation very seriously and that can only happen if the counselor and/or the school and/or the AF brand have a strong foundation of credibility with that college. Finally, the college counselor needs to determine how multiple applicants to one school might be reviewed by a college. In a case when you have three kids applying to the same selective college, like Union College, it will be important to determine talking points prior to getting on the phone with a college rep. The counselor must consider the students’ admissibility to that school, the students’ likelihood of attending if accepted, and the students’ financial need, and the competitiveness of that group of applicants in comparison to each other. The following example can highlight and explain the complexity of this process:

Three applying to Union College:

The college counselor knows that the most competitive applicant in a pool of three to Union College thinks of the college as a ‘back-up’ school if they don’t get into the school that they really want to attend. Let’s assume for this example that the college counselor is confident that the student will get into their top choice. The college counselor then needs to advocate for the #2 or #3 student on the list even though the #1 candidate is the most likely admit. Depending on the relationships with the college rep, the college counselor can be more or less forthcoming in the advocacy call, about the likelihood of the #1 attending, and strongly advise the college to admit the #2 or #3

**Q: Does the college counselor(s) advocate for every student?**

Yes. The college counselor will advocate for each student in some way. However, if advocating for a scholar would put both the college counselor and the school’s credibility at risk, the college counselor should not advocate for the student. Especially with more tricky situations, it is important that the college counselor discuss their advocacy strategy for a student with the Dean of College.

**Q: How many interviews are students required to attend?**

Students should attend as many interviews as necessary to ensure acceptance to college. In most cases, interviews are most important when a student is applying to an extremely selective college and/or an opportunity program at a college. When the college counselor creates their advocacy plan, they must consider the competitiveness of the college, the competitiveness of the applicant, and any assets about the student that do not translate in their paper application.

**Key Messages:** [(back to top)](#_top)

* Advocacy is a year-long process that intersects with college rep visits, application submission, financial aid submission, and decision-meetings processes. A college counselor should allocate time each month during the school year to address the time-specific types of advocacy.
* It is important to be thoughtful and strategic when advocating ensuring that the college counselor does not overpromise on behalf of the student and potential ruin the relationship with the college rep and school.

The most effective advocacy occurs when relationships between the college counselor and the college rep have been built over time. Once established, the college counselor can leverage the power of that relationship.

* Advocacy is not a guarantee of acceptance, additional financial aid, or matriculation. It is possible that a college counselor could employ every possible tactic and still not reach the desired outcome of acceptance, additional financial aid, or matriculation.
* Direct advocacy is not the only or even the most effective way to help scholars get admitted to college. Great counselors will advise scholars to make calls, write emails, and send thank you notes. It’s critical, however, that the counselor ensures those communications are of extremely high-quality as otherwise they may have the reverse impact of what was intended.
* Discussions or meetings about advocacy work (phone calls to reps, emails, mobilizing networks) should be done with a level of delicacy and caution with students, families, and amongst school faculty Advocacy calls or outreach is not a guarantee for acceptance and requires a certain level of finesse when talking to colleges. Because of the relational nature of college admissions (e.g. college admissions counselors will be more forthcoming about applicants when they have a stronger, trustworthy relationship with a college counselor), it is important that college counselors don’t discuss advocacy calls in front of parents or students. Additionally, it would be misleading to give parents or students the impression that a college counselor can “just call and fix things.” Advocacy work is only as strong as the relationship between the counselors and the college and therefore, it is important to guard the communication between them and the confidentiality of their conversations.
* SCHOOL SHOULD INSERT ANY ADDITIONAL KEY MESSAGES

**Key Pitfalls**: [(back to top)](#_top)

* College counselors should not compromise their relationship and reputation with colleges to advocate for a student they do not feel extremely confident advocating for. While the short-term impact of not advocating could be difficult (e.g. a student would not be accepted to the college or not receive additional financial aid), the long-term impact is far more severe (e.g. erodes the trust between the college and college counselor when advocating for future students who might be a stronger fit, even if still a risk for the college). A college counselor must use their discretion and weigh all factors (extenuating circumstances for a student, feedback from teachers, knowledge about the likelihood of student persisting through challenges in college, etc.) when deciding when and how much to advocate.
* College counselors should have a clear financial picture (# of family members, parent/guardian marital status, any ‘hidden” assets i.e. owning a home, significant savings, etc., that would appear on the CSS Profile) of a student’s profile *before* advocating for any change in financial aid packages.
* College counselors do not utilize ‘land, sea, and air’ tactics of Achievement First. The college counselor should access all key stakeholders at AF (staff members, parents, board members, funders, etc.).

**Norms:** [(back to top)](#_top)

* In most cases, we believe that student and staff should send ‘Thank you’ cards and/or emails to any supporter in the advocacy process (college reps, board members, AF staff members, etc.)

**Key Timeline**: [(back to top)](#_top)

| **Month** | **Process/Strand** | **Action** | **Related Materials** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| August | Engagement  Admissions  Financial | Review preliminary college lists and determine scholars who needs engagement, admissions, and financial aid advocacy | * [Email to request informational interview from student](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/435864/communication-to-colleges-students) * [Thank you email after info interview from student](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/435864/communication-to-colleges-students) |
| August | Engagement | Create advocacy plan by identifying action steps & owners for each scholar within each strand of advocacy, where applicable | * [Advocacy Plan Tracker - SAMPLE](https://docs.google.com/a/achievementfirst.org/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0Ak2Zp4z1NU6_dFVjSE5HbVZIZGFTNXpuX2R2SXBiRmc#gid=1) * [College Rep Visit Communication Tracker - SAMPLE](http://betterlesson.com/my/document/1692155/collegerepvisitoutreachplanandcommunication_tracker_2013-xlsx) * [Diversity Overnight Tracker-SAMPLE](https://docs.google.com/a/achievementfirst.org/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AgtBQhxz13bTdFp5MF93SEdaTTRnazhrNUpybWsxY3c#gid=2) * One-pager on “Engagement, Admissions, and Financial Advocacy Strategies” |
| August | Engagement  Admissions  Financial | Execute strategies for engagement, admissions, and financial advocacy | * [Email to request informational interview from student](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/435864/communication-to-colleges-students) * [Thank you email after info interview from student](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/435864/communication-to-colleges-students) * [Thank you email after college rep visit from student](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/362403/communication-to-colleges-counselors) * [Thank you email after college rep visit from counselor](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/362403/communication-to-colleges-counselors) * See [College Representative Visit Overview](http://betterlesson.com/unit/81469/college-representative-visits) * See [Diversity Overnight Overview](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/384683/overview-of-diversity-overnights) |
| August | Engagement | **25% of engagement advocacy should be complete\*** |  |
| August | Engagement | **50% of engagement advocacy should be complete\*** |  |
| August | Engagement | **75% of engagement advocacy should be complete\*** |  |
| August | Engagement | **100% of engagement advocacy should be complete\***  *\*Generally, by the time a student submits their applications to all colleges in December, they should be invested and wanting to attend any college on their list. However, students can be fickle and change their minds and/or have reservations even after they submit applications.* |  |
| September | Engagement  Admissions  Financial | Execute strategies for engagement, admissions, and financial advocacy |  |
| October | Engagement  Admissions  Financial | Execute strategies for engagement, admissions, and financial advocacy |  |
| September | Engagement  Admissions  Financial | Execute strategies for engagement, admissions, and financial advocacy |  |
| September | Financial | Review all financial documents & additional assets of families to determine any additional financial advocacy needed. | * See [Financial Aid Overview](http://betterlesson.com/unit/81471/financial-aid) |
| September | Financial | Create financial aid outreach & submission plan | * [Financial Aid Tracker-SAMPLE](https://docs.google.com/a/achievementfirst.org/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AplzXaTil1YMdFdCY1lCNHAxcmpFSWZydjl3VDdvMkE#gid=0) |
| October | Engagement  Admissions  Financial | Execute strategies for engagement, admissions, and financial advocacy | * Happy New Year email post app submission from college counselor to college rep - SAMPLE |
| October | Financial | 100% of eligible seniors should complete the FAFSA and/or CSS Profile (and TAP for NY only) by January 31st | * See [Financial Aid Overview](http://betterlesson.com/unit/81471/financial-aid) |
| October | Admissions | **25% of admissions advocacy should be complete\*** |  |
| October | Admissions | **75% of admissions advocacy should be complete\*** |  |
| October | Admissions | **100% of admissions advocacy should be complete\***  \*Generally, all admissions decisions should be made by end of March/first week of April. | * [Advocacy Calls for Admissions – Options Overview](http://betterlesson.com/my/document/1958356/advocacycall_admissions_menuofoptions_2013-docx) * [Advocacy Call for Admissions – Agenda for a “new” college](http://betterlesson.com/my/document/1958363/advocacycall_agendatalkingpoints_newcollege_2013-docx) * Advocacy Call for Admissions – Agenda for a “returning” college * Advocacy Call for Admissions – Agenda for a “returning” college with competitive applicant pool * [Email to request informational interview from student](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/435864/communication-to-colleges-students) * [Thank you email after info interview from student](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/435864/communication-to-colleges-students) * Thank you email after admissions interview from counselor |
|  | Financial | **25% of financial advocacy should be complete\*** |  |
|  | Financial | **75% of financial advocacy should be complete\*** |  |
| May | Financial | **100% of financial advocacy should be complete\***  \**If a student is waiting for a waitlist spot, there may be some additional financial aid advocacy in May and June* | * [Letter of Explanation, Non-custodial- SAMPLE](#noncustodial) * [Letter of Explanation - Non-custodial, from parent - SAMPLE](http://betterlesson.com/my/lesson/435857/data-tracking-planning) * [Letter of Explanation, family circumstances - SAMPLE](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/435857/data-tracking-planning) * Advocacy Call to Financial Aid – Agenda & Talking Points |
| June | Matriculation | Review college acceptances (actual and projected) and determine which scholars who need matriculation advocacy | * [See "Decision Meeting Overview"](http://betterlesson.com/unit/117729/decision-meetings) |
| July | Matriculation | Identify action steps & owners for each scholar |  |
| July | **Matriculation** | Execute strategies for matriculation advocacy |  |
| July | **Matriculation** | Execute strategies for matriculation advocacy |  |
| July | **Matriculation** | 100% of decision meetings should be complete\* | * See [Decision Meeting Overview](http://betterlesson.com/lesson/442723/overview) |
| July | **Matriculation** | **100% of matriculation advocacy should be complete\***  \**If a student is waiting for a waitlist spot, there may be some additional matriculation advocacy in May and June* |  |

**Better Lesson Site Map:** [(back to top)](#_top)

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| **“Lesson”** | **Sample materials in this “lesson”** |
| Data Tracking & Planning | * Tracking tools to ensure strategic quality and response to colleges |
| Call Agendas | * Sample agendas for advocacy calls |
| Communication to Colleges- Counselors | * Emails to colleges to schedule an advocacy call; emails to colleges to advocate for students |
| Communication to Colleges- Students | * Emails to college to advocate for themselves for admission |
| Appeal Letters | * Sample letters appealing for admissions |

**Resources**: [(back to top)](#_top)

AF College Connections Survey, 2012-2013 (alma maters of all AF staff member and board members): <https://docs.google.com/a/achievementfirst.org/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AkeqYnuow5UbdGlEUWhzNlR2NTRtdE9rNzI1bXlNOUE#gid>