STRATEGIES, STRUGGLES, AND SUCCESS: STUDENTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES
WITH RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION

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Session Description: Students who have been historically under-represented in Advanced Placement courses have faced a multitude of obstacles from stereotype threat, to low expectations, to barriers to entry. Once at college, these same students face further challenges. Participants will listen and learn, and question and dialogue with a panel of students, each with a different story of strategy, struggle, strength, and success. The panel of students will identify strategies, explain programmatic supports (both at the high school and college level), and speak to the power of peer-to-peer perseverance. Participants will walk away with relevant insights and proven strategies that will support their efforts to create and implement bridges instead of barriers for historically under-represented students accessing and succeeding in an AP program and then in higher education, regardless of race, background, or family income.

Recommendations:

1. High School teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators must work harder to engage parents and families in the students’ education.

2. High School teachers, guidance counselors and administrators must teach our students **self-advocacy** - every student said that this was an area where they felt weak in college.

3. We need teachers in grades 10 and 11, especially, to recognize AP potential and bump students into honors and Advanced Placement courses. Several students noted that they had been in honors classes, and a junior teacher recognized their talent and ability and recommended them for Advanced Placement courses. ALL students recommended by this teacher had successful outcomes on the AP test (one student scored a 5). We must be careful that pre-AP does not serve a barrier to AP courses.

4. We need to increase the rigor of our courses - especially at the honors and college level - so that our assignments mirror those that students receive in college. Specifically, students remarked that high school classes could be improved if:

   - Students were required to evaluate research sources more effectively.
   - Students were required to synthesize information in a variety of different ways
   - Students were asked to collaborate with other students in meaningful ways

5. All teachers should be trained in Advanced Placement in order to increase rigor in the lower grades.
6. Classes that focus on computer programming, art, engineering, etc., should be strengthened to give students a better idea of what they might want to study or at least allow them to get a feel the nature of what they'll be doing in college. Electives should designed so that the option to take an AP exam for that class could be possible (i.e. computer science, music, art, etc.)

7. High schools should provide opportunities for students to gain cultural capital that will help them compete with their wealthier peers in college. Field trips to plays, museums, the opera, lectures, etc. had a profound effect on students and helped to level the playing for them in college.

8. Students who felt connected to at least one adult in the high school – teacher, guidance counselor, etc. – felt that the mentoring experience helped them to achieve in high school and to realize their dream of college.

9. High school students, especially those whose parents do not speak English, need more targeted support in choosing a college, applying to college and navigating the FAFSA and other forms.

10. College students need to establish immediate relationships with their professors and advisors, so that if and when they need help, they can approach the professional who can assist them with their problem.