

Too many Utah high school students are not going to college.

One in three high school students aren't enrolled in college within five years of high school graduation. The Utah Board of Regents is proposing a statewide program that will put a permanent, near-peer, full-time, college access advisor in every high school in Utah to better support students on their path to college.

This first-in-the-nation, statewide college access advisor program will increase college enrollment, increase college graduation, change the course of intergenerational poverty.

Student support for the college access advisor program

"I was lucky to have access to a UCAC advisor during my senior year at Hillcrest High School. My mother did not know anything about the US education system as she is an immigrant from China. As I had no other adult caretaker in my life, college was a distant goal with no accessible route. During my senior year, our teachers introduced to us the UCAC advisor as an expert in college resources. I had no plans for financing college, for applying, or for making the transition between high school and college. I met with Savannah, our UCAC advisor, who took time out of her day to listen to my situation, assess, and introduce me to different college resources. I remember her patience when she explained the application process and when she informed me about our school's college application day where students had the opportunity to apply to our state schools for free. Most importantly, she matched several scholarships that fit my situation and encouraged me to apply. As I took her counsel, I was able to receive the Gail and Larry H. Miller Enrichment Scholarship, a full tuition, housing, fees, and books scholarship that has been monumental in my college career. It took financial pressure off my hardworking single mother and myself, allowed me to focus in school, and connected me with people around campus that I would have never had the chance to meet. I am currently applying for medical school, an expensive process that has been possible through the money that I have saved from my undergraduate years. Savannah was, in a way, a person that has defined my college experience, and I absolutely appreciate time she spent at my high school, helping not only me but also many other peers of mine."

Franco Jin, Olympus High School

"I was lucky enough to have a college advisor at West High, and thanks to him I believed I could get scholarship money, go to a college, and attending college further from where I thought I was gonna go. Throughout my senior year, I already had an idea of what I wanted to be and what I wanted to study in college, which was Automotive Technology. I wanted to be a mechanic because of the CTE courses I took at West and liked to fix cars. This is where the college advisor at my school helped me figure out more information about colleges, which ones would be in my best interests. Come to see when applying to colleges/universities, he told me Weber State University would be the best fit for me because of what I wanted to do. He was right and was able to help me with the whole application process, but he also went above and beyond by reminding me that I was going to Weber State and found a scholarship that I should apply for since its description/criteria best fit me. I applied for the scholarship, didn't really think much about it until I got an email saying I had received the scholarship. Right then and there I couldn't have been more excited to go to college knowing I was able to get a scholarship to help me out. As soon as I knew I received the scholarship, I went straight to his office to let him know and thank him for looking out for me. My college advisor was one of the few people that truly helped me with my path going on to higher education. I'm glad that I had an awesome college advisor."

Kevin Enriquez, West High School, current UCAC advisor at Taylorsville

"Ms. Hallows had a great impact on my life in terms of helping me pursue higher education. If I ever had any questions about anything related to college, she always had the answer. She even was able to help me get a scholarship that helped pay for all of my books and other things during the beginning weeks of my first semester at the University of Utah. I am so glad that she was at Pine View High School during my time there since she was able to assist in so many ways inside and outside the classroom!"

Taylor King, Pine View High School

"I had great experiences with previous UCAC Advisors during my high school career. Until now, I still remember their names and see them in the community. My sophomore year (2010-2011) at Hunter, Moana Hansen was the UCAC Advisor who told me to get good grades and get involved, so when I'm a senior it can help me to apply for college and scholarships. My junior year (2011-2012), Mikaela Mokofisi was the advisor who inspired me to apply for more than 10 scholarships. I remember I asked her, is it possible to go to college and graduate debt free? She said YES, she told me that there was a student at West High School who applied for 50 scholarships. It caught my attention. I never thought that you can apply for more 10 scholarships. During my summer of junior year to senior year, I searched for scholarships, wrote down deadlines on my calendar and set goals to apply for 10 scholarships each month. The first week of my senior year, I already had my essay and letters of recommendation from my teachers and mailed out scholarship applications weekly. Even the post office clerk knew me really well at that time, because she saw me come to post office every day. I told her that I planned to apply at least 50 scholarships before I graduate. Also, Emily Ah Ching was the UCAC Advisor my senior year. She helped me and my twin brother to register for ACT and request a fee waiver for U of U Admission Application. One thing that I can't forget about Emily, she handwritten all the U of U scholarships that I can apply at the time because I told her I want to go to the U. She invests her time and believe in me. UCAC Advisors at Hunter had influenced me and helped me so much. Even I was a sophomore and junior, Moana and Mika they gave me tips to prepare for my senior year. Now, I am excited to be UCAC Advisor at Hunter and give back to my community."

Sambat Kim, Hunter High School, current UCAC advisor at Hunter High School

"As a student that originally came from Mexico and that had no experience whatsoever on how the educational system in the United States worked, I find myself extremely lucky to have had a UCAC college advisor such as Dayan Castañeda to guide me through college applications, scholarships, major explorations and even career interests. Without the resources that my college advisor provided me with, I would not be where I am now. My college advisor acted as a guide through my journey for higher education. Thanks to the guidance of my college advisor I was admitted to the Honors College at the University of Utah, admitted to Southern Utah University and to Westminster College. In addition, for my first year alone at the University of Utah, I was awarded a total of \$26,095 in scholarships and financial aid, which was more than enough to pay my tuition for my first year. These opportunities involved many essays to review, applications to go over, calls to make and even mock interviews to have, all with which my college advisor was happy to help with. I recognize my college advisor, Dayan Castaneda, as an important contributor to my most recent achievements. The resources and support that she provided me with allow me to be where I am now."

Bryan Banuelos Jara, Taylorsville High School

"Having a college advisor during my high school senior year helped me get a better understanding of higher education in college. I personally did not know how to apply for scholarships and my college advisor showed me the steps to apply and how most scholarship applications work. My college advisor helped me get an understanding of the college lifestyle and how I can succeed in my freshmen year. My college advisor would ask about my goals in life and what universities I would want to attend. I would come back to speak with my advisor and my advisor would have a list of scholarships I could apply for. I would not be at the University of Utah if I did not have a college advisor in high school. The advice and the knowledge my advisor has given me has helped me reach my goal of higher education."

Ulises Amaton, Taylorsville High

"I'm the first in my family to ever step foot in a college, and I truly believe that if it wasn't for you I wouldn't have done it. You not only helped me fill out applications but also inspired me to continue with my education and help those around me. You would always remind me to fill out FAFSA and that even if I didn't believe I qualified for it to still give it a chance, and for that I am truly thankful. So I truly believe you had such a positive impact in my life, thank you."

Angelica Carmona, West Jordan High

"In my days of being a senior I was grateful to have Ms. Arteaga as a person to help me advance my knowledge and help me push through the rough parts of getting college ready for myself. I had no other person in my life to drive me to further my education and I'm glad that I did because I'm learning new things every day and also being able to put those skills I learned in the classroom out into the real world outside of it. The applications were a big issue because nobody in my family understood them, so having that reference on hand with being able to talk to someone who could explain it easily was a big help for me and my family."

Ashanti Cage, West Jordan High School

"In high school, I did not have any plans for college. It wasn't up until my senior year that the reality of graduating was hitting me, and I still had no plans. I didn't have any help from family as my brother only had his high school diploma, and my parents couldn't afford to go to high school. I was stuck. I thought that I was going to work straight out of high school. Until one of my friends directed me towards a UCAC advisor we had in the school. I walked in and had no idea what to even ask. The only knowledge I had of college is what I saw from movies. She started to explain to me about the benefits of getting a bachelor's degree vs a high school diploma. She then told me about tuition for schools and I was about to leave as I wouldn't be able to afford it. Then, she started talking to me about scholarships and Salt Lake Community College. I was hooked. I felt like if I got a scholarship, I would be able to afford going to SLCC. I would visit every week to see if she had any new scholarships posted that I could apply to. Once I found the perfect one, she helped me apply. Because of her constant help, I was able to get the Quest scholarship at SLCC. From there, I started to get into more leadership roles and even got into advising. All due to her helping me out and not giving up on me. UCAC and their helped me out in the best way possible, and if it wasn't for their help, I wouldn't know where I would be right now."

Michael Daniel (Hunter High School), former UCAC advisor at Taylorsville High

Parent support for the program

"When my daughter, Melissa decided to attend The University of Utah, I made a plan to help her with the admissions process and scholarship applications. I heard about Marissa Manzanares on November 2016 working as college admissions counselor at her school, as I was sifting through the information about colleges Melissa had brought home. So, I decided to get in touch with her. My first encounter was to ask Marissa for help to complete FAFSA, as my daughter is a Dreamer. Marissa was very generous with her time as she helped me browse through scholarships my daughter could apply for, since our plan was to help Melissa study on scholarships, since our financial situation would not allow us to cover tuition costs.

Before Melissa graduated, Marissa helped me to complete the HB 144 forms, since I had prior knowledge of them. As a mother, I felt preoccupied and worried about the immigration status of Melissa and whether she would fit in well. So, I addressed my worries and concerns to Marissa and she connected me to Alonso Reyna, who has been an invaluable asset and mentor to Melissa at The University of Utah. Our family is grateful for the help of Marissa Manzanares, as she is a dedicated professional in helping my daughter and other Dreamers pursue a higher education. It was a beyond pleasant experience meeting and working with Marissa, because if it were not for help, Melissa would not be one step closer to achieving her goals today."

Parent of Melissa Regalado

Counselor support for the program

"The UCAC advisor has been invaluable to Hunter High School. The UCAC advisor helps our students see that college is an option and can give them opportunities to further their lives. We are grateful for the assistance and value the quality help that we have received from our UCAC advisor."

Claudia Travis, Counselor, Hunter High School

"At Taylorsville High we have appreciated our college access advisor. The advisors that have worked at Taylorsville have been instrumental in implementing and improving our College Application Week activities. The last data given to us by the state shows an increase in enrollment for the first time in 10 years. We feel the college advisor had a significant role in this upturn."

Lorri Aldridge, Counselor, Taylorsville High School

"Without a doubt, our college access adviser is an integral piece of the process of getting our seniors accepted into college with financial aid and scholarships. He works tirelessly to provide access and means to all students – specifically those with limited resources and experience – and does so in a way that facilitates trust, respect, and establishes him as a mentor and friend to our students."

Amanda Calton, Counselor, Cottonwood High School

"Our college access adviser has changed our school! She provides services for our students that are irreplaceable and we are grateful to have her."

Jen Morrison, Counselor, West Jordan High School

We really enjoy having Utah College Advisers in our school and are grateful for them. They are a lifesaver to our students. We have a high percentage of first generation students that are always needing help with filling out college applications, prepare for the ACT, apply for scholarships and FAFSA. They continue to be great helpers and role models for our students."

Uotlose Havea, Counselor, Granger High School

Administrator support for the program

"We have loved having a College Advisor at Cyprus High School! They are great at connecting with our students and giving them the most current information. In times past, our college advisor has been Spanish speaking, which has really helped our students feel connected, have a role model and also keep their parents in the loop! Please keep sending them to us!"

Michele Callahan, Assistant Principal, Cyprus High School

"UCAC program helped so many students both enroll in college, apply for scholarships and financial aid. Without the UCAC program many of my students would not have the opportunities in higher education they have today."

Craig Stauffer, Principal, Hunter High School

“UCAC coordinators are amazing! They work tirelessly to make each senior feel special and they have an opportunity to do whatever they set their sights to achieve. Each UCAC coordinator have taken the time and energy to build relationships with our students and would individualize each student’s college pathway to success. Ever since the inception of UCAC, our Regents’ Scholars have increased as well as our seniors attending college.”

Maile Loo, Principal, Kearns High School

“The UCAC program provides 150 plus students with a long list of benefits they would otherwise not be able to receive. Our students benefit from an on-campus rock star who can assist them with scholarship applications, FASFA information, college applications. Our students better understand the importance of going to college. This reality becomes real to the students. We are able to remove frustrating and difficult barriers that used to discourage students from even applying to college. We now have more students applying to college, not to mention a much larger number of students who are accepted to college—lastly, we see more students stay with their college program. We have fewer students dropping out of college. We truly love and appreciate this wonderful program.”

Mike Mees, Principal, Pine View High School

College Access Advisor support for the program

“Working as a college advisor after graduation was the perfect opportunity to expose me to the world of public education, public service, and it encouraged me to pursue a graduate education. Through my work for UCAC, I witnessed the resilience, drive, determination, and talent of students who lived below the poverty line, students who had no family member ever attended college, and students who had recently immigrated to the US. Furthermore, some of my most dear memories and fulfilling moments were hearing these students get accepted to various colleges, receive scholarships and federal grants, and be recognized for their wonderful achievements. Because of this experience, I pursued a Master’s degree in public administration, and continue to work towards increasing access to higher education for first-generation, and underrepresented students, this time for the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. My time at UCAC was not just a job, it helped me develop professionally and personally, and built lasting relationships with many of the students whom I still keep in touch to this day.”

Pamela Portocarrero, Taylorsville Advisor 2015-2016

“UCAC allowed me to utilize my passion to help students while serving as a leader in the community. As a college adviser, I was able to ensure that students receive the attention and guidance they required in order to successfully apply to college and obtain the financial resources they needed. Thanks to UCAC, I was able to serve as a liaison between my students’ communities, their respective high school, and the system of higher education. My experience with UCAC allowed me to learn more about our education system and ways to support students achieve their aspiration for higher education. Professionally, UCAC gave me the tools and experience I needed to successfully graduate from law school and work as an attorney in various areas of the law.

Eduardo Reyes Chavez, Esq., Cottonwood Advisor 2012-2013