

ADVICE FROM SENIORS ABOUT COLLEGE

What I Wish I Had Known When I Was a Freshman!

A classroom workshop/presentation



What's required:

- A group of high school seniors eager to engage with freshmen about what it takes to make it to college, including passing on tips from their own experiences
- A 45-minute (approximately) block of time
- Ninth grade classrooms where the seniors can lead students through discussions, show a video, and answer questions
- A DVD player to view the 14-minute video , “Hear Us Out: Students Talk About Their Path to College”
- A flip chart to record the thoughts and concerns of ninth grade participants
- Trust in the power of “upper classmen” to teach and motivate “underclassmen”

Stay in class. Go to every class. My freshman year, I kicked it like I was a senior. This is the only year I haven't been in any trouble. Yeah, I maintained pretty good grades, but I could have did better. When I got a B, I could've got an A. When I got a C, I could've got a B. As a freshman...think about who it is you want to be so that you won't get sidetracked by things that are nonsense. – Chattanooga, TN senior

Take every opportunity that is given to you. There's so many things that can help you grow as a person and people that are there to teach you something. You'll learn a lot more about yourself and what you actually want to do and where you want to go if you push yourself. It's easy to fall into what you're used to or with the crowd surrounding you rather than pushing yourself to see how far you can go. – Seattle, WA senior

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Background: In the spring of 2010, the Center for Youth Voice at What Kids Can Do (WKCD) joined student research teams in Hamilton County, Tennessee and Seattle, Washington to learn more about the challenges high school students face on the path to college. Over 5,000 students completed the students' "Hear Us Out" survey. Another 225 participated in focus groups and individual interviews, led by the student researchers. We learned so much: about what's motivating, what's discouraging, and what's needed to make it to college, especially if you are low-income and minority. We've shared our findings online, in written reports, and in videos.

The "Hear Us Out" project also taught us the power of having seniors share their experience and advice with freshmen, face-to-face. This gave us an idea: Why not encourage high schools to make a time and space each spring where small groups of seniors could meet with freshman and pass on their hard-earned wisdom about making it to college.

Scenario: To bring our idea to life, we propose a scenario in which—

- (1) A member of the faculty/guidance staff takes ownership of the project and recruits a group of seniors, 12 – 15, willing to lead the freshmen classroom presentations.
- (2) The seniors are as diverse as possible—a mix of gender, race, students for whom the path to college was relatively straightforward along with those for whom it was challenging, first-generation students along with students who have college in their family background.
- (3) The seniors meet as a group to get oriented, watch the "Hear Us Out" video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFwcRc72CLI>, review the suggested protocol for their presentations, and decide who will pair up with whom; the ideal number of seniors for each classroom presentation is probably three.
- (4) The group develops a strategy for how the presentations will occur— e.g., in ninth grader language arts classes—and signs up teachers , then draws up a schedule and assignments.
- (5) The group re-convenes when they have finished all of their presentations to debrief the experience—and celebrate their accomplishments.
- (6) A few volunteers record the flip chart notes from the classroom presentations so that teachers and counselors can get a feel for what the ninth graders had to say about college.

PRESENTATION PROTOCOL FOR SENIORS

Please feel free to amend this “script” to fit your circumstances. And be prepared to improvise when you’re doing the actual presentation!

Introduction (2 min)

Introduce yourselves: your name, where you hope to go for college and what you might major in—and then maybe something personal (e.g., something about yourself that wouldn’t be apparent just by looking at you).

Explain the purpose of the presentation/discussion.

Icebreaker (3 min)

If the group is 15 students or less:

Pick a question, like one of the following, and ask each student in the group to say his/her name and answer the question.

- *What is one goal you’d like to accomplish, during your lifetime?*
- *If you had to give up a favorite food, which would be the most difficult to give up?*
- *If you could transport yourself anywhere instantly, where would you go and why?*

If it’s a full class, ask:

What are the first words that come to mind when you hear the word “college?”

Video (14 min)

Show the video, “Hear Us Out: Students Talk About Their Path to College” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFwcRc72CLI>

Video discussion (10 min)

Ask students to comment on the video. Record student answers on a flip chart. Sample questions:

- *What stands out most for you, from what the students in the video had to say?*
- *What surprises you?*
- *What did you learn?*

Advice (10 min)

Share your advice, as seniors, for freshmen following in your footsteps. Take turns telling your own “story”:

- *What motivates you to go to college: to believe in yourself, stay motivated, to do what you need to do to make it to college?*
- *What has weighed you down, got in the way, sidetracked you? What have you done to overcome these challenges?*
- *Looking back, which mistakes do you wish you hadn't made? Which mistakes did you make that, looked at from a distance, you're glad you made—because you learned important lessons from them?*

Closing discussion (5 min)

Invite students to share the challenges they feel they face when it comes to college. Record their answers on a flip chart. If there's time, pick a few of the challenges the freshmen have listed and explore solutions.

RESOURCES

Tell students about www.firstinthefamily.org and encourage them to check out the planning checklists, links, videos, inspirational quotes, and other materials.

QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, COMMENTS?

Please write us at info@firstinthefamily.org