

SUCCESSFULLY SERVING THE COLLEGE BOUND

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AFRICA S. HANDS



AN IMPRINT OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
CHICAGO | 2015

www.alastore.ala.org

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ISBNs:

978-0-8389-1272-0 (paper)

978-0-8389-1279-9 (PDF)

978-0-8389-1280-5 (ePub)

978-0-8389-1281-2 (Kindle)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hands, Africa S.

Successfully serving the college bound / Africa S. Hands.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8389-1272-0

1. Libraries and students—United States. 2. Libraries and colleges—United States. 3. College student orientation—United States. 4. Universities and colleges—United States—Admission. I. Title.

Z718.7.H36 2015

025.5—dc23

2014027916

Cover design by T. J. Johnson. Text design by E. J. Strongin in the Sabon LT Std, Avenir LT Std, ITC Machine, Edwardian Script, Univers LT Std, and ITC Zapf Dingbats Std Medium type-faces. Composition by Neuwirth & Associates, Inc.

Ⓢ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992 (Permanence of Paper).

Printed in the United States of America

19 18 17 16 15

5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
CHAPTER ONE Who Are Our College-Bound Patrons?	1
CHAPTER TWO Handling Objections	13
CHAPTER THREE Conducting a Needs Assessment	21
CHAPTER FOUR Developing a Collection	39
CHAPTER FIVE Programs for College Bound	53
CHAPTER SIX Creating Partnerships	71
CHAPTER SEVEN Marketing and Outreach to the College Bound	87
CHAPTER EIGHT Online College-Planning Resources	107
APPENDIX A Additional Resources	125
APPENDIX B Commonly Used Sources for Higher Education Data	133
APPENDIX C Sample Questions for Needs Assessment Data Gathering	135
APPENDIX D Resources for Brainstorming	138
<i>Index</i>	147

PREFACE

Working in a public library requires staff and administrators to be attuned to the many types and needs of current and potential library patrons. Just when you think the library has an understanding of the service and program needs of one population, another special population or subgroup of patrons need or want specific services or programs. From children with special needs, to patrons whose native language is not English, to seniors in the community, the library is often considered the one place where all are welcome, and, for the most part, can find information and programs to suit personal needs and interests. Given the inherent educational value of the public library, one might expect to find services or programs geared toward patrons with higher education aspirations.

Librarians and other library staff members work with patrons throughout their life cycles. We see children on their first day of kindergarten, and again when they enter middle and high school. Over time we get to know our patrons' personal histories as well as their reading preferences. The reference desk is not just a place to learn about the latest bestseller; it is where patrons share what is happening in their lives. We are privy to their life events and their goals, which may include pursuing a college degree or other postsecondary training. Library staff can be trained about available resources so that they are able to have informed conversations with patrons interested in exploring higher education—not as advisors, but as reference professionals qualified to make educated recommendations.

My review of public library websites revealed that not only do many libraries not have college-related information and links on their websites, few have specific programs for college-bound patrons of any age. This, of course, is only one state; many libraries—large, medium, and small; and suburban, urban, and rural, do a good job of serving college-bound patrons, particularly those of traditional college-going age. *Successfully Serving the College Bound* recognizes that librarians and other library staff members have different levels of expertise related to college planning, and patrons have different

levels of needs. For libraries interested in starting or improving services and programs for college-bound patrons, this book provides tips and information from librarians who have planned both large and small programs to connect with their college-bound community.

For nearly ten years, I have helped students of all ages navigate the maze of college admissions. Some are adults who are interested in graduate study but lack undergraduate degrees, and are unaware of the steps they are expected to follow to pursue graduate-level education. They have the necessary interest, will, and support, but lack information. Others are like the parents who contact a college's admissions office in April to find out how to enroll their son, who is about to graduate from high school, for the upcoming fall semester. He has worked hard on his studies and earned good grades but has not yet applied for admission. The parents have no idea that he should have applied for admission the previous fall. The deadline for admission to the freshman class has passed, the entering class has been admitted, and students have already accepted places in the freshman class. In this case, although the teen has grades and test scores that meet admissions requirements, he did not have enough information about the admissions process to secure a place. The family now has to work on plan B.

Changes in the economy call for changes in our patrons' skill sets and knowledge bases. Today's college-bound community includes students of all ages and backgrounds who are interested in different educational experiences that range from a traditional campus, to flexible online or evening and weekend programs, to vocational and career-focused programs. Some patrons are returning to college after taking several years off because of professional, financial, and family obligations. Others are first-generation students with little or no access to college advisors. Still others, like students with disabilities or military-service members, have special needs and require assistance to navigate the college-planning process. In my experience, many students do not know how to select and apply to college—what questions to ask, what accreditations to look for in a college, or what financial aid and scholarship opportunities exist. Some prospective students do not know that all colleges and universities are not the same—there are public, private, and for-profit institutions, some of which are research universities and others liberal arts colleges, each offering different majors and extracurricular activities.

Successfully Serving the College Bound was written because college-bound members of our community need our help, and public libraries are equipped to provide access to resources and programs that will help patrons get on the right track to obtain a college degree or other post-secondary training. This book includes worksheets to help you begin taking inventory of your

library's programs, resources, and your staff's skills and interests; presents programming ideas for a different types of college-bound patrons; and reviews online college-planning resources. I hope *Successfully Serving the College Bound* helps you to research your college-bound community, brainstorm community partners, and create programs to support the educational pursuits of your patrons.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Jack Montgomery, professor and coordinator of collection services at Western Kentucky University, for stopping by my poster session at the Kentucky Library Association conference and inviting me to write an article about college-planning resources for *Against the Grain*. Thank you to Cheri Voellman for coaching me chapter-by-chapter and helping me stay on task, and for your emails acknowledging my progress. Thank you to my first editor, J. Michael Jeffers, and my second editor, Jamie Santoro, for taking the reins and being a genuine delight to work with. To those librarians and administrators who work tirelessly to help patrons plan for and succeed in college, including Christine Caputo, Erin Derry, Pam Edwards, Rosy Henderson, Danielle McGavock, Donna Pesce, Isamar Ramirez, and Judy Reno, thank you for your willingness to be interviewed and share your experiences. This project could not have been completed with the support of my partner, Debra J. Mumford. Thanks for celebrating each completed chapter. And a special thank you to my mother, Valerie A. Lloyd, and sister, Estelle Paysinger-Hill, for your support and love.

1

WHO ARE OUR COLLEGE-BOUND PATRONS?

A quote from an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a leading publication that reports on higher education news and trends, supports the public library’s case for serving college-bound patrons. In the article, Mary Willingham, a researcher and whistle-blower at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, states, “People who can afford it give their kids tutors, enrichment, and after-school SAT prep. I saw the gap between students.”¹ This statement refers to a recent scandal involving the reading levels of college athletes with whom Willingham worked as a reading specialist. Willingham is under fire for making public the less than college-ready reading skills of some athletes at the elite institution, which set off a storm of controversy and debate about the academic preparedness of college athletes, the university’s commitment to supporting the academic interests of athletes, and the general plight of some inner city and racially and ethnically diverse college-bound students. Beyond the politics of college athletics, Willingham’s statement points to an overall problem of inequality between the haves and have-nots in regard to readiness for college and access to college preparatory programs.

Some families are able to spend upwards of thousands of dollars on college aptitude test preparation courses, essay-writing consultants, and all manner of other application-enhancing services and activities to help their college-bound offspring gain admission to the top (and even not-so-top) colleges and universities. Those families who are unaware of such services and programs, or who cannot participate in them due to limited finances or other obligations,

are left to fend for themselves with little or no information about how the college admission process even works. My intention is not to malign those fortunate patrons who are familiar with these resources, but to make clear that, as Willingham suggests, there are gaps, not only in literacy but in other areas related to college preparedness—entrance exam preparation, financial planning, writing and research skills, and more. Libraries can fill some of the gaps by offering programming for college-bound patrons.

In Phoenix, Arizona; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana; and New Brunswick, New Jersey, public libraries already offer services and programming to help future college students get on track to pursue a college degree or other post-secondary training. In keeping with the public library's historic mission to foster the educational, economic, cultural, and philanthropic growth of their patrons, these libraries and others like them are stepping up to support the educational interests and pursuits of their communities.

TODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENT

When you think about the college-bound patron, who comes to mind? Is it the teen who serves on your young adult services advisory board? Is it the home-schooled patron who frequently asks for help on projects? Is it the single mother or middle-aged gentleman who picks up books on hold after a long day at work? Although you may not recognize them, college-bound patrons, including both typical traditional high-school seniors and nontraditional adult learners, are all around you. As you begin to think specifically about how to serve college-bound members of your community, you will need to think broadly about today's diverse college students.

Enrollment data is a reliable source for information on college students. The federal Department of Education collects data that paint a picture of students currently enrolled in college by age, ethnicity, gender, institution type, and other variables. Changes in enrollment patterns, as presented by this data, will inform your library's decision to increase or make changes to existing services and programs for college-bound patrons. The data will tell you whether more traditional-age youth are attending college directly after high school, if there is a trend of attending two-year institutions before transferring to four-year institutions, or if there is a growing population of nontraditional students in your community. Because "enrollment is a key indicator of the scope of and access to educational opportunities," this information will help you make the case for those program and service enhancements in your library that will better serve your community.²

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the immediate college enrollment rate for high-school graduates increased from 60 percent in 1990 to 66 percent in 2012. Of these students, 37 percent were enrolled in four-year institutions and 29 percent were enrolled in two-year colleges. The majority of full-time students enrolled at public and private nonprofit four-year institutions were traditional students under the age of twenty-five.³ Although the rate of enrollment among male students barely increased (from 58 to 61 percent), the rate of female students increased from 62 to 71 percent over the same time period. Recent enrollment patterns have shifted such that more females than males are enrolling in college, and this pattern of females outpacing males is projected to continue through 2020 for both full-time and part-time students at traditional two- and four-year institutions.⁴

With regard to enrollment immediately following high school by racial/ethnic group, rates have increased for White, Black, and Hispanic students, with rates for students of Asian descent higher than any other group. Among all undergraduate students, White students attend two- or four-year public and private institutions at a higher rate than other racial or ethnic groups. Black and Hispanic students attend four-year for-profit institutions at higher percentages than four-year public and private nonprofit institutions.⁵

Unfortunately, for students from families whose incomes are in the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes, in 2012 the college enrollment rate for newly graduated students was 29 percentage points lower than for students from high-income families (52 percent compared to 81 percent). Students from middle-income families attended at a rate 16 percentage points lower than the rate of students from high-income families.⁶ The low-income families for whom enrollment rates are lower are will benefit from related programs and services offered by the library. Families with higher incomes are more likely to avail themselves of expensive college preparatory services and programs.

Over 500,000 students attended non-degree granting institutions that offered career and technical programs in fall 2011.⁷ All college-bound members of your community may not be headed for traditional four-year, or even two-year, degree programs. They may plan to enroll in local career and technical colleges or programs within the community college system that offer training in specific trades that can be immediately applied in the workplace. These students will need support to select reputable institutions and training programs that match their interests and skill levels, and that correlate to job prospects and employment trends in the local community. Serving this population may involve partnering with local career-development organizations and professionals to offer programs on career selection and preparation.

Enrollment in non-degree granting institutions specializing in career and technical education and in for-profit institutions experienced a considerable

upswing (from 0.4 to 1.7 million students between 2000 and 2010).⁸ This is consistent with data on colleges and universities with the highest enrollments, which show that the for-profit University of Phoenix's Online Campus had the highest college enrollment of any institution in fall 2011, with 307,871 students enrolled.⁹

Because today's college students have more options in choosing program structures and institutions, the library will need to offer programs to fit the different needs of the college-bound community. Some students will need to enroll in the flexible evening and weekend educational opportunities offered by private for-profit institutions, whereas others will be able to enroll at local public institutions that offer more traditional structured programs. Depending on the employment opportunities and trends in your community, some college-bound patrons will need information on career and technical programs offered at community colleges or private non-degree granting institutions.

Nontraditional Students

Though there is no precise definition of *nontraditional student*, this group is often defined by enrollment status (part-time) and age (over the age of twenty-four).¹⁰ A study by the National Center for Education Statistics presented a set of defining characteristics that can be used to distinguish members of this group. The nontraditional student

- delays enrollment (i.e., does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school)
- attends part-time for at least part of the academic year
- works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled
- is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid
- has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- is a single parent (either unmarried or married but separated)
- does not have a high-school diploma (i.e., obtained a GED or other high-school completion certificate or did not finish high school)¹¹

Does this sound like the community served by your library? In academic year 1999–2000, 73 percent of undergraduates had one or more of the above characteristics, specifically financial independence and part-time enrollment status.¹² As discussed, in recent years the online campus of the University of Phoenix had the highest enrollment of all post-secondary institutions, and it is likely that many of their students are nontraditional learners taking advantage

of flexible academic programs that best fit the lifestyles of students juggling the above-mentioned characteristics.

Numerous barriers to education exist for nontraditional students because of the circumstances listed above. Adult and nontraditional students often enter higher education with different backgrounds than do traditional students, and have different needs and motives for obtaining a degree. These students “have a difficult time with the traditional format and structure [of colleges and universities]—length of semesters, parking on the campus, getting to a traditional campus with a traditional schedule from their place of work.”¹³ Add the “general confusion about how to navigate the system” to the scheduling complexity and other negotiations a nontraditional student must make, and you have college-bound patrons who need a soft place to land. The public library, which is already known for providing quality services that advance the information and education needs of the community, is one such place.¹⁴

Nontraditional students preparing to enter or return to college will benefit from some of the same library programs and services as traditional students, but if offered separately these students can interact with others with similar life experiences. Data show that enrollment for students aged twenty-five and over is steady, and research tells us about their specific needs and challenges. Libraries can take a lead role in serving this population of college-bound patrons solely or jointly with partner organizations.

Students with Disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) enacted in 1975 ensures the provision of free and appropriate public education for children with disabilities from age three through twenty-one.¹⁵ Nearly 95 percent of students ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA in 2011-2012 were enrolled in traditional schools.¹⁶ Additionally, students with disabilities covered by IDEA spent most of their school day in general classes rather than separate classes for students with special needs. (You may encounter some of the younger students with disabilities in your storytime programs specially designed for special populations.) Just as you might offer modified programs for children with disabilities, you will want to offer programs for them as they get older, become teenagers, and eventually join the college-bound community.

In academic year 2007–2008, 11 percent of undergraduates reported having one or more disabilities, including a specific learning, visual, speech, hearing, or mobility disability. Most students reporting a disability were White (65 percent), followed by Black (13 percent), Hispanic (13 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (5 percent), and other ethnicities or races (4 percent). In terms of gender, females comprised 57 percent and males 43 percent. Students of all

ages reported having a disability: 52 percent of disabled undergraduates were aged fifteen through twenty-three, 21 percent were twenty-four through twenty-nine, and 27 percent were thirty or older.¹⁷ Many students are too old to be served under IDEA, which means the library has a specific group of students who can benefit from programs that inform them of other suitable educational support programs.

College-bound students with disabilities may have different information needs than students without disabilities. They may be interested in campuses serving students with specific disabilities, what disability resources are available on campuses, and how to advocate for services and accommodations. They will definitely be interested in scholarship and financial aid opportunities specific to students with disabilities. You may decide to host programs tailored specifically to their needs, but open attendance to all patrons. Your community's specific demographics and your own experience with patrons will provide the basis for your decision whether to offer such programming.

Military-Service Members and Veteran Students

According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, in academic year 2007–2008 approximately 4 percent of undergraduate students were military-service members or veterans, and 38 percent of these students received GI Bill education benefits in the academic year. For the same year, 43 percent of military students attended public two-year institutions, followed by public four-year institutions (21 percent) and private, nonprofit four-year institutions (13 percent). These students were mostly male. They had more family obligations than nonmilitary students, which may be why location was a significant determining factor when choosing higher education institutions. Other common reasons for choosing a particular school were affordability and program of study. Military students also were drawn to distance education programs more than were their non-military peers.¹⁸ An institution that includes online courses and degree programs offers the sometimes mobile military student much more flexibility than traditional campus-based programs.

Enrollment rates for military students have likely increased because of troop withdrawals from foreign countries in recent years. A new group of military and veteran students are ready to enter or continue college using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. From the data discussed above we may assume that military students will benefit from library programs that address online educational opportunities, education benefits available through the US Department of Veterans Affairs, ways to balance school and family obligations, and affordable local higher education options.

First-Generation College Students

In 2007, the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles published “First in My Family,” a report on first-generation college students based on data collected by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program’s Freshman Survey from 1971 through 2005. According to the report, the proportion of first-generation students from all racial and ethnic groups experienced a steady decline. In 2005, the highest proportion of first-generation students was Hispanic, followed by Black, Asian or Asian-American, Native American, and White students.¹⁹ In addition to describing demographic characteristics of first-generation college students, this report offers important insight into the socioeconomic circumstances facing first-generation students. This information is useful to librarians and libraries seeking to offer or improve services and programs to this particular college-bound population, because it touches on such issues as parental encouragement, motivations for attending college, financial considerations, and pre-college academic preparation. These factors should be kept in mind when planning outreach or programs for first-generation college-bound students because they may impact ability to attend or afford programs, encouragement to participate, and overall interest in college-planning programs and services.

First-generation students reported that parental encouragement was a very important reason for going to college. These students also relied more on the advice of high-school counselors and relatives when selecting a college than did their non-first-generation peers, who were influenced by national rankings, the percentage of students who go on to attend graduate school after graduation, and the academic reputation of the institution. Non-first-generation students were also more familiar with the various factors to consider when selecting a college or university.

Other characteristics of these first-generation students included:

- A higher percentage worked 20 or more hours in their final year of high school, and over half of these students expected to work during college to pay for expenses.
- Financial factors were very important when choosing a college choice and continued to be so after enrollment.
- Students favored colleges within 50 miles of their homes.
- Students were less likely to live on campus during freshman year.²⁰

First-generation students also were underprepared academically. There was a gap between first-generation students and their non-first-generation peers in the amount of time spent studying; average grades in high school; self-ratings

of math, writing, and leadership ability; and academic self-confidence. Because this group of first-generation students knew less about the intricacies of college planning and the many factors influencing the choice of a particular college, it is not surprising that this group had lower educational aspirations than their non-first-generation peers.

At the time of this particular study, first-generation students stated that they needed support in many areas. These students did not learn about the college experience from stories told by parents and relatives, and had only vague ideas about what was required to be admitted to and successfully graduate from college. They were less likely to experience the socialization that comes from a fully integrated college experience because financial circumstances prevented them from living on campus, and required them to work rather than participate in campus life. These students may have entered college with less-refined study skills and may have needed remediation in the first year (if their self-assessments of their abilities were accurate).

This profile of the first-generation student experience is supported by a study from the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, which found that first-generation students had lower first-year grade point averages than their non-first-generation peers (2.5 compared to 2.8), earned fewer credits in their first year (18 compared to 25), entered college with an undeclared major (33 percent versus 13 percent), and took more remedial courses (55 percent compared to 27 percent).²¹

Not all first-generation students experience the challenges mentioned above. If data from the needs assessments you conduct finds that there are a large number of potential first-generation students in your community, you will need to do further research to ascertain their specific needs and challenges.

THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The value of higher education—specifically a college degree—is often defined by employment and salary statistics. It is projected that by 2020, 65 percent of jobs in the United States will require some form of education beyond a high-school diploma.²² This projection is supported by data from the recent “Great Recession” of December 2007 through January 2010, when 5.6 million jobs requiring only a high-school education or less were lost. In fact, since the end of the recession, job opportunities for individuals with a high-school education or less continue to decline. On the other hand, since the end of the recession employment opportunities for those with some college education or an associate's degree grew by 1.6 million, and by 2 million for individuals with a bachelor's degree.²³ Although college graduates may be unemployed or

underemployed, the employment outlook is much brighter for degree holders and individuals with some education beyond high school than for those with less education.

According to “Education Pays,” a College Board report on the value of higher education for individuals and society, the benefits of a college education extend into other areas of life beyond employment. Individuals with college educations

- are more likely to receive employer-sponsored health insurance and retirement benefits
- are more active in volunteer activities
- lead healthier lifestyles with lower rates of smoking and obesity
- report higher rates of job satisfaction compared to those with high-school diplomas or less²⁴

As well, a college-educated citizenry is an asset to the overall well-being of a community in terms of employment opportunities, economic stability, public health, and community engagement. Obtaining a college education may seem like a solitary and personal activity, but the result has broad implications for society at large.

The library has a history—particularly a recent history—of providing supplemental support services to the community. The San Francisco Public Library has an outreach program for homeless library users, which is staffed by a full-time psychiatric social worker and peer counselors who were previously homeless. In New York, the Northern Onondaga Public Library lends not only books, but also provides patrons with garden plots for organic gardeners.²⁵ The Detroit Public Library is doing its part to combat child hunger by providing lunches and after-school snacks through funding from the Chrysler Foundation.²⁶

From providing aid in times of natural disasters to offering services and programs to special populations, the public library opens its door to those in our communities who are most in need. These services may seem to be outside the scope of a public library’s mission, but they help solidify the library’s role in the community. Offering services and programs designed for college-bound patrons supports a library’s plan to support the cultural and intellectual interests of its community. These efforts can have significant effects, because a college education has been shown to improve not only an individual’s circumstances, but those of the larger community.

Students of varying backgrounds will benefit from programs addressing their specific needs. The data presented on various subgroups of college-bound individuals gives librarians an idea of the needs of these groups, recent college enrollment patterns, and the type of data available to support planning decisions.

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INDEX

f denotes figures; **t** denotes tables

529 savings plans, 62–63, 74, 79

A

academic libraries, 75, 80–81
Acceptance (Coll), 43
accreditation status, 117–118
accuracy, of materials, 50
ACT test, 43–44, 58–60, 67, 83, 90
action plans, 25–26, 37–38
administration
 objections from, 13–18
 reporting to, 37–38
adult services staff, 25, 26, 64
adult students, 2, 4–5, 23, 46, 49*t*, 54–55,
 100–101, 109*t*
affordability, of college, 115–116
Affordable Care Act (ACA), 15
agreements, in partnerships, 74, 81–82
Alire, Camila A., 88
American Association of State Colleges and
 Universities, 115
American Council on Education, 62, 120
American School Counselor Association
 (ASCA), 15–16
applications
 for college admission, viii, 23, 55, 64, 76,
 104*f*, 116–117
 for financial aid, 57–58, 90, 109*t*, 118–119
 for grants, 21–22
Archibeque, Orlando, 88
Arizona library programs, 2, 17–18, 83–84,
 99–100, 103*f*
Asian students, 3, 5, 7
assessments. *See* needs assessments
asset lists, 78
Association for Library Service to Children, 22
Association of Public and Land-grant
 Universities, 115

audiobooks, 42, 48*t*–49*t*

auditory learners, 42

author qualifications, 50

B

Back-to-School Night programs, 54–55,
 61–62
benchmarks, in needs assessments, 28
BigFuture, 108–110
“big-picture” books, 46
Bilezikjian-Johnson, Erin, 98–99
Black students, 3, 5, 7
book lists, 42–43
books, on college admission, 45–46
 See also test-preparation resources
Books in Print, 44
budgets
 of libraries, 16–18, 88, 92, 95
 of students and families, 62–63, 76, 83, 118
Bureau of Labor Statistics, 65
Business Journal, 79
businesses, partnerships with, 64–66, 75–76,
 79

C

Calcasieu Parish Public Library, 2, 18, 57, 59,
 75, 83
California library programs, 9, 40
Campus Explorer, 109*t*, 110–111
Campus Security and Data Analysis Cutting
 Tool, 109*t*, 111–112
Campus Visit Guide, 61
campus visits, 60–61, 110–111, 113
Candlewick Press grants, 22
career and technical programs, 3–4, 65–66
career exploration resources, 76, 108, 109*t*,
 112–113, 118
CareerOneStop, 109*t*, 112–113
Census Bureau, 13–14, 36
Chambers of Commerce, 24, 54, 66, 71, 74,
 96, 97

- Chappaqua Library, 18, 59, 104*f*
 charged questions, 32
 checklists, for physical assessment, 48*t*–49*t*
Chronicle of Higher Education, 1, 51
 circulation statistics, 24, 27–28, 47
Classic Connections (Koelling), 43
 Clery Act, 111–112
 closed-ended questions, 32, 33
 Coll, Susan, 43
 collaborations. *See* partnerships
 collateral, marketing, 101–104*f*
 collection development
 evaluation process in, 47–51
 needs assessments and, 23–24, 27, 31, 36*t*
 policies for, 39, 51
 selection process in, 40–47
 of test-preparation resources, 36*t*, 42–45, 48*t*
 collection-centered evaluation, 47
 college admissions, books on, 45–46
 College Admissions Day, 90
 college applications. *See* *under* applications
 College Board, 9, 43–44, 61, 108–110
 College Confidential, 109*t*, 113–114
 College Depot, 17–18, 83–84, 99–100*f*, 103*f*
 college fair programs, 60–61, 63–65, 67, 76, 82–83
 college libraries, 75, 80–81
 College Navigator, 109*t*, 114
 College Portrait, 109*t*, 115
 College Prep Program (Free Library of Philadelphia), 17–18, 67–68, 83, 102*f*
 college preparatory programs. *See* programs
 college readiness, inequality of, 1–3
 College Resources @ Your Library programs, 56
 College Scorecard, 109*t*, 115–116
 college search tools, 108, 109*t*, 110, 113–118, 120–123
 college-bound patrons
 digitally-connected, 98–101
 with disabilities, 5–6, 48*t*, 66–67, 76, 104*f*, 109*t*, 119–122
 diversity of, vii, 1–4, 41, 50
 first-generation, viii, 7–8, 107–108, 116, 120–121
 military and veteran, 6, 29, 48*t*, 61–62, 108–110, 118, 120–121
 nontraditional, 2, 4–5, 23, 41, 46, 49*t*, 54–55, 109*t*
 Common Application, 64, 109*t*, 116–117
 community colleges, 3, 4, 26*t*, 65–66, 75
 community development organizations, 75–78
 concerns, addressing of, 13–18
 consultants, 91–92, 95
 contracts, in partnerships, 74, 81–82
 Cooperative Institutional Research Program
 Freshman Survey, 7–8
 costs
 of college, 62, 115–116
 of library materials, 50, 92, 95
 counselors, guidance, 15–16, 119–120
 crime, on campuses, 111–112
 Crowther, Janet, 73–74
Crunch Time (Fredericks), 43
 Cuesta, Yolanda, 91
 currency, of materials, 50
 customers, determining, 22–23, 29–30, 98
- D**
Dancing with Digital Natives (Salz), 99
 data
 analysis of, 36–37, 89, 111–112
 collection of, 22, 27, 29–36
 on enrollment, 2–6, 13, 89
 presentation of, 13, 36, 37–38
 Database of Accredited Postsecondary
 Institutions and Programs, 109*t*, 117–118
 date partnerships, 74, 82
 degrees, value of, 8–9
 demographics, student, 3–7, 115
 Department of Education, 2, 8, 13, 111, 114–115, 117–118
 Department of Veterans Affairs, 6, 75
 dependents, students with, 4
 Derry Public Library, 18, 91
 Detroit Public Library, 9
 digitally connected patrons, 98–101
 disabilities, students with, 5–6, 48*t*, 66–67, 76, 104*f*, 109*t*, 119–122
 displays, 23–24, 51, 55, 58–61, 90
 Dudden, Rosalind Farnam, 24, 30, 37, 38
- E**
 ease and impact grids, 37
 economic development organizations, 54, 66, 75–78
 “Education Pays” report, 9
 El Cerrito Public Library, 40
 electronic resources. *See* online resources
 employment statistics, 8–9, 17
 engagement partnerships, 74, 82
 enrollment data, 2–6, 13, 89
 essay preparation, 48*t*, 59–60, 91, 104*f*
 evaluation
 in collection development, 47–51
 of marketing plans, 94
 of needs assessments, 37–38
 of partnerships, 82

- exam-preparation resources, 36*t*, 42–45, 48*t*, 58–60, 75, 83
- Excel downloads, 112, 114, 118
- F**
- Facebook, 98–99, 101, 110–114, 117–120, 122–123
- FactFinder, 13
- FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), 57–58, 90, 109*t*, 118–119
- FAFSA Month, 90
- FAFSA4Caster, 58, 119
- Fat Envelope Frenzy* (Jager-Hyman), 43, 45–46
- Federal Student Aid website, 31, 56–58, 109*t*, 118–119
- feedback, 23, 24, 33, 37, 82
- female vs. male students, 3, 5–6
- fiction titles, recommended, 43
- financial aid
 - applications for, 57–58, 90, 109*t*, 118–119
 - programs on, 56–58, 60–63, 83
 - resources for, 31, 49*t*, 56–58, 90, 109*t*, 113, 118–119
- financially independent students, 4
- “First in My Family” report, 7–8
- first-generation college students, viii, 7–8, 107–108, 116, 120–121
- flyers, promotional, 101–104*f*
- focus groups, 22, 25, 28, 29, 34–36
- Forbes*, 107–108
- Fredericks, Mariah, 43
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), 57–58, 90, 109*t*, 118–119
- Free Library of Philadelphia, 2, 17–18, 57–58, 67–68, 76, 83, 102*f*
- Freshman Survey (Cooperative Institutional Research Program), 7–8
- Friends of the Library groups, 26, 64, 92
- Frontline, 44
- funding, library, 16–18, 21–22, 28, 88, 92, 95
- G**
- gap model, of needs assessment, 24
- gender, data on, 2–3, 5–6
- GI Bill benefits, 6, 29
- glance partnerships, 73
- glossaries, 31, 33, 118
- grant applications, 21–22
- Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation, 17
- Great Recession, 8
- Gregory, Vicki L., 22, 24, 40
- grids, impact and ease, 37
- guidance counselors, 15–16, 119–120
- guidebooks, 45
- H**
- Heath Resource Center, 66–67, 109*t*, 119–120
- Henderson, Rosy, 51, 64, 99
- Hercules Public Library, 40
- high impact grids, 37
- high school libraries, 16, 80
- higher education, value of, 8–9
- Higher Education Opportunity Act, 111
- Higher Education Research Institute, 7
- high-income families, 1, 3
- Hispanic students, 3, 5, 7
- Hobsons, 113
- “how-to” books, 46
- I**
- impact and ease grids, 37
- income differences, 1–2, 3
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 5–6
- industry-specific professional associations, 71, 75, 79
- information-technology staff, 25, 26, 64
- Inside Higher Ed, 51
- Institute of Museum and Library Service, 22
- Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 31, 36, 114
- intellectual disabilities (ID), 66, 121–122
- intermediate level services, 88
- Internet and American Life Project, 100
- interviews, in needs assessments, 22, 25, 29–30, 33–34
- J**
- Jager-Hyman, Joie, 43, 45–46
- K**
- Kahn Academy, 42
- Kaplan Educational Centers, 43, 45, 59, 83
- Kentucky enrollment data, 89
- Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, 47
- Klor, Ellin, 71–72
- KnowHow2Go, 56, 62, 108, 109*t*, 120–121
- Koelling, Holly, 43
- L**
- leading questions, 32
- learners, types of, 42, 50
- Learning Express Library, 56, 96
- librarians, role of, 14–15, 80–81
- libraries
 - academic, 75, 80–81
 - assets of, 78, 93
 - funding and budgets of, 16–18, 21–22, 28, 88, 92, 95

- libraries (*cont.*)
 high school, 16, 80
 public (*See* public libraries)
Library Marketing That Works! (Walters), 94
 Library Staff Experience, Skills, and Interests Inventory, 78
 literature, recommended, 42–43
 Louisiana library programs, 2, 18, 57, 59, 75, 83
 Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance, 83
 Louisville Free Public Library, 51
 low impact grids, 37
 low-income families, 1–2, 3, 75, 108, 120
- M**
 male vs. female students, 3, 5–6
 market research, 93, 97
 marketing
 to adults, 100–101
 to Millennials, 98–100*f*
 needs assessments and, 25, 26
 promotional flyers for, 101–104*f*
 reasons for, 87, 92–98
 marriage partnerships, 74, 82
 materials
 community focus of, 40–41
 displays of, 23–24, 51, 55, 58–61, 90
 market for, 42–44
 See also collection development
 math-test preparation, 42
 maximum level services, 88
 McEwen, William J., 97
 McNeese State University, 83
 meetings, in partnerships, 71–72, 77, 79
 middle-income families, 3
 military-service members, 6, 29, 48*t*, 61–62, 108–110, 118, 120–121
 Millennials, marketing to, 98–100*f*
 minimum level services, 88
 mobile technology use, 98–99
 moderators, of focus groups, 34–36
 Montana State Library, 15
- N**
 National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC), 46, 61, 67
 National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, 123
 National Center for Education Statistics, 3–4, 8, 114
 National Leadership Grant for Libraries, 22
 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 6
 National Urban League, 71, 75
 needs assessments
 collection development and, 23–24, 27, 31, 36*t*
 data-collection in, 22, 27, 29–36
 questions for, 22–24, 27–28, 32, 33, 35
 reasons for, 21–22, 25
 steps in, 25–38
 timelines for, 28–29
 Need/Want/Have tables, 36
 New Brunswick Free Public Library, 18, 51, 64, 67, 76, 82–83, 99
 New Hampshire library programs, 18, 91
 New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, 83
 New Jersey library programs, 18, 51, 64, 67, 76, 82–83, 99
 New York library programs, 9, 18, 59, 88, 104*f*
 non-degree granting institutions, 3–4
 non-probability sampling, 30
 nontraditional students, 2, 4–5, 23, 41, 46, 49*t*, 54–55, 109*t*
 Northern Onondaga Public Library, 9
- O**
 objections, handling of, 13–18
 observation, in needs assessments, 22, 27, 30–31
 Office of Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS), 88
 older students, 2, 4–5, 23, 46, 49*t*, 54–55, 100–101, 109*t*
 online resources
 for career exploration, 108, 109*t*, 112–113, 118
 collection development and, 39, 50
 for college searches, 61, 108, 109*t*, 110, 113–118, 120–123
 for financial aid, 31, 56–58, 109*t*, 113, 118–119
 needs assessments and, 23, 27
 overview of, 56, 107–108
 of public libraries, vii–viii, 23, 56, 107
 open-ended questions, 32, 33
 opportunities analyses, 93
 organization, of collections, 51
 outreach
 to adults, 100–101
 to Millennials, 98–100*f*
 reasons for, 87–92
 See also marketing
 Outstanding Books for the College Bound list, 43
- P**
 parents
 budgeting for, 62–63, 76, 83, 118
 encouragement from, 7

- guides for, 44, 46, 49*t*
 - single parents, 4
 - participants, in needs assessments, 25, 29, 30, 33–36
 - partnerships
 - with academic libraries, 75, 80–81
 - levels of, 73–75
 - for library programs, 55, 57–58, 59–65, 66
 - reasons for, 71–73
 - setting up, 81–82
 - types of, 75–81, 82–84
 - part-time students, 4–5
 - patrons, college-bound. *See* college-bound patrons
 - Pennsylvania library programs, 2, 17–18, 57–58, 67–68, 76, 83, 102*f*
 - people, marketing concept of, 94, 97–98
 - Pesce, Donna, 59, 60
 - Pew Research Center, 98, 99, 100
 - Philadelphia College Prep Roundtable (PCPR), 83
 - Philadelphia library programs, 2, 17–18, 57–58, 67–68, 76, 83, 102*f*
 - Phoenix Public Library, 2, 17–18, 83–84, 99–100, 103*f*
 - physical assessment, 47–49
 - place, in marketing, 96
 - plans of action, 25–26, 37–38
 - price, of marketing, 95
 - primary sources, 29–36, 38
 - The Princeton Review, 43
 - print vs. non-print materials, 42
 - probability sampling, 30
 - product, in marketing, 94–96
 - professional associations, 71, 75, 79
 - programs
 - college fairs, 60–61, 63–65, 67, 76, 82–83
 - on college resources, 56
 - on financial aid, 57–58, 62–63
 - funding for, 16–18, 92, 95
 - libraries as providers of, 1–3, 53–54
 - for military-service members, 61–62
 - for nontraditional students, 54–55
 - for students with disabilities, 66–68
 - on test-preparation, 58–60, 75, 83
 - on vocational opportunities, 65–66
 - promotion, 96–97, 101–104*f*
 - public libraries
 - in Arizona, 2, 17–18, 83–84, 99–100, 103*f*
 - lack of college-related programs in, vii–viii
 - in Louisiana, 2, 18, 57, 59, 75, 83
 - in New Jersey, 2, 18, 51, 64, 67, 76, 82–83, 99
 - in New York, 9, 18, 59, 88, 104*f*
 - in Pennsylvania, 2, 17–18, 57–58, 67–68, 76, 83, 102*f*
 - role of, 2, 5, 9, 82, 83–84
 - See also individual libraries*
- Q**
- qualitative data, 28, 33–34
 - questions
 - for needs assessments, 22–24, 27–28, 32, 33, 35
 - for partnerships, 78–79
- R**
- random sampling, 30
 - recession data, 8
 - recorders, in focus groups, 34–36
 - reference materials, 36, 45, 48*t*–49*t*
 - relevance, of materials, 50
 - remuneration, 33–34, 95
 - reports, on need assessments, 37–38
 - representatives
 - from colleges, 36*t*, 54–55, 60–61, 62–64, 82–83
 - from libraries, 71–72, 77
 - from test-prep companies, 58–59, 60
 - resources, online. *See* online resources
 - review resources, 45–47
 - “Road to College” program, 61
 - Robinson, Erin, 91
 - Rutgers University, 64, 82
- S**
- salary statistics, 8–9
 - Salz, Peggy Anne, 99
 - sampling procedures, 29–30
 - San Francisco Public Library, 9
 - SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), 43–44, 58–60, 67–68, 83, 90–91
 - scholarships, 46–47, 49*t*, 62–63, 77, 109*t*, 110, 112
 - Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), 43–44, 58–60, 67–68, 83, 90–91
 - school libraries, 16, 80
 - search tools, college, 108, 109*t*, 110, 113–118, 120–123
 - secondary sources, 29, 36, 38
 - security, on campuses, 111–112
 - Selecting and Managing Electronic Resources* (Gregory), 22
 - selection tools, 45–47
 - Services Audit for College-Bound Patrons, 78
 - simple random sampling, 30
 - Simsbury Public Library, 60–61
 - single parents, 4
 - skills, of library staff, 78, 91, 97
 - social media, 98–101, 110–114, 117–120, 122–123

- special populations, serving, 17–18, 21, 51, 64, 71, 91, 95–96
- staff, library
 assets of, 78, 91, 97
 in outreach, 90–92
 role of, 14–15, 80–81
- stakeholders, 25–27, 28–29, 36–38
- statistics
 on circulation, 24, 27–28, 47
 on college students, 2–6, 8–9, 13, 114
- Steele, J. M., 43
- strategic planning, 21, 87
- stratified random sampling, 30
- strengths analyses, 93, 95
- students. *See* college-bound patrons
- “students’ perspectives” books, 45
- surveys, in needs assessments, 21–22, 25, 28–33, 38, 41
- SWOT analyses, 93, 95
- Sylvan Learning Center, 59, 75
- T**
- The Taker* (Steele), 43
- target population, 22–23, 29–30, 98
- team members
 in needs assessments, 25–27, 29, 36–38
 in outreach programs, 91–92
- technical programs, 3–4, 65–66
- Testing Day, 90
- test-preparation resources, 36*t*, 42–45, 48*t*, 58–60, 75, 83
- Think College, 66–67, 109*t*, 121–122
- threats analyses, 93
- timelines, for needs assessments, 28–29
- Trott, Barry, 73–74
- Twitter, 99, 101, 110–114, 117–120, 122–123
- U**
- U-CAN, 109*t*, 122–123
- university libraries, 75, 80–81
- University of Colorado, 80
- University of North Carolina, 1
- University of Phoenix, 4–5
- US Census Bureau, 13–14, 36
- US Department of Education, 2, 8, 13, 111, 114–115, 117–118
- US Department of Veterans Affairs, 6, 75
- US News and World Report*, 107
- user-centered evaluation, 47
- users, determining, 22–23, 29–30, 98
- V**
- vendor resources, 28, 50
- veteran students, 6, 29, 48*t*, 61–62, 108–110, 118, 120–121
- video resources, 42, 108, 113, 121–122
- virtual campus tours, 61, 110, 121
- visits, campus, 60–61, 110–111, 113
- vocational programs, 3–4, 65–66
- Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), 115
- W**
- Walters, Suzanne, 94, 96
- weaknesses analyses, 93, 95
- websites. *See* online resources
- White students, 3, 5, 7
- Willingham, Mary, 1–2
- word clouds, 35
- wording, of surveys, 32
- workforce development organizations, 75–78
- writing preparation, 48*t*, 59–60, 91, 104*f*
- Y**
- Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), 43
- young-adult services staff, 25, 26, 64
- YouTube, 110, 112–113, 118–119

