Student Lead Scholarship Club

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Abstract

Grade 12 students are very busy in their final year of high school. As well as studying hard for their classes they are also working, volunteering, participating in school or community sports teams and other organizations and applying to post-secondary institutions for the following year. They are also tasked with researching, finding and applying to scholarships to help them pay for their schooling. There is no structure or system for navigating the vast number of available scholarships and easily identifying scholarships for which students are eligible. This paper researches how a student run scholarship club could help students to connect to their school, become aware of financial aids and other financial incentives and to encourage students to excel in high school and pursue post-secondary education. A review of the literature verifies that a student run scholarship club at their school that would assist students to work together to find, analyze and apply to scholarships. The club could also help students to create their own portfolio of accomplishments, manage reference letters, maximize their GPA and learn how to write scholarship essays.

Table of Contents

Page

Student Lead Scholarship Club

Chapter 1

The Problem

Introduction

Grade 12 is an exciting year for students, seeing as it is their last year of high school. They look forward to graduation, convocation and many other grad activities throughout the year. Though an exciting time, it can be very frightening as they leave behind their childhood, enter adulthood and the inevitable journey to colleges, universities, technical schools or the work force. Some students encounter financial stress in order to attend post-secondary schooling, while others may be fortunate enough to have parental financial support. Those students who do not have financial resources must pursue student loans from the government as well as possible scholarships and bursaries. While a student loan application can now be done online and is very easy to find and access, scholarships and bursaries must be applied to individually. All have different requirements and are not located in the same place. In this paper I will discuss the numerous barriers for students seeking scholarships as well as how students could help themselves to locate and win scholarships by working together. I will propose a method that students, school counsellors and high schools could use to maximize their scholarship success.

Background to the Problem

The cost of a university education is "expected to have about tripled from 1990 to 2017" according to a report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (Shaker & Macdonald, 2013, p.6). Current and future high school graduates will increasingly find it difficult to pay for their post-secondary education. The report named "Degrees of Uncertainty: Navigating the Changing Terrain of University Finance" noted that provinces prefer to help students through directed assistance. This means students are forced to "turn to loans, grants and bursaries, tax credits and loan forgiveness to work their way toward a post-secondary education" (Habib, 2013, para. 6). Colleges and Universities justify the price of education because "according to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), enrolment at post-secondary schools is at an all-time high" (Habib, 2013, para. 10). Hence, there is minimal motivation to lower their costs accompanied by a high level of competition for financial aid. Statistics show that "since 2000, the number of full-time undergraduate students in Canada has grown by nearly 44 per cent" (Habib, 2013, para. 11). Why such a high number? With greater competition for good jobs, students see a post-secondary education giving them a greater chance to earn a much higher income and more stable employment than those without a post-secondary degree. With more competition

to get into a post-secondary school and higher prices to attend those schools, students and their parents are looking now more than ever at alternative ways to finance their post-secondary schooling. Some parents start saving for their children's education through a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) through grants from the government. However, if your "child does not attend school after high school, any grant money received must be paid back to the Government of Canada" (CanLearn.ca, 2013, para. 5). As well there is a maximum lifetime limit of $50,000 though "the cost of a four-year university education is estimated to reach over $80,000" (Habib, 2013, para. 20). This leaves a deficit of money to pay for their schooling. These factors promote students and parents to look for scholarships and bursaries now more than ever to help them pay for their schooling.

Students are encouraged to start looking for and applying to scholarships and bursaries at the start of their grade twelve school year. Some schools provide students the opportunity to receive local bursaries that include school, community, and district bursaries of up to $1000. To be considered for these bursaries students must complete and hand in an application that lists their academic achievements as well as volunteer and work experience. Once this package is returned, a group of counsellors along with specific club sponsors and other specialty teachers do their

best to assign available bursaries to students who meet each ones specific criteria. If students do not apply, they forgo these schools, community and district awards. While these bursaries help students, they only pay for a very small portion of their expenses (University books can cost hundreds of dollars each and tuition for one course at UBC for a first year undergraduate degree is "$1,630") (ubc.ca, 2014). Students strive to win a scholarship that could pay for a full year's worth of school or a full ride scholarship (usually in the form of an academic or sports related program with high competition).

Statement of the Problem

There are numerous obstacles that students run into when trying to pursue and win scholarships. Some students assume that their parents will pay for their post-secondary schooling so they do not bother to look for scholarships. Other students see the minimal dollar amount of the scholarship and decide that it's not worth their time to apply for it. The reverse can also be problematic: a large monetary scholarship that promises lots of money will create a lot of competition reducing the probability of winning the scholarship. Some students that are very busy in their final year of high school lose interest in applying for scholarships because of "the perceived time and effort required to obtain scholarships" (Perna, 2008, p.10). Those students who struggle with English class or writing in general

become discouraged when faced with the prospect of having to write an essay to apply for each scholarship. This can lead to an imbalance in the type of students applying for scholarships. Some counsellors believe that "the ones (students) that are more prepared or able to look for the scholarships do not need them so much as the ones that are not really sure how the whole thing works" (Perna, 2008, p.9). Other students who are uncertain about what they are going to do after high school generally do not pursue scholarships. Finally, some students do not apply for scholarships because of the lack of a "structure or system for navigating the vast number of available scholarships and easily identifying scholarships for which they are eligible" (Perna, 2008, p.10).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study will be to research and find or create a structure or system that high school students could use find, analyze and apply for available scholarships. In this structure or system I hope to suggest an online curriculum that would take the form of a website or digital video that could be accessed by students and parents who are curious about scholarships. Theoretically, grade 12 students who wish to create a club or organized group could help each other apply for and possibly win scholarships by using this system to locate applicable

resources. As a group they could help each other with the application criteria and essay writing that is needed to ensure they don't miss the application deadlines.

Statement of Research Hypothesis

How could a student-run Scholarship Club help high school grade 12 students find, analyze, apply for and win scholarships? Usually individual students and their parents spend enormous amounts of time looking for and applying to scholarships. I hypothesize that if they were to work collaboratively they could pool their time and resources and be successful in winning scholarships, thus benefitting the students, their parents and their school. My research will explore how student-run clubs can be an effective means of encouraging student engagement and how scholarships and other awards can encourage students to pursue post-secondary education.

Summary

Grade 12 students have an enormous amount of pressure on them to do well in their last year of high school in order to get into a good college or university. As well as focusing on their academic courses, they are encouraged to participate in

school and community volunteer activities. Some are forced to work part-time

jobs so that they gain some work experience for their grad requirements. At the

same time students are often engaged in social activity and yet need to apply to

post-secondary schools to plan their next year. They are also faced with the

daunting task of looking for scholarships and bursaries that they may be qualified

for, filling out applications and possibly writing essays for each scholarship

application, all with the hope that they may qualify for financial educational

assistance. Having a system in place where students could find scholarships easily,

get help with the application process or essay writing and work collectively as a

school club to pursue post-secondary education would help the students, parents

and the school.

Outline

In chapter two, I will conduct a literature review of academic peer-reviewed

journals from Ebsco, Academic Search Premier and Google Scholar on the subject

of scholarship applications, students and counsellors perceptions of the scholarship

process, the effectiveness of student run clubs to encourage student engagement

and how scholarships and other awards can encourage students to pursue post-

secondary education. Chapter 3 will include a proposal for a curriculum that

would help grade 12 students form a student run Scholarship Club. Chapter 4 will

be a conclusion to this paper.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I will present the relevant research in the area of student

involvement in school activities and their impact on students' academic success.

How student and school counsellor perceptions of the process for winning

scholarships are aligned and how financial incentives (scholarships, bursaries and

other government programs) entice students to be successful in high school and

encourage them to continue their education into post-secondary will also be

explored from the research.

School Involvement Leads To Student Success

High school students have the option to join school clubs, sports teams and councils to become more involved in their school and to enhance their high school experience beyond academics alone. Students' academic motivation comes from social and personal relationships, and a sense of membership in the school community directly influences student's "commitment to schooling and acceptance of educational values" (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p.60-61). There is a "strong and positive link between students subjective sense of belonging in school and both their participation and achievement" (Gibson, Bejinez, Hidalgo, & Rolon, 2004, p.129). Though school attendance is obligatory, having a sense of belonging to school is important for their success in school. "Students function better and participate more in school settings and situations where they feel they belong" (Gibson, Bejinez, Hidalgo & Rolon, 2004, p.129). The literature also shows that students who participate in extracurricular school activities and join school clubs are more likely to create positive relationships with teachers, achieve higher grades, develop leadership skills and have aspirations to continue their education beyond high school (Gibson, Bejinez, Hidalgo, & Rolon, 2004).

School Counsellors & High School Students Perceptions of Scholarships

High school counsellors assist students with academic course planning throughout high school to enable graduation and preparation needed to apply to the

post-secondary institution of their choice. The student is hopeful that they are accepted into the program they have been planning for since grade 10 (students do a career research project in planning 10 that requires them to research what post-secondary education is needed for the career they have chosen). In grade 12 students must apply to the post-secondary institutions that they wish to possibly attend – this usually occurs between January and March in order for the institutions to assess current marks. While students are preparing paperwork for their applications the school counsellors are receiving information from the post-secondary institutions in regards to programs, fees, application deadlines and information on financial aid.

A college or university degree or trade certification is becoming increasingly required for ensuring a person's future economic security and job stability (cbc.ca, 2013). Therefore, "it is critical for students to know how to access every type of tuition aid possible" (Rapp, 2005, p.15). However, with the need to get a degree or "trade" the tuition to get these will have increased three fold since 1990 according to a policy think tank (cbc.ca, 2013). This creates " a paradox in which students need to have money in order to make money" (Scurry, 2003, p.8).

There are two different kinds of financial aid, merit and need based. "In Canada, scholarships refer to merit-based student aid and bursaries are need based

aid" (Drewes & Michael, 2006, p.789). Merit-based relies on students' grades to access funds while need-based is calculated based on their parent's finances. Unfortunately for low income students, there is a current decrease of available need-based financial aid (Farelle, 2003). Universities use merit-based scholarships to attract the most high-quality students (highest academic scores) but students "from middle- and upper-income families traditionally receive the majority of merit-based grant money" (Farelle, 2003, para. 30) while placing lower-income students at a disadvantage (Scurry, 2003). Students from low-income families are less likely to be informed about financial aid opportunities than their peers because their parents often have little or no experience with applying to college (Krueger & Rainwater, 2003) . This means that the chances of a student knowing about post-secondary finances increases as their income level increases, therefore, students who can least afford college know the least about what it costs to attend (Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003).

With rising tuition and the increasing importance of a degree or trade training students require more assistance with post-secondary applications and finances. For students seeking merit-based scholarships "it is critical that the students seeking these awards are properly advised on how to obtain them" (Rapp, 2005, p.16). High school counsellors, through their experience with the college

and scholarship application processes, provide this link from secondary school to college (Krueger & Rainwater, 2003). According to the National Association of College Admission Counseling, "one of the most important resources in the college search is the school counsellor" (Gross & Polo, 2010; Rapp, 2005, p.16). This is echoed in other research (McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008) which links the role of school personnel in shaping students' perceptions of financial aid. School counsellors "make scholarship information available through lists that are posted on bulletin boards, books that are available in the guidance office, newsletters, and Web sites" (Perna, 2008, p.11). However, some school counsellors still feel that despite all their best efforts to help and educate students about available scholarships and bursaries the students lack of initiative and/or feelings of being overwhelmed by the application process create a barrier to them pursuing and winning scholarships.

Students in grade 12 who plan to attend a college, university or technical school after they graduate only have a few months after school starts in September to apply to post-secondary institutions and apply for scholarships. There are many barriers to students' pursuit of scholarships, the greatest barrier is that students "expect their parents will pay the costs of their post-secondary education" (Perna, 2008, p.9). In most schools, grade twelve students are encouraged to talk to their

parents about their post-secondary education and how they are going to finance it. Some schools offer a "Grade 12 parent night" where the career counsellor, Principal and Vice Principals talk to the students and their parents about convocation, grad requirements, future grad events as well as their post-secondary options and how they can access information on scholarships and bursaries. Other schools hire a professional speaker to talk to the grads and their parents about how to maximize their chances of winning scholarships and other ways to pay for their post-secondary education.

Research has mentioned the importance of involving the parents in planning for post-secondary (Perna, 2008; St. John, Musoba, Simmons, Chung, Schmit, & Peng, 2004; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Tierney and Hagedorn (2002) identify "a number of features of effective postsecondary preparation, which includes an emphasis on academics, parental involvement, strong connections with post-secondary institutions, stable financial support, preparation for a variety of postsecondary options, and early intervention" (St. John, , Musoba, , Simmons, Chung, Schmit, & Peng, 2004, p.833). Parental involvement is even more necessary for low-income families as many reports document the absence of accurate knowledge of financial aid among high school students and their families (Grodsky, & Jones, 2004; Horn, Chen, & Chapman, 2003; Perna & Steele, 2011)

and among parents who have no direct personal experience with college (Hossler, Schmit, & Bouse, 1991; Krueger & Rainwater, 2003). Additionally, Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) found that parental encouragement is the most significant influence on the college decision process. This would indicate that educating parents as well as their graduating children would prove beneficial to both parties when researching how to pay for post-secondary education.

Other forces that prevent pursuit of scholarships are "the low average award, the low expected probability of obtaining a scholarship, the perceived time and effort required to obtain scholarships, the need to write an essay and the overall absence of a structure or system for navigating the vast number of available scholarships" (Perna, 2008, p.9-11). Grade 12 students and their parents learn about available scholarships through our career department, the "Grade 12 Parent Night" as well as several other sources such as their "families experiences with older children, school counsellors, and the Internet" (Perna, 2008, p.11). The problem with students and their parents focusing all their efforts on finding scholarships on the internet is that, as one student put it, "there's like a billion scholarships out there, that just nobody ever looks for them at all" (Perna, 2008, p.10).

Financial Incentives Encourage Success and Promote Further Education

Post-secondary institutions want the best students to attend their school. This allows the student to receive a good education and the institution to promote itself. "Colleges and universities award scholarships as a means to attract high-achieving students" (Perna, 2008, p.7). But does this practice of offering scholarships encourage students in high school to work harder in their classes? Does the lure of free education entice students to continue their education to post-secondary?

Some research shows that financial aid promotes attending college by reducing or eliminating financial barriers at the time of college entry (Drewes & Michael, 2006; Perna & Steele, 2011) but it also affects students indirectly by encouraging students to engage in other college-related behaviors because of the expectation that financial aid will be available (Fitzgerald, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Available research does not establish whether merit-based aid programs improve students' academic readiness for college (Doyle, 2008; Dynarski, 2004) and (Perna & Steele, 2011; Perna & Titus, 2004) claim that research has not proven that the "knowledge" of aid causes students to engage in activities that promote college enrollment. High school students that are given specific criteria for achieving specific grants or scholarships say that the knowledge of the criteria "encourages the student to work harder in order to reach

those requirements of that certain grant or scholarship" (Perna & Steele, 2011, p.914). This knowledge also helps parents stay connected to their child's academic aspirations. Some analysts argue that "parents' education is the major determinant of college enrollment" (Choy, 2002, p.2). If this is true then parental involvement is very important to students educational goals and aspirations as their parents will "encourage their students to achieve the levels of academic performance needed to earn the state merit aid" (Perna & Steele, 2011, p.914).

Prior research reveals that different types of financial aid have distinct effects on college enrollment often varying between different types of students (DesJardins, 2001; Heller, 1999; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Generally the findings show a positive trend of grants promoting college enrollment (Heller, 1999; Moore, Studenmuud, & Slobko, 1991) and economic researchers consistently have found a positive linkage between student aid and college enrolment (Heller, 1997; Kane, 1994, 1999; McPherson, & Schapiro, 1991, 1998) though this positive trend does differ slightly when student characteristics such as income and race (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Heller, 1997) are taken into account. Research on individual state grants did find positive influences of need-based grants on college choice and enrollment decisions of low income students (Perna & Titus, 2004; St. John, Chung, Musoba, Simmons, Wooden, & Menendez, 2004) and there is "growing

evidence that state merit-based grants influence student college choice" (Kim, 2011, p.124). Through all the research, the knowledge of the academic requirements for receiving state merit aid appears to stimulate both students and parents attention to students' academic preparation for college and may consequently improve the likelihood that students graduate from high school with the academic preparation required not only to enroll in college but also to persist to bachelor's degree completion (Adelman, 2006; Perna & Steele, 2011).

An offer of financial aid has been shown to be positively related to the likelihood of enrolling in college among high school graduates, college applicants, and high-aptitude high school students (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Catsiapis, 1987; St. John, 1991). When asked if they would go to a post-secondary institution if they received financial aid "a few students reported that their college choices would not be influenced by financial aid offers, however their parents stated that their children would attend the institution that offered the most generous aid package (Perna, 2008, p.8). Of course these are the same students who said "well, mom and dad will pay for it" (Perna, 2008, p.9).

Summary

Research shows that students who participate in school activities become better students; they feel a connection to their school which compels them to work

harder and results in better grades and the potential for future opportunities. Their

experiences with scholarships depend on their plans for the future, their drive to

look for and apply to scholarships and their parent's history of education and

willingness to work with their children to find ways to finance their future plans.

The school counsellor that is responsible for scholarships and the career

department is their best resource in high school for researching post-secondary

options and scholarship opportunities. Students apply for scholarships to help

them pay for their education while post-secondary institutions offer scholarships to

attract the best students to their school. The knowledge of the scholarship criteria

helps students and their parents work together to maximize their marks and prepare

them for post-secondary education.

Chapter 3

Proposal

As the research has shown there is a definite need for a structure or system

for navigating the vast number of available scholarships and easily identifying

scholarships for which students are eligible. In this section, I will propose a structure of a high school based student lead scholarship club that can be created at any high school.

Physical and Cyber Structure of Scholarship Club

Teenagers today are connected to their friends and interests 24/7 thanks to their smart phones and other electronic devices and apps. The old system of finding a teacher sponsor to "host" a clubs meeting in their classroom is outdated. Students today need to be able to access information when it best suits them. A modern scholarship club needs to convey information not only through lunchtime meetings but also through an online portal. This portal would give the students who cannot attend the meetings access to information and allow them to stay connected to the rest of the members of the club. This would also benefit parents because they could see what their child is working on at school and work together with them at home. There are numerous online free web or blog hosting sites that can give you your own online space. The preference would depend on the students running the club or the counsellor responsible for the club. Those responsible for the club could create an online blog, website, Facebook group or other system to convey information digitally over the web. YouTube is also a great resource to use, not only to post a video from the meetings so that students could see what they

missed also to advertise the club, get students and their parents informed about what they should do to start planning for scholarships earlier.

Starting the Scholarship Journey Early

One of the drawbacks of having a scholarship club in grade 12 is that you don't get to work with students in junior grades. Most scholarship judges prefer to see students' applications that show years of participation in extracurricular activities rather than the last 6 months of grade 12. Because grades are less important before grade 11, students can focus on getting their volunteer time and extracurricular activities banked without sacrificing their academic scores. The scholarship coordinator could create a video that could be shown to grade 8-10 parents during their schools parent nights and could be posted online for students in grade 11 and 12 to reference when starting their scholarship application process. The better-rounded students are, the higher chance of success they will have when applying for scholarships.

Scholarship Club Curriculum

In order to run a successful club that other students want to join, the organizers of the club need to present information that is helpful, useful and time

appropriate. The school counsellor responsible for scholarships could advertise the

club to grade 12 students and their parents at a grade 12 parent night, to grade 12

students and teachers at the grade 12 assembly and post information on counselling

bulletin boards, and in their schools careers dept. The club organizers, if students,

should be voted on in the first or second meeting. A President, Vice-President and

Secretary are usually the minimum requirements for a successful club or

organization. Once voted in they should convey what information they will be

covering over the next few months. The search for scholarships can begin at any

time but the organization of the scholarships and their criteria should be collected

and displayed as soon as possible so that members of the club can start to manage

their applications right away. The leaders of the club could hold a meeting at least

once a month starting at the beginning of the school year. In the first meeting

organizers could coordinate an email list or other social media to relay information

about upcoming meetings to keep their membership informed. The meetings could

cover one topic each month that pertains to the scholarship application process and

allow questions from the members and share pertinent information. The first

meeting could start with a brief summary of what most scholarships are looking

for, according to (Beech & Beech, 2012, p.12) "the five common selection criteria

that find their way into most scholarship applications are: leadership, community

service, extracurricular activities, grade point average and the ability to write a

clear and concise essay." This would be a good starting point and would give

students information that would allow them to plan their year. Other areas that

could be covered include: researching yourself, developing a scholarship portfolio,

collecting and managing recommendation letters, maintain and /or increase GPA

and maximizing the application.

Researching Scholarships

For most students the hardest part of initiating their scholarship research is

actually starting it. To most students the sheer number of scholarships is

overwhelming. Students are too intimidated to start looking. One of the main

benefits of creating the scholarship club is for students to collaborate with each

other and compile a list of available scholarships that meet their criteria. It makes

more sense to find the scholarships that they qualify for, rank them in order of

monetary value, requirements and their application deadlines. Students could visit

some online scholarship databases such as scholarshipscanada.com and

yconic.com (used to be studentawards.ca) where they can create a student profile

to list scholarships that they qualify for. The club could encourage the members to

seek eligible scholarships that offer maximum aid. The Association of Universities

and Colleges of Canada has a website (www.aucc.ca) where students can find over

130 scholarships from government, foundations and private sector companies.

Aboriginal students can check out the following resources for scholarships: The Aboriginal Multi-Media Society (www.ammsa.com), The First Nations Education Steering Committee (www.fnesc.ca), The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca), Aboriginal Youth Services (www.youth.gc.ca), Indigenous Education (www.indspire.ca) and their local First Nation Council. Students can also visit the post-secondary institution that they wish to attend and contact their financial aid office to inquire about entrance scholarships or if they have a website for financial aid and awards. Students could work with the counsellors at their school to find out if there is a scholarship coordinator that could help them with their search. Some schools may have a career department to access information on scholarships and bursaries. And finally, the student could talk to their parents to find out if the company they work for offers scholarships to dependents and to the leaders of any community groups or clubs they are involved with to find out if they offer scholarships to their members.

The "Story of My Life"

Scholarship committees are looking for the students' story. They want to know who they are and what they've done with their life. In order to do that the student needs to examine their life – what have they accomplished? Where have

they been? What were their greatest achievements or failures that they learned the most from? As they go back through their life they should get an idea of what they were passionate about. If they are focusing on scholarships that show their leadership abilities they need to convey what their motivation was and what drove them to take action or get involved? Large scholarship programs want to see innovative solutions to problems. Their story needs to include an issue that they identified, what they did to solve the problem and how their actions affected others. The aim is to leave the Scholarship Committee feeling motivated and inspired.

The scholarship committee looks for students who are well rounded with school involvement, community involvement, volunteering, work experience and good grades. To help students discover their story, the following lists have been compiled from the book "Developing A Scholarship Mentality – Scholarship Strategies For Life" (Beech & Beech, 2012, p.18-23):

School:

- Marks above 80 percent
- Attended a leadership conference. If they can show how they applied their learning at the conference by leading something it will impress the judges more than just attendance.

- Demonstrated their leadership abilities by taking the initiative within their peer group to get them to take action or get involved.

- Overcame obstacles throughout high school and they can use an example to describe it.

- Choose a leadership class in their senior years if they are passionate about leading others and affecting change.

- Choose courses wisely in grade 11 and 12. Encourage them to choose courses that they can achieve at least 80% in and that are pertinent to the university program they will be applying to.

Extra-Curricular Activities:

- Join student council

- Join or lead a school club

- Member of a school sports team (Team Captain shows their leadership abilities!)

- Regular participant in an individual sport

- Play a musical instrument

- Involved in the arts, theatre, dance or choir at their school or in the community.

Community:

- Identified a local issue and took action

- Worked in their School

- Worked in their community (able to demonstrate growth in their community involvement or able to raise money for their project)

- Done community work nationally or internationally

- Recognized in the media for what they have done in their community

Volunteering:

- Did what they love to do and made a difference at the same time.

- Research organizations in their community that they want to volunteer for, check out their website or visit them in person to inquire about volunteer opportunities.

- Travel the world and volunteer at the same time. [Schools Without Borders (www.swb.ca) or Volunteers For Peace (www.vfp.org)] (Beech & Beech, 2012, p.18-23)

Ideally students should plan to have something from each of the above mentioned categories to prepare them for their scholarship application.

Scholarship Portfolio

Students could be encouraged to keep all their scholarship research and paperwork organized at home in order to access this information when needed. As they find scholarships that they qualify for they can start to write the application and be able to pick and choose which of their accomplishments would make the best fit to the application. Keeping track of the deadlines would be helpful so they can apply well before the due date. If the scholarship requires letters of reference, they should contact their reference at least one month before the application is due. Requests for reference letters require a certain amount of time which needs to be respected. If the student can get digital copies of the reference letter when completed it will make their job and the referee's job much easier for future applications as the referee can quickly modify what they have already written and get it to the student quickly.

Cultivating Reference Letters

Carefully considering who to ask for a reference letter is important. Students should already have a relationship with their teachers, their boss or manager at their part-time job, the leader of their school club, the coach of their sports team, the pastor at their church, and someone in charge at the community organization they belong to. The idea is to have a reference letter from all areas of their life. When asking a referee for a letter of reference the student must ensure to give them as much information as possible including the criteria for the award, what they think the scholarship committee is looking for and include all the things they have done that the referee can mention in the letter (if their experiences match what the scholarship is looking for, even better!) Previously mentioned, they should give their referee at least one month to complete the letter and should also direct them in how the letter needs to be forwarded. Some scholarships want all the parts of the application to arrive at the same time so they will have to get the letter from their referee so that the application package can be mailed all together. Others require the letter of recommendation to be "closed" meaning that the applicant doesn't get to see the letter as it is mailed directly to the institution from the referee who must sign their name over the seal of the letter so that they know it came from the referee directly. If the student can get a copy of the letter after their referee sends it they can still use it as part of their portfolio for future applications that may be open applications. Encourage students to send their referee a thank

you note afterwards, if they get an amazing reference letter it will be useful

multiple times for future applications such as college and university applications,

internships, volunteer positions and their career.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

There are need-based and merit-based scholarships. Need-based

scholarships are for students whose family finances may prevent them from

attending post-secondary or the criteria focuses on an area outside of academics

such as athletic ability or community involvement. Merit-based focuses on

academic achievements and may include other areas as well. That said, even need-

based scholarships will have academic criteria attached to it as they want students

who will excel in their chosen school. Therefore the grades in the courses students

select are very important. The better a student's GPA the more options they will

have when applying to scholarships. A GPA at or over 80% meets the criterion for

most scholarships. If the student struggles to get 80% here are some helpful

pointers for increasing their GPA:

1. Read before class. When the teacher goes over the lesson the next day

   the student will be able to double check that they understood what

   they read and ask questions about anything they didn't understand

   from their reading.

2. Be an active classroom participant. Engaging in classroom discussion will make students actively think about subjects as they are discussed.

3. Write out notes. It has been proven that people retain much more information when they write down their notes rather than just highlighting them for future studying.

4. Try not to cram. Cramming information is unavoidable sometimes due to all the other things happening in their life. Do not study anything right before the test, rather relax the body and mind by eating something and getting some exercise right before the test.

5. Actively manage the courses for the year. Most high school counsellors try to balance students' timetables for the year by making sure they don't have all their academic courses in the same semester. In grade 12 students should use their spare or study block to help them maximize their study time for the provincially examable courses. Remember, the scholarship judges don't see any difference between an A+ in an apparently easy class and a hard earned B in a difficult one.

Maximizing the Application

When students apply for a scholarship the person who receives it does a quick screening of their application before it even gets seen by the scholarship committee. They check the most basic requirements: Is it neat? Are all the documents included? Did they answer all the questions? Many applications are discarded at this first step (90%). If the application makes it through this check, then it will be judged on the criteria of the scholarship. In order to maximize the chances of the application making it through the quick check and criteria stage instruct the student to follow these helpful tips:

1. Type your application.

2. Make sure all required documents are included.

3. Ensure your application matches all the criteria.

4. Be polite and positive in your essay (rudeness will not make the judges want to give a student money).

5. SPELLING! Applications can be discarded for something as small as a simple spelling mistake. Ask people to proofread the application before submitting it.

The last step judges take when weeding applications comes down to competition. If all the applicants have made it past the quick check and the criteria stage then they are potentially judged on their GPA. If one student has a 3.8 GPA

and another has a 3.4 then that application doesn't go on. Remember the judges want the very best student with the very best application. "Even those scholarships that do NOT consider academic achievement as their PRIMARY consideration are going to look at your grades, your community service, your school activities – the judges are ultimately looking at THE WHOLE PERSON" (Beech & Beech, 2012, p.68).

Summary

A student-lead scholarship club would assist high school students to navigate the vast number of available scholarships and help them to identify scholarships for which students are eligible. This club would operate both in person and online so that all graduating students, their parents and anyone else could access the information. The club would focus on the areas that are usually required for a scholarship: leadership, community service, extracurricular activities, grade point average and essay writing. Students would work together to develop a scholarship portfolio, collect and manage recommendation letters, maintain and /or increase their GPA, critically review their application essays and all the while collect, discuss and manage scholarship information brought to the club through their members.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Grade 12 is a very busy time for students who plan to move on to post-secondary institutions after graduation. As well as doing their best in their courses, they are also volunteering their time at school or through community organizations, working part-time jobs to gain experience and some pocket money, playing on school or other sports teams, and are applying to post-secondary institutions hoping to get accepted into the program of their choice. On top of all this, they are tasked with the gargantuan feat of finding scholarships that they qualify for, filling out applications, writing essays, finding referees and getting reference letters and hoping that all this work will lead to some money to help them pay for their education. To assist grade 12 students with this monumental task it would be helpful to have a school club where students can work together to find scholarships and get help with their applications, essays, reference letters and GPA. This student lead scholarship club would have an online component as well as a physical meeting place. The online structure would depend on the club sponsor or the students running the club and their level of social media experience and knowledge. The student leaders of the club could use the online system to inform and educate other students about upcoming meetings and to house data on scholarships and their criteria and other important information. The sponsor of the

club could use online media sites to advertise the club as well as provide

information to prospective students in junior grades and their parents.

A student-run scholarship club could help grade 12 students find, analyze,

apply for and win scholarships. It would also benefit students by enticing them to

pursue post-secondary education and through participation in the club they would

gain a connection to their school.

High school students who become involved in school activities gain a sense

of pride and a feeling of belonging to their school. Through school activities they

make new friends, develop stronger relationships with their teachers, increase their

self-esteem and cultivate leadership skills. When students feel connected to their

school it propels them to work harder in their classes and thus achieve better

marks. As they experience greater success in school students aspirations for the

future expand and they are more likely to remain in school and continue their

education towards post-secondary.

The high school counsellor is one of the most important resources to

students during the college and financial aid search (Rapp, 2005). They make

post-secondary and scholarship information available to students through bulletin

boards, books, newsletters, websites and school assemblies. Yet even with all this

help and information students still have trouble starting the scholarship research

process. Some students don't bother to look for scholarships as they assume their parents will pay for their education while other student's parents have no experience with post-secondary education and therefore no experience with scholarships. Monetary and procedural factors also prevent students applying as they think the award is too low for the work required, there will be too much competition for the award or they think their application or essays will not be good enough because of their essay writing skills or lack of references. And finally they struggle to start the scholarship search process because of an absence of a structure or system for navigating the vast number of available scholarships and easily identifying scholarships for which they are eligible.

Post-secondary institutions want the best students to attend their schools so they offer scholarships hoping to attract those students. High school students who are planning to go to post-secondary institutions apply for scholarships hoping to receive money to help them pay for their education. To win those scholarships students must meet the criteria of the scholarship. Therefore, the knowledge of scholarship criteria "encourages the student to work harder in order to reach those requirements of that certain grant or scholarship" (Perna & Steele, 2011, p.914). This relationship creates a positive link between student aid and post-secondary enrollment. Parental education and involvement in their child's academic

aspirations also plays a major role in post-secondary selection as well as any offers of financial aid.

Recommendations

Based on the literature review there is a definite need for a structure or system for navigating the vast number of available scholarships and easily identifying scholarships for which students are eligible. This structure or system would be further enhanced if it was created and maintained by students and counsellors and had the ability to be accessed by all grade 12 students, other interested students, parents and other school personnel. Also, the structure or system for delivering the information would be dependent on the knowledge and experience of the students or counsellor setting it up. Creating a student-run scholarship club at a school would also depend upon the interest of each year's grade 12 class. The supervising counsellor would need to advertise the idea to the current grade 12 class during a grade 12 parent night or school assembly. The effectiveness of the club would also depend on the students running its curriculum and the interest of the other grade 12 students to keep the club surviving year after year. Starting a student run scholarship club would require a meeting place that all students could access at lunch time or after school. As discussed in the proposal section a president, vice president and secretary would need to be voted on by the

members of the club and it would be a good idea to collect phone numbers or email addresses of all interested people so that they can all stay connected via an email list or as part of a Facebook group or other social media site.

To make a student-run scholarship club successful I suggest collecting data on the scholarships that members of the club win so that they can be broadcast and advertised to the rest of the school to promote the scholarship club and to celebrate the students' achievement. This could be done during the convocation ceremony, as students cross the stage to accept their graduation letter from the principal the announcer can broadcast to the auditorium all the scholarships and bursaries that the student has won. The scholarship club can use this data to promote their club the following year and it could help future club members with their scholarship research as they will have a record of scholarships that have been won by previous students at their school.

Future research on school based scholarship clubs could look into whether scholarship winners from grade 12 continue to adopt a scholarship mentality by pursuing the activities that got them the scholarship or did they just do it once to win a scholarship in high school.   A researcher could also look into the statistics of scholarships themselves as there were no available statistics on the number of scholarships available, the monetary value of available scholarships and the

number of scholarships that go unclaimed each year. Continuing with unclaimed

scholarships, a researcher could investigate whether scholarship committees grant

their scholarship to applicants even if they don't meet the criteria or does the

money disappear for that year or roll over to the following year? As for the

scholarship club itself, a researcher could track the success of the students at a

school to see the number of scholarships won and the total value of scholarships on

a year-by-year basis. If multiple schools adopted student-run scholarship clubs, a

researcher could investigate and compare each schools achievements and get a

better understanding of how many scholarships are won each year by different

schools.

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