

Philly Goes to College: Changing the College- Going Culture of Philadelphia

Jennifer Glaeser 31 October 2013

The decision to not attend college or other postsecondary institution usually does not cross the minds of the readers of this journal. The expectation of the typical American teenager is this: in order to be a successful, functioning adult, you must first and foremost be a college graduate. As a high school student in my suburban community, this translates into an intense competition among students for the highest GPA, for the highest number of extracurricular club memberships and band instruments you can accumulate, and for anything that might make you stand out as a “well-rounded” student. The caliber of universities and colleges which send you acceptance letters is a matter of pride. This is what a college-going culture looks like. Where this culture exists, the college attainment rate is incredibly high.

Relative to other large cities in America, Philadelphia has a low college attainment rate. Mayor Nutter has made it his mission to improve this number in the city. He hopes to double the college attainment rate by 2018. Here is the

theory: helping to improve the percentage of students graduating from high school and then graduating from college will have transformative effects on Philadelphians' lives and the economic and cultural life of the city.

To achieve this, the expectation for children needs to include an opportunity to go to college. In our city the resources are available, but taking a student with no expectation of attending college and transforming him into a student who fully exercises the resources available presents a challenge. Through his Office of Education, Mayor Nutter is building a campaign that will change how students think and feel about their opportunities to earn a college degree. The Philly Goes 2 College (PG2C) initiative is one of the mayor's key tools for encouraging the community to think differently about going to college.

The PG2C initiative engages in many activities to help promote the college-going culture in Philadelphia. With a grant-funded budget of just \$200,000 a year, the long-term impact is substantial. The PG2C website acts as a centralized hub through which Philadelphia's citizens can access the information they need to get started on their journey. The site makes use of the resources already available, while also incorporating the mayor's voice to enhance the message and extent of outreach. By raising awareness, building a platform for connecting potential college-bound students with the resources they need and by collaborating with effective members of the college

access community, the PG2C initiative has the key components in place for a successful campaign. Even if PG2C is considered to have a very minor role in increasing the college attainment rate, the potential return on investment (ROI) is approximately \$3,000 per every dollar spent. This is a worthy investment of the Mayor's Office, especially considering the potential long-term benefits a high college attainment rate could have on the city.

Why Go to College?

According to Mayor Nutter, it is a "K-16 world out there...now everyone needs some postsecondary education. A high school diploma won't get you far" (Nutter 2012). The mayor began to position himself as a strong proponent for education early in his tenure. From the start he has championed education as an integral factor necessary to address the problems facing the city of Philadelphia: crime, poverty, the budget crisis and unemployment. He very-publicly declared to the Democratic National Convention, "In Philadelphia, our public safety, poverty reduction, health and economic development all start with education. We can't grow the middle class if we don't give our kids the tools they need to innovate and invent" (Nutter 2012).

When Mayor Nutter took office, the worst was yet to come with the financial crisis. Even then though, the city was suffering from high levels of poverty, high levels of crime

and low rates of higher education attainment. While there has been some improvement since his election, the numbers are still a serious concern. According to the most recent Pew Charitable Trusts' report on the state of the city, Philadelphia had an unemployment rate of 10.7% in 2012, which is slightly higher than other comparable cities such as Baltimore, Chicago and Pittsburgh. The poverty rate is still very high at 28.4%. In 2012, there were 331 homicides, which is a rate of 21.6 per 100,000 residents. Table 1 demonstrates how Philadelphia compared to other large cities in America in 2012.

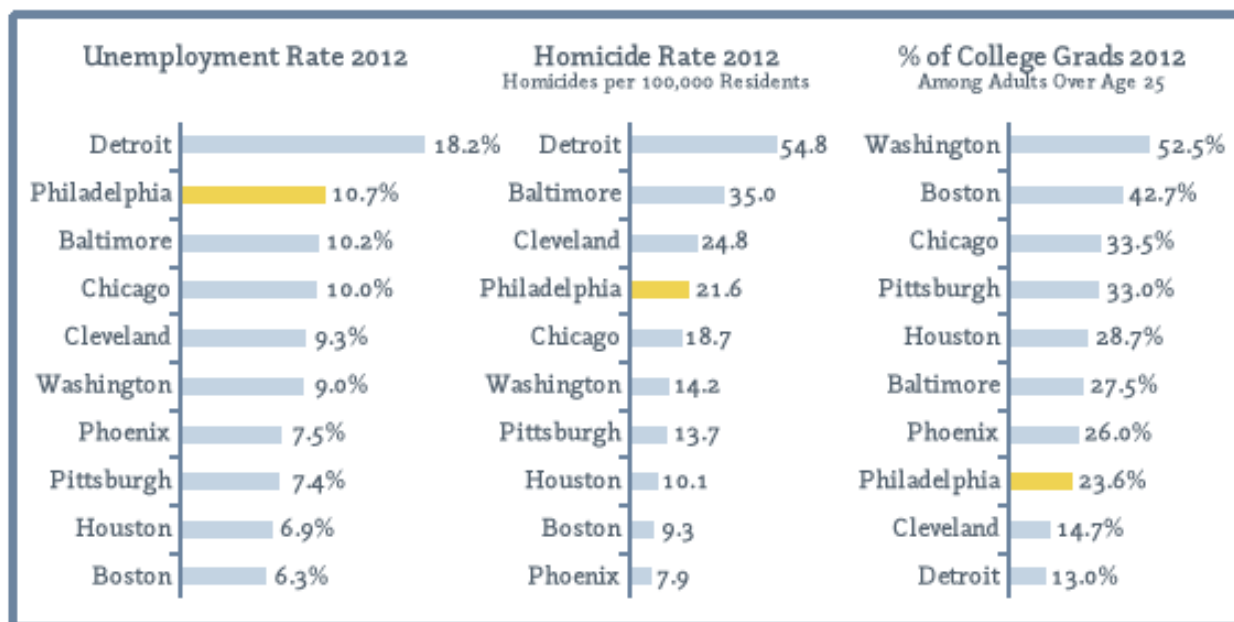


Table 1. A Comparison of Three Statistics for Ten Major Cities in 2012

Mayor Nutter's emphasis on education as a means to addressing these problems is not unfounded. Statistics show that those who achieve academically are less likely to commit crimes and less likely to live in poverty. A key statistic the mayor cites is that a Philadelphia college

graduate can earn up to \$2 million over a lifetime —this is \$1 million more than a high school graduate (Brown 2011). Not only does this provide support for the individual, but this translates into more revenue for the city as well.

However, there is more to this than poverty rates, crime rates and tax revenue. As our economy continues to evolve, the labor force is changing. We are becoming a knowledge-based economy that requires at least an undergraduate degree. With a knowledgeable workforce, a culture of innovation follows that leads to the creation of new companies and new jobs (Wadhwa 2011). In fact, “Before, investments in strategic industries supposedly generated employment, which then attracted people. Now, it’s the other way around. Attract the right people—the young, educated, and talented, the drivers of today’s knowledge economy—and jobs will follow” (Polese 2011). Investing in an educated workforce is not only good for city statistics, it is a legitimate and powerful strategy for economic development.

In Philadelphia, only 23.6% of citizens above the age of 25 currently have a college degree. While the education attainment levels are rising, they are still below the national average. According to a 2013 Pew report, Philadelphia ranks 22nd among the country’s 25 largest cities in terms of college attainment. This low rate, juxtaposed with the relatively large number of colleges and universities in the Philadelphia area, is perplexing.

Every time you turn a corner it seems as if Temple, Drexel or UPENN is expanding, building yet another structure or redeveloping another block within the city of Philadelphia. The city is a higher education powerhouse.

As a means to rectifying this discrepancy, Mayor Nutter has created the Mayor's Office of Education. Housed within is the Philly Goes 2 College resource center. Philadelphia already has a very active college access community, so there are many resources available to students who would like the opportunity to go to college. As a part of the mayor's plan to improve higher education attainment rates, PG2C acts as the heartbeat for the overall campaign.

The Solution

At its core, the PG2C initiative is a key piece in the mayor's campaign to develop education in the city. The mission of PG2C is to "promote and support a college-going culture among citizens of all ages by engaging them and providing high-quality college-going information and resource referrals that are current, comprehensive and easily accessible" (Philly Goes 2 College 2013).

Essentially, the mayor's office now acts as a resource and referral service for citizens of Philadelphia seeking more information about going to college.

The PG2C office does more than operate a website and

refer college seekers to other resources. It also engages in substantial outreach to students, either through the Graduation Coach Campaign, the adult intervention to increase college attainment, or one of the many workshops they frequently host themselves. For example, four times a year the office puts together a college and scholarship application workshop where students have the opportunity to write and edit their applications with assistance from current college students. During Spring Break, PG2C hosts S.W.A.G. (Students with a Goal) week. Throughout this week college-related events and activities are planned during each day so students and adults can use their break to prepare for the next steps in their educational paths. In partnership with other organizations, this week also features a college fair, college open houses, practice exams and more.

The PG2C office collaborates with many stakeholders in the community including the School District of Philadelphia's Office of College & Career Awareness, Campus Philly, the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), The Free Library, Graduate! Philadelphia, the Mayor's Commission on Literacy, the Philadelphia College Prep Roundtable and the Philadelphia Education Fund. These partners work closely with the PG2C office to help achieve the mayor's ambitious goals. Whether students are being referred to them through the PG2C office, or they are advertising their events on the PG2C calendar, each organization has an opportunity to contribute to the

overall message.

Changing culture and creating a movement are ambitious goals, especially for a mayor working to avert a budget crisis. But Americans are no stranger to grand campaigns. A prominent example is the anti-tobacco movement; America now thinks very differently about cigarettes. Smoking is no longer “cool” as policy has now banned smoking in nearly every public space. Similarly, the mayor hopes to change the expectation of Philadelphians from, “There is no way I could go to college,” to “I can go to college if I want to.”

Increasingly, cities are expected to do more with less, and mayors face a great challenge in delivering under such circumstances. In fact, using the mayor’s office as an agent of city-wide cultural change is innovative for the education field. If the mayor is seeking to form a college-going movement in the city of Philadelphia, the PG2C campaign is an innovative mechanism to transform the discussion from a background issue to one that is city-wide and consistently top-of-mind. Through its efforts at building awareness and creating a collaborative network of existing stakeholders, the PG2C campaign becomes a centralized hub with a powerful spokesperson.

Step 1: Raise Awareness

Led by Barbara Mattleman, the small office plays a big

role in the college access scene of Philadelphia. Let's face it, the college application process can be a daunting prospect. It is easy to become overwhelmed by college requirements, essays, etc., but there are resources available and Barbara's team can help students find them. Barbara's office and the mayor have been able to provide a strong voice to the continuing education movement in the city, while not reinventing the wheel.

A large source of support comes from the fact the mayor has made himself the face of education for the city, and with that type of backing, an issue can become a great priority. Just as President Obama made healthcare the focal point of his first term of office, the mayor has chosen to do the same with education. As the leading political figure in Philadelphia, Mayor Nutter has the power to prioritize this conversation.

Not only does his position add credibility to the issue, his model of establishing an office within City Hall helps support the greater network of stakeholders. A network of college access programs and organizations exist in the city and there is no need to replicate those services. With its position in City Hall, the office can act as a centralized hub, help guide the conversation and further connect people in the community. A lot can be accomplished in a small space.

Step 2: Collaborate and Form a Network

A growing body of evidence is supporting the notion that change does not come from one individual or one organization, but is a result of collaboration among organizations and public sectors. The PG2C initiative not only functions as a service provider, but as a collaborator as well. An interesting comparison comes from the Rockefeller Foundation. The Foundation was looking for pioneering ways to turn solar-powered flashlights into all-purpose room lighting for countries lacking adequate access to electricity. The Foundation worked with InnoCentive to ask investors worldwide how such a flashlight might be converted. In this situation InnoCentive acted as an innovation intermediary, or “an organization that brokers relationships between those with questions and those who might have answers” (Nambisan 2009). Through this collaboration platform, a more diverse network of organizations and people could meet, make better use of resources and create faster solutions. PG2C is not that much different in its role as an information resource and referral hub for collaboration between clients and providers.

A few years ago, Satish Nambisan wrote for the Stanford Social Innovation Review about the three types of collaboration platforms that foster collaboration. An exploration platform brings partners together to help define a problem; an experimentation platform is used to test proposed solutions to the problem; and an execution

platform collaborates to disseminate the proposed solutions. In the first case, the “exploration platforms bring together diverse stakeholders so that they may frame problems fully and accurately. Once the partners develop a shared definition of the problem, they can start working on solutions” (Nambisan 2009). Through its relationship with the Philadelphia College Prep Roundtable, its outreach to students and partnership in service with other stakeholders, PG2C is able to help build a space where organizations can work on the problem together. Mostly though, the initiative acts as an execution platform. The organizations PG2C partners with have developed successful tools for helping students go to college. Through the resource and referral hub, PG2C is able guide more students to these tools and help these other organizations succeed. According to Barbara, “I am always saying [to] use our materials, we all have the same goal—for us all to be successful” (Mattleman 2013).

Creating a successful campaign is a tough road. Community Wealth Ventures is an organization familiar with creating agents of change. They have developed a set of insights through their work with successful organizations that have brought real impact to our communities. Below, I have adapted some of their insights to show how PG2C is a useful tool to the mayor in building his education campaign (Community Wealth Partners 2013).

Create a Shared Leadership: To help ensure the sustainability of both an organization and a campaign

Successful organizations create a culture of shared leadership within their ranks. Employees are encouraged to use their skills in their own unique ways to help further the mission of the organization. At PG2C, it is important to Barbara to support her employees in this process. "You want to make sure you are finding the best ways to reach out to people...I am smart enough to hire people who are smart and work collaboratively. People work with people in different ways and it is great to say 'let's go about this together'" (Mattleman 2013).

Externally, PG2C participates in the Philadelphia College Prep Roundtable, where they network with other people and organizations focused on college access in the Philadelphia community. Further, inherent to the nature of the resource and referral service, PG2C does not tell organizations how best to improve college access. Instead, they partner with these organizations to help raise their awareness among the population and refer clients to their services.

Open the circle: Problems cannot be solved by a single organization, but by multiple stakeholders

When Barbara first started with the PG2C campaign, she knew there already was a healthy college access

community in Philadelphia. Through her office, the PG2C website and staffers engage in their own outreach, but also refer potential college-goers to one of the many resources and stakeholders available in the city.

Communication: Integral to strategy

The mayor is a continuous source of communication support for the PG2C program. In return, the campaign is regularly reaching out to Philadelphia citizens. Through their website, workshops, college fairs, the Graduation Coach Campaign and more, PG2C is consistently sending the message out to the Philadelphia community.

Build public support (the value of public opinion): This can lead to more funding, more initiatives and more government or private support

Through PG2C, the message is getting across. By continually messaging on the value of an education and the positive effect it has on an individual and the community as a whole, the more likely the public expectation will change.

Live in the market: Understand and adapt to the market needs

Barbara is familiar with the populations that need the most help. PG2C targets these populations and adapts their

programming to better engage in the community. For example, PG2C recently sponsored a 3-on-3 basketball tournament during Philly S.W.A.G. Week to attract African American males, a population they do not always reach. - In order to watch and participate in the tournament, everyone had to first walk through a college fair.

The Philadelphia Landscape

The sustaining part of this model is that there is no real competition within the Philadelphia area. The focus of this model is to become a centralized collaborator, so other college access services and programs are considered partners in the process. With limited resources, this is a critical aspect to sustainability.

During the creation of this program, it was important for Barbara to not reinvent the wheel. The resources exist in the city and there are qualified people and programs engaging in this work. However, the notion of using the mayor's office as a centralized hub through which people can circulate to the appropriate organizations is new. No other city at the time had brought this type of work into the mayor's office. Further, no other office in the city performs a similar function: resource and referral hub, outreach and service.

Similar types of campaigns have since popped up around the United States. In New York State there is now the

Go!CollegeNY campaign. This website is also an extensive resource and referral page for anybody wishing to seek more information on going to college in that state. However, the site is run and maintained by the New York State government and does not focus on a small geographic area like PG2C. Another nationally-known example is College Summit, which is a nonprofit that partners with school districts to help them increase their respective college attainment rates. This organization has been successful in reaching students nationwide, as well as in engaging in advocacy and policy making. However, unlike these larger state- and nationwide organizations, PG2C has the advantage of being a local, more accessible resource, targeted and more adaptable to the Philadelphia community. By using the resources that are already available and channeling the campaign through the mayor's office directly, the initiative truly becomes an effective service in the local area. This can easily be replicated in other cities where there is a college access community. Table 2 summarizes the activities of the PG2C initiative relative to similar organizations outside of the city.

	PG2C	Go! College NY	College Summit
Owner	Mayor of Philadelphia	New York State Government	Nonprofit Organization
Geography	Local/City	State of New York	Nationwide
Target Audience	Any Age	Any Age	High School Students
Activities:			
Resource Center	●	●	●
Referral	●	●	
Outreach	●		●
Direct Service	●		●
Advocating/ Policy Making			●
Networking & Collaborating	●		●

Impact

Impressively, the city is able to provide these tools on a relatively low budget of \$200,000 a year. The program is entirely grant funded from the Lenfest Foundation.

However, PG2C has recently received their last installment of the grant and continue to look for additional funding for the future.

To date, the Philly Goes 2 College program has reached out to at least 28,500 current and former students since its creation in February 2010. The office keeps track of where they work, by zip code, as well as the populations and types of organizations they work with. Approximately 40% of their outreach is to neighborhood schools, 27% to charter, 19% to university college, 5% to special admissions, 3% city wide (open attendance), 3% elementary/middle schools and 2% to faith-based

organizations. The office has also mapped out the areas of low educational attainment in the city, paying special attention to the areas with the highest poverty rates and working to target those areas where extra help is most needed. However, 28,000 is likely an underestimate. This does not include the number of people using the website, or the number of people the office has referred to other resources within the city, or even the number that simply drop by for a chat with someone in the office regarding their options for college. PhillyGoes2College and Graduation Coach Campaign are just two of the many initiatives that exist in the city to help students prepare for college. There is a collective hope that the increased awareness, collaboration and networking created by the PhillyGoes2College office will all ultimately lead to a higher college attainment rate for the city of Philadelphia.

When the mayor took office in 2008, he set an ambitious goal of doubling the college attainment rate by 2018. According to the 2000 census, the attainment rate for Philadelphia County was 18%, and Mayor Nutter hopes to have it reach 36%. As of the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS), the college attainment rate was 24%, so Philadelphia is well on its way. To put these numbers in perspective, using the 2011 population data, the difference between 18% attainment and 36% attainment is 179,651 more adults with at least a bachelor's degree. Right now, with an attainment rate of 24%, another

123,076 are needed to achieve 36%. The number of students currently enrolled at Temple University, University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University is about 85,000. These estimates are for people aged 25 and above, so it begins to get tricky when you think about the timing of these numbers. Students who were high school seniors in 2009 (when PG2C opened) would have just graduated from a four year college, assuming there were no breaks in between high school and senior year. It will be another three to four years before we see this cohort of students reach the age of 25 and be included in this statistic. Of course, PG2C does not just focus on getting high school-aged kids into college, but the point is there is a time lag in looking at this data.

Another interesting outcome to look at might be the percentage enrolled in college or graduate school. Again using ACS 1 year estimates, since 2009 there are a total of 16,176 more students enrolled in college or graduate school. From this, we can estimate the impact of the campaign. Using Mayor Nutter's statistic that a Philadelphian with a college degree can earn up to \$1 million more in their lifetime, this could amount to roughly \$16,176,000,000 more in earnings over a lifetime. The PG2C campaign operates on a yearly budget of \$200,000 a year. This means for every \$1 spent by the PG2C campaign, an additional \$26,960 is earned. Now, this number is making the assumption that PG2C is the sole contributing factor to a student going to college. While

not an exact science, you could make the assumption that PG2C played a critical role in getting 10% percent of students to go to college. In this case, the return is still positive at \$2,696. Table 3 demonstrates some calculations relating these figures.

Percentage of Students Using	# of Students Who Used	Total Earnings Over a Lifetime	Return
PG2C	PG2C		
10%	1,618	\$1,617,600,000	\$2,696
20%	3,235	\$3,235,200,000	\$5,392
30%	4,853	\$4,852,800,000	\$8,088
40%	6,470	\$6,470,400,000	\$10,784
50%	8,088	\$8,088,000,000	\$13,480
60%	9,706	\$9,705,600,000	\$16,176
70%	11,323	\$11,323,200,000	\$18,872
80%	12,941	\$12,940,800,000	\$21,568
90%	14,558	\$14,558,400,000	\$24,264
100%	16,176	\$16,176,000,000	\$26,960

All data from US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

These are impressive returns. However, it is difficult to estimate the real effect that a campaign has on an individual's decision and ability to go to college. Often, PG2C will refer students to other organizations, so who should receive the credit? Looking at the first row in Table 3, let's assume the role that PG2C may have played in the student's decision to go to college stands at 10%. This would still give PG2C responsibility for \$161,760,000 earned over a lifetime, which is still a positive ROI of

\$2,696.

Future Viability of the PG2C Initiative

As we watch Congress debate borrowing rates on government-backed student loans, we wonder when does debt become so large that college is no longer a good investment? Prospective students must be cautious to not take on a large amount of debt that will be difficult to pay back. At PG2C though, Barbara makes sure the conversation includes how to best take care of yourself financially, whether this means starting your degree at a community college to lower the cost, or pursuing scholarships. It is important and reassuring to understand that there are options.

PG2C works with many area colleges and encourages students to attend open houses, though they are careful not to promote any particular institution. However, PG2C does work closely with Campus Philly, which works to keep students in the Philadelphia region. PG2C sticks to its mission of encouraging college attendance, but leaves the retainment aspect to Campus Philly. This is a great example of how PG2C has "opened the circle" to allow other organizations to do what they do best.

Though the PG2C initiative has embedded itself well in the Philadelphia College Access community, it is not immune to politics. As a key pillar of the Nutter administration

platform, the next mayor may choose to focus on a different issue or entirely overhaul PG2C under his own agenda. The organization is currently looking at sustainability options right now, but the hope is that it will remain intact. The office has grown in importance and has worked hard in a short time to make key partnerships with other members of the community. By building networks and opportunities to collaborate, Barbara hopes the recognition of public support of PG2C will help sustain the office through the next mayoral transition.

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