



Some Los Angeles students who toured Amherst College in Massachusetts saw snow for the first time

College Bound

By Robyn Emde

WHEN TALENTED LOW-INCOME STUDENTS GET THE SAME PERKS AS PRIVATE PREP SCHOOL KIDS, CHANCES OF ADMISSION TO ELITE UNIVERSITIES RISE



Student Rosie Avila and Harley Frankel

Mr. Frankel:

Thank you soooooo... much for being such a great person. Thanks to you I have a chance to succeed in life. You are a very unique, caring

The greatest colleges in the United States and abroad scramble to get that small set of students who rank not only in the very top percentile of their academic class, but also in the very bottom percentile in their socioeconomic status. To provide diversity on campus, this small group of new high school graduates is heavily recruited by the Ivy League schools, and other top universities, like USC and Stanford, earnestly compete for them.

Just below this in-demand demographic are thousands of low-income students who have impressive academic records, but get passed over in the recruitment process. This is the body of students that Harley Frankel, founder and director of College Match, wanted to help. “Many excellent colleges want these kids,” says Frankel, “but they don’t know how to identify them.” Frankel’s mission with College Match is to connect these elite institutions with well-qualified, low-income students in the Los Angeles area.

Harley Frankel has a track record in the field of education, which gives him valuable connections for the organization. As Executive Assistant to the U.S. Commissioner of Education in the 1970s, he

worked to reform the higher education financial aid system that gives grants for the nation's lowest income students. His reforms became the forerunner to the highly regarded Pell Grant. Frankel also had the responsibility for directing the national Head Start program and helped select the first U.S. Secretary of Education, Shirley Hufstедler, while serving as a Senior White House Aide for President Jimmy Carter.

When his own children began preparing to apply for college, Frankel became aware of the enormous amount of energy that wealthy, college-educated parents put into their children's application process. There are the SAT test prep classes, writing tutors to help with application essays and solicitation of help from influential friends.

What if The Playing Field Were Level?

An enormous disparity exists between these students and those from low-income families whose parents didn't attend college. Helping his children apply "was like a full-time job," Frankel says. "I began to wonder, 'What about the kids without all these advantages?'" He established College Match to help highly-qualified, low-income students get the necessary information to compete in the college admission process—"to give disadvantaged kids everything they would have gotten had their families been affluent."

He seeks out successful students at the end of their sophomore year at Jordan High School and Animo Inglewood High School in South Central L.A., Bell High School in East L.A., Franklin High School in Northeast L.A. and the Bresee Youth Center in Central L.A. There are approximately 100 students in the program this year. They are about two thirds Latino; 15% are African American and 12% Asian.

"L.A. kids of color are the new gold of California," says Bud Jacobs, the director of high school programs for the Los Angeles Unified School District. "Colleges outside of California don't always successfully recruit L.A. kids, but Harley is connected to some very prestigious schools. I'm very impressed with his program." One reason Jacobs thinks so highly of College Match is Frankel's fundraising. Private donations run the program so that it operates at no expense to the school district.

Economically disadvantaged students are the largest underrepresented group on college campuses today, according to the Educational Testing Service. Unfortunately, economically disadvantaged students most often attend overcrowded high schools where college counselors are responsible for hundreds of students. "Public school counselors are very supportive and committed to these kids," says Frankel, "but they only have so many resources and just can't spend the time necessary for each student."

Some of the resources College Match provides include assistance filling out college application forms, SAT preparatory classes, college visits across the country, advocating for the students with college admissions offices, financial aid packages and, once they're admitted to college, necessities such as computers and appropriate clothing. "Twice a month we meet with the students at their school to have one-to-one meetings," says Frankel. "We make the time to give individual attention to every child. It's the very reason we're effective."

Making Influential Connections

One of the most individualized services College Match kids receive is getting well-connected, influential people from the schools of their choice to meet with them and recommend them to the Director of Admissions. One girl who was attending a magnet school in Los Angeles had applied to UCLA and USC, but didn't get into either one. She decided her only option was to attend community college and then apply to transfer later on. "It didn't make sense to me, because she was such an excellent student," Frankel says. "So I arranged a meeting with the director of admissions at USC, and it turned out they had made a mistake on her record. She ended up with a full ride scholarship to USC."



College Match teens tour Yale

“L.A. kids of color are the new gold of California.”

—Bud Jacobs, Los Angeles Unified School District

Another important service to which middle class and wealthy parents make sure their children have access is SAT preparation. Students in College Match attend approximately 100 hours of intensive SAT prep, which results in an average increase of 247 points on sample tests, according to Frankel. Antonio Reveles, the director of college counseling at Bell High School, who is responsible for 800 students, feels the test prep College Match provides is one of the most beneficial services of the program. Bell has had a partnership with Frankel for four years and has more than 60 students participating in his program. “College Match is one extra tool we have for the best and brightest at Bell,” says Reveles. “Frankel gives students the opportunity to actually look at universities like Rice and Yale.”

that you'll continue to support us
and the people that come after
us. You opened my eyes to so
many things that I never considered.
Thank you so much.

Critics have long cited cultural and economic biases in the SAT. At a Saturday morning class on September 10 at Bell High School, one boy raised his hand during a difficult math problem in *Gruber's New SAT*, a text book thicker than the West L.A. phone book. After several seconds of confusion between teacher and student, the two realized he was misinterpreting a word that was imperative to understanding the problem. It was not the difficulty of the calculation, but of the English language that caused his misstep, which is why College Match also provides ACT prep classes. Many students for whom English is a second language perform better on the alternative test.

Many of the students participating in the Bell High School prep class plan to take the SATs multiple times. “Next month will be my third time,” says Betsy Perez. She and her brother are the first in their family to go to college.

“I plan to take them three times,” says Cindy Ballon, “but I’ll take it four times if that’s what it takes.” Ballon joined College Match for the support in getting accepted to a college, but the result has been eye opening. “College Match helped me get to know colleges that I had never heard of before,” she says. “Now I have so many choices and would like to go to either Wellesley or Stanford.”

Giving Students Options

Choice is a crucial facet of the philosophy of College Match. Students are asked to apply to ten private schools, four University of California campuses and one Cal State. “Of the fifteen schools, I ask them to choose three schools that would be a stretch to get into, four where their chances are probably fifty-fifty and three that are a sure thing,” Frankel says. And he never tells a kid which school they should pick. “Even if I have an idea of where I think they’ll thrive, I never tell a kid where to go,” he says. “It’s important to give them options, tell them the differences and let them make the choice.”

In March of this year, Frankel took 37 high-achieving minority students from East L.A. and Watts on an eight-day trip to the East Coast to visit some of the most prestigious schools in the country. On an average day, students visited two to three colleges before staying the night at either the university or at a hotel. On one particularly exciting day, after a morning session at Yale University in Connecticut, Frankel and his students headed to Boston for a Celtics game. The next morning, they had the beautiful campus of Harvard University to look forward to, followed by an evening at Brown.

For many College Match kids, this trip was the first time they had ever left their family, or Los Angeles, and was a life changing experience. In an oversized Thank You card to Frankel, the teenagers revealed their feelings about the college visitation. “This trip allowed me to experience so much and learn so much about myself,” says a girl from Franklin High School. “Leaving my family for the first time, I realized I can be away from home...and have the confidence that I can get into a college that I once thought was out of reach.”



Avis White and Shanon Segre at Yale



An SAT preparation class

“I’ve come to realize that college isn’t a waste of time,” says another Franklin student, “and although college involves a lot of studying, it also provides young adults with choices and a sense of independence that will help us grow up and be able to handle life’s twists and turns.”

Since its inception, College Match has helped deserving youngsters get accepted to institutions such as Yale, Wellesley, Pomona, Columbia, NYU, Wesleyan, Claremont McKenna, Wheaton, Trinity, Pitzer, Scripps, Cornell, USC, St. Mary’s, Loyola Marymount and UCLA. Three fourths of the students in last year’s program went to top ranked colleges.

Guiletta Aquino, an undergraduate college admissions officer at Mills College in Oakland, CA, worked closely with Frankel in her former admissions position at Wellesley. “Harley casts the net as wide as possible for his students,” she says. “He encourages the parents to look beyond their immediate environment and works to make their dreams of a higher education a reality.”

Although there are other programs with similar goals, College Match does two things uniquely. For one, it focuses its efforts exclusively on students with strong academic records rather than counseling students at all levels. “These are the students who are likely to be future leaders in their community and in our nation,” says Frankel.

Second, College Match provides more intensive one-on-one support than other programs and develops individualized strategies based on the students’ strengths, weaknesses and personal preferences. It is a model based on the college counseling programs in elite private high schools in addition to what is offered by affluent parents. “The College Match students receive the same level of support and assistance that affluent students receive so that they can participate effectively in the highly competitive college admissions process,” Frankel says.

You have been and will be the most influential person in my life. This extraordinary program will be what most helps me in life. This time has been great and I have learned a lot.

It is easy to see the gratitude of the students who have had the opportunity to be a part of College Match. One girl from Franklin High School epitomizes the emotions students feel for Frankel. “I really didn’t have the motivation in my life to go to college, but then you came to our school, and there was my motivation. I am ready to brighten my future.”



College Match students Ruben Marquez, Marvin Lopez and Luis Ceballos

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—Harley Frankel, founder of College Match

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