Student to Student

Team Member 1 Name
email@nyu.edu
School
Class
abc123

Team Member 2 Name
email@nyu.edu
School
Class
abc123

Team Member 3 Name
email@nyu.edu
School
Class
abc123
The Issue. Student to Student seeks to address the growing education and achievement gap between low-income students and their high-income counterparts. Just 8% of the 16 million children living in poverty in the United States will graduate from high school by age 24. This issue is widespread and is reflected in the recent lawsuit brought against the Department of Education concerning the racial bias of the NYC Standardized High School Admission Test. Whether or not a student gets into a top-tier NYC high school and ultimately receives the benefits as a result is dependent upon this single two and a half hour test. As is the case with many issues concerning low-income families, the educational achievement gap disproportionately affects people of color. Stuyvesant High School’s student body was nearly 13 percent black in 1979. Today, only 1.2 percent of students at the city’s most sought after selective high school is black. Only 1.4% of students offered admission to Stuyvesant this year (13 of 937) were Latino, even though Latinos comprise 21% of students who took the standardized high school test.

If a student attends an exam school like Stuyvesant, they have a 99% chance of graduating from high school, a far higher chance of going onto college and thus receiving the benefits of higher educational attainment: increased wealth, stable occupational status, higher income, and so on. In addition to financial consequences, the effects of education permeate into all areas of life: education is strongly tied to better health outcomes, chances of incarceration, and other life altering institutions.

Low-income students do not have access to the wide array of resources that more affluent students generally have. Statistically, high-income students are more likely to perform better academically because they have access to tutoring opportunities such as one-on-one tutoring or expensive test preparation classes outside of school. The free tutoring services offered to minority students, if any at all, usually take place within a large group. As a result, students that need the most help do not get the attention they need to target the unequal distribution of opportunity and resources.

The Idea. Student to Student is dedicated to addressing the achievement gap by providing low-income NYC students with high quality SHSAT preparation. The sad reality is that high-income students are a step ahead of their lower income peers because they have access to important and expensive resources outside of the classroom. Student to Student will allow motivated and talented NYU students to mentor and tutor NYC middle school students, thereby giving NYU students an invaluable opportunity to gain real-world experience and engage with their community. More importantly, Student to Student will begin to address the harsh inequalities in the biased education system.

Student to Student addresses multiple needs within the education system. Not only is there a need for free tutoring services that assist with exam preparation, but there is also a need for a place for soon-to-be teachers to develop and refine their skills. With the cost of higher education rising at an alarming rate, working for free is not a feasible option for most college students. The compensation Student to Student provides would allow NYU undergraduates to gain experience without having to make significant personal sacrifices. In addition, low-income NYC students would receive test preparation that is valued at hundreds of dollars. There are very limited free or low-cost alternatives to preparation programs such as Kaplan, Princeton Review, and so on.

To allow for maximum individual growth and catering to individual needs, Student to Student teachers will be given basic materials, information, and broad curriculum support, but ultimately they will be allowed to create their own lesson plans. All parties benefit from Student to Student: students learn while teachers get to develop their own lesson plans and implement effective teaching methods on a trial and error basis. Student to Student will give NYU undergraduates invaluable leadership experience and
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professional development. The experience Student to Student tutors will get from the program will positively benefit them regardless of what industry they end up in. Our program will expose low-income students to college students and positive role models. Through diverse, varied, and effective teaching methods, Student to Student will improve both performance on the SHSAT and in school. Many students in low-income schools are restricted to large class sizes and face challenges that are not conducive to individual learning styles. Student to Student will not just teach to the test but, as a result of smaller learning groups, will help students identify and practice study skills that work best with their unique learning style.

Initially college students will be paid $10 an hour, 75% of which will come from work-study funds. After a three-month introductory period, college students have the opportunity of a pay raise to $15 an hour. High school students will have an introductory period where they will serve on a volunteer basis in a tutoring session overseen by a college student. After their three-month introductory period they have the opportunity to teach their own SHSAT section and earn a pay rate of $8 an hour. High school SHSAT teachers must be high-performing 11th and 12th grade students.

The primary cost of our program will be compensation for tutors. Furthermore, a portion of our budget will be allotted to hiring coordinators that will oversee the flow of our program. These coordinators will work on a part-time basis, which will alleviate the cost of having a full-time staff member. In addition to these primary costs, we will also need a portion of our fund to pay for supplies and test prep material. Lastly, some of our funds will be given to obtaining a small office in which our coordinators will be able to work.

We are creating an ongoing cycle of valuable experience and opportunity for both the students we want to serve and the resources we wish to tap into within the educational field. With each academic year comes a new group of students that need to prepare/take the SHSAT, in addition to growing numbers of the NYU student body who can serve as tutors. Maintaining track of testing progress and percentage of achievement will allow us to market the effectiveness of our venture over time to the demanding need demonstrated by underserved students living in poverty.

New York City provides a wealth of resources and networks for us to tap into. NYU has an enormous and talented student body consisting of 20,000 undergraduates and 20,000 graduate students. Student to Student intends to forge meaningful connections with the NYC education system. Valuable allies include, but are not limited to, high school and middle school counselors, teachers and administrators. In addition to NYU undergraduates, tutors will come from one specialized high school. Over time, we plan to reach out to other high schools, adding to our pool of potential tutors and the overall growth and success of Student to Student.

One means of measuring the success of our program will be through the use of periodic SHSAT practice exams. Since one of the main goals of Student to Student is to alleviate the specialized high school achievement gap between low-income and higher income students, we hope program participants will achieve significant gains on the SHSAT. In addition to SHSAT scores, we will measure the success of our program using school specific data. For example, if only 3% of middle schoolers from a given school that applied to an exam high school in 2012 gained admission, we would aim for 10% or higher. Also, we will measure our success by the overall growth of number of students taking the exam from any given low-income school.
Team Bios

Team Member 1 is part of the 8% of low-income students that will graduate from college by the age of 24. The daughter of immigrant parents with less than a high school education, her life has been changed by programs like Student to Student that are dedicated to promoting disadvantaged student success. She attended a high school labeled a “dropout factory” by Johns Hopkins University and witnessed the injustices of educational inequity firsthand.

She has a range of experience working with low-income students. From finger painting with elementary school students living in public housing to teaching NYC high school students constitutional law, she has dedicated her time and efforts to closing the academic achievement gap. In her current position as a Teach for America Campus Campaign Coordinator, she is responsible for spreading the message about educational inequality and creating and executing a detailed strategic plan aimed at inspiring top students to apply for the corps.

Team Member 2 is an alumnus of the Bronx High School of Science and a product of the New York City Education system. Growing up in New York City, he has seen first-hand the lack of diversity as well its decline as he progressed through high school and college. Because of his experience with New York City’s biased education system, he hopes to provide minority students opportunities that they would otherwise not be able to afford.

As a current research intern at Columbia University Medical Center, he is working on a study concerning child psychiatry and epidemiology. After interviewing families in the South Bronx, he was fascinated with motivation and the academic achievement of minority students. He also has worked with other low-income families as a teaching adjunct in Flushing.

Team Member 3 is an Asian American student from a low-income family who lacked the ability to access educational resources. Having attended a high school where the majority of the students were minorities and the prospect of college acceptance and graduation were dim, he has experienced the pains of being part of an underserved group. Like Team Member 1, Andy has benefited from programs like The Gates Millennium Scholars Program that specifically serves to level the playing field for students from less-affluent backgrounds. This incredible experience has led to his interest in working towards providing equal opportunity in the form of academic tutoring, personal support, and financial assistance to students with statistically lower success rates.

Currently, he is an intern for the national nonprofit program, College For Every Student. Starting his involvement in Florida, he began mentoring and tutoring fellow underserved students at his high school. His role in New York City is to assist in helping students prepare for, gain access to, and succeed in college. This is done through site visits to elementary-high schools, scholarship presentations, and facilitating peer mentoring workshops. Through this work experience, he has gained a broader perspective as to the needs and circumstances of New York City based students.