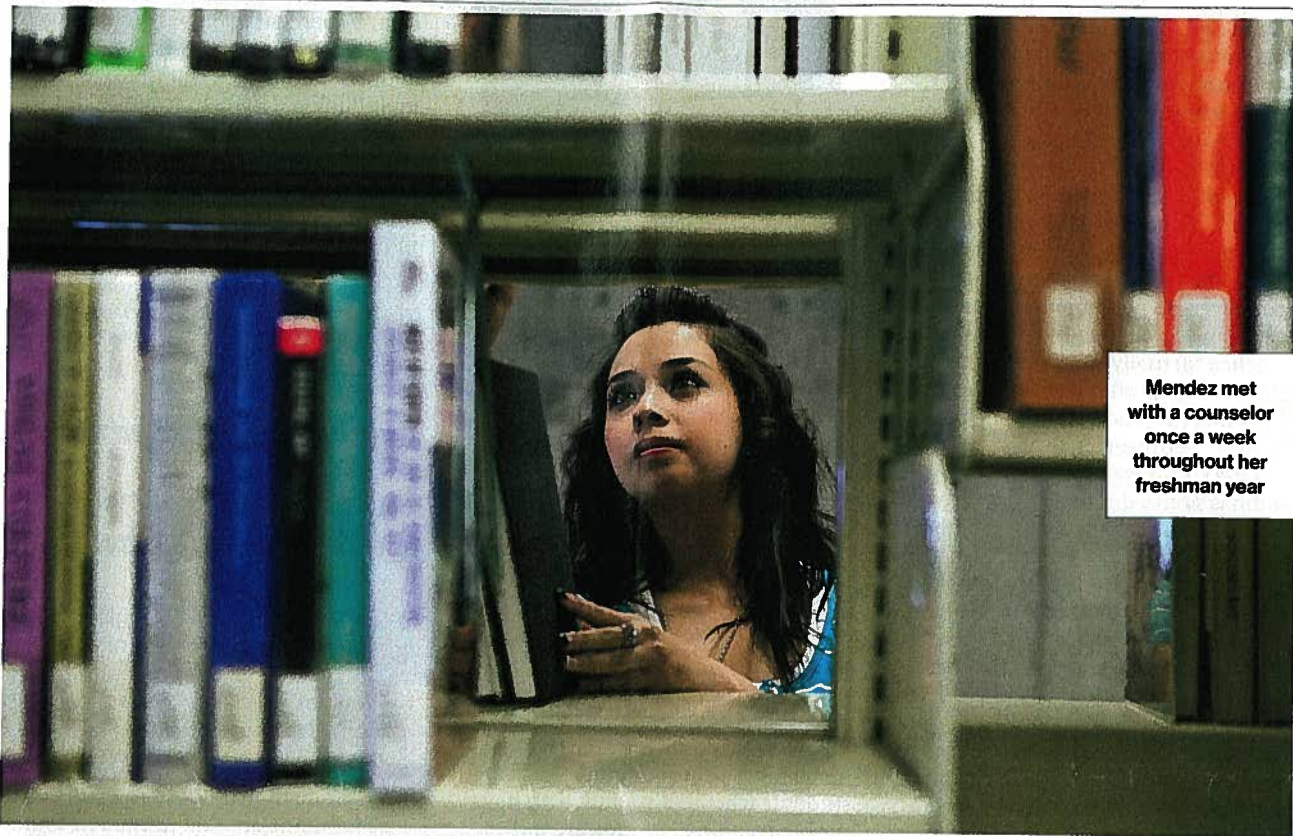


## Focus On Education



Mendez met with a counselor once a week throughout her freshman year

# At College, Coaching Isn't Just for Athletes Anymore

▶ Universities look to executive-style coaches to keep freshmen from dropping out

▶ "It sounds basic, but it is necessary and can have a profound impact"

The odds were stacked against Selene Mendez when she enrolled at California State University's Monterey Bay campus in 2010. She'd moved to the U.S. from Mexico when she was 7 and her father was a migrant farmworker. Her high school guidance counselor seemed to think she'd follow in the footsteps of her older sister and brother, who had dropped out of college in their freshman years. "She told me I wasn't college material," Mendez says. "It got me angry."

Determined to prove the counselor wrong, Mendez participated in a program that helps freshmen stay focused on their studies. Once a week through-

out her first year at Monterey, she spoke with a coach who gave her tips on managing her time as she balanced schoolwork with two part-time jobs and a long commute. "I was excited that there was someone who actually took the time to help me out and make sure I succeed," says Mendez, 19, now a sophomore.

Executive-style coaching is making its way onto campuses across the country as schools struggle to keep students from dropping out. Only 58 percent of full-time freshmen enrolled at four-year institutions in 2004 managed to graduate by 2010, up one percentage point from the year before, according to the

latest available data from the Department of Education.

Coaching has helped Monterey Bay beat those odds, says Provost Kathy Cruz-Urbe. Last year 78 percent of freshmen returned to school as sophomores, up from 65 percent in 2006-07, the year before the school added its coaching program. "If you're the first one in your family to go to college, you may not know how to navigate the university and take advantage of the resources in the best way," Cruz-Urbe says. "Coaches can really work with us to ensure the success of our students."

In much the same way career coaches help executives reflect



## Education

on their job performance and goals, student coaches talk with freshmen about studying, financial challenges, family issues, and long-term planning. Eric Bettinger, an associate professor at Stanford University's School of Education, compared the academic records of more than 13,500 students; half had received coaching and half hadn't. He found that freshmen in the coached group were 15 percent more likely to still be in school 18 to 24 months later. Coaches "actually call the student and aggressively go after them, rather than expecting the students to come to a service," Bettinger says. "The information the coach brings into that conversation is pretty dramatic."

In the past decade a cottage industry of coaching has sprung up because many schools lack the staff to offer such services on their own. The biggest player is **InsideTrack**, a 12-year-old San Francisco company that employs 300 coaches and has worked with more than 350,000 students at 50-plus schools. InsideTrack charges colleges anywhere from \$30 to \$120 a month per student who receives coaching. Some of the company's advice is simple, says InsideTrack President Kai Drekeimer: Visit professors during office hours, get involved in campus activities, and use services most freshmen might not think to take advantage of. "Coaches help students think through and articulate their goals, so they have some sense of direction," Drekeimer says. "It sounds basic, but it is necessary and can have a profound impact."

Many universities are starting to build their own coaching programs, says Luke Iorio, president of the **Institute for Professional Excellence in**



Mendez's high school counselor said she "wasn't college material" because her siblings had dropped out. "It got me angry," she says

**Coaching**, a training company. Iorio says his group is teaching counselors and career advisers to become coaches at four U.S. schools and is negotiating with about a dozen others. "We are seeing more schools move ... to take these coaching services in-house," he says. "Universities already have a significant investment in student counselors and services, so this is a way of adding on to what they are already doing."

Carleton College, a private liberal arts school in Northfield, Minn., hired a coach four years ago after efforts to encourage successful students to coach their peers didn't catch on. About 30 of Carleton's 500 or so freshmen take advantage of the service each year, says Kathy Evertz, director of Carleton's Academic Support Center. "We'll get students who finally admit they have a problem and realize they are not getting the grades they should be getting," Evertz says. "They come to the coach because they just want to get more out of school and out of their college life."

Sundar Kumarasamy, vice president for enrollment management at the University of Dayton, has made coaching services available to the Ohio school's 2,000 freshmen for the past two years. About 400 students signed up this year, and the school pays InsideTrack about \$200,000 annually to work with them, he says. Since hiring the coaches, Dayton's retention rate has gone

from 87 percent to 89 percent, Kumarasamy says. Even a "1 percent increase in the retention rate can translate to multimillion dollars in revenue" for the university, he says. "It makes so much more sense to keep students rather than lose them. It is not only the right thing to do, but it is financially much more viable for the university."

—Alison Damast

*The bottom line* Coaching freshmen reduces undergraduate dropout rates and ultimately saves millions of dollars for colleges.

### Student Loans

## Buried in Debt, and No Degree to Show for It

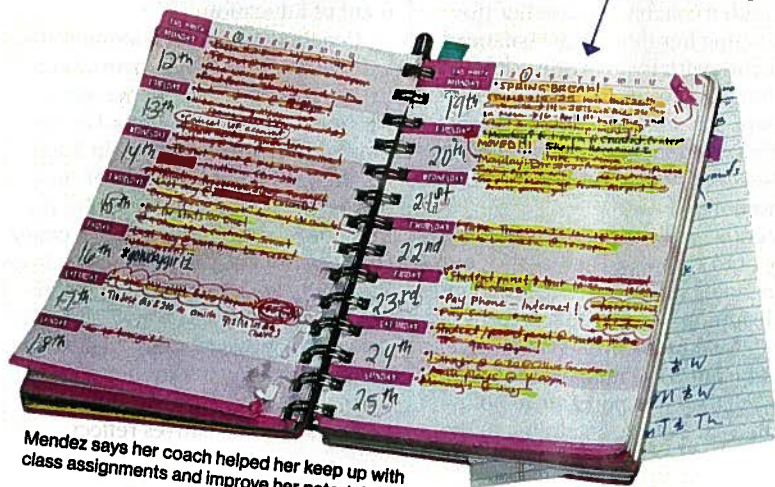
► More dropouts are struggling to repay money borrowed for school

► "You get ... the debt and no real increase in earning power"

Kevin Wanek was one semester away from graduation at Western State College in Gunnison, Colo., when he found himself in a bind. He no longer wanted to be an accountant, the field he was studying, but he owed more than \$50,000 in student loans. Reluctant to take on more debt, he decided to drop out. "I started adding up what I owed," he says, "and it really hit me."

Though he had limited career options as a college dropout, he found an entry-level job at **iTriage**, a mobile-health-care-app maker in Denver, and over the past two years he's become a computer programmer. Now he wants to finish his degree, this time with a focus on computer science. Yet with nearly all his disposable income going toward \$600 monthly student loan payments, the 24-year-old worries he'll never save enough to re-enroll. "It almost feels like the money is going into a black hole," Wanek says. "It's frustrating knowing that you're paying for something you don't have a tangible return on."

With tuition up more than sixfold in the past three decades—to \$32,000-plus for four years at a state university and \$83,000 in a private school—the percentage of people with student loans who quit without a degree is on the rise. Almost 30 percent of borrowers who



Mendez says her coach helped her keep up with class assignments and improve her note-taking