



Learning to STRIVE

Gentry discovers how a Silicon Valley kid turned a good idea into college admissions for hundreds (soon to be thousands) of fellow students.

TEXT BY JESSICA GOLDMAN

PORTRAITS BY JACK HUTCHESON

Michael Carter is smart. As a senior in high school, he applied to 24 colleges—simply because he loved the process—and was admitted to twenty-three of them. But Carter swears there are other students, more qualified than he, who did not attend a four-year college. They didn't even apply.

"Most of the students at my school didn't think they could go to college," Carter says. "We had a school counselor who wanted to help, but she didn't have time for anyone but those who sought it. And the ones who sought help didn't need it." This was the seed of discrepancy from which an idea was born.

According to national data, over 400,000 low-income students qualified to attend four-year colleges, don't. Roughly the same number of students who go to four-year colleges under-match at lesser institutions or receive less aid than they should. "These students don't attend college because no one tells them they can," Carter says, "or how to do it."

school, this is where you should apply and this is how you will do it."

With the success of its first run, Carter decided to commit to the program (now called STRIVE) full-time. And by the end of his sophomore year, Jacob Stiglitz, a friend he met during a summer internship, had convinced Carter to hire him full-time as well. Both young men kept up with their other commitments, college for Carter and another full-time job at QuestBridge for Stiglitz, while fine tuning STRIVE's programming and infrastructure.

"I told Michael I was happy to work at Starbucks until he could raise my salary," Stiglitz says. "I believed if anyone could make this work, he could. STRIVE didn't need a lot of money to run. Just a lot of dedication."

In only three years, the high-tech, high-touch model of STRIVE is creating big waves in educational equality, helping low-income students set their goals and expectations higher. Carter and Stiglitz gathered an impressive Board of Directors and Advisors (including such education all-stars as former Executive Director of Education at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

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The summer before entering his freshman year, Carter began brainstorming. He had received a full merit scholarship to Washington University and realized that he had been given a tremendous gift. "I wanted to give back, and I wanted to start a program with the merit scholarship students in which we would counsel low-income high school students in inner city St. Louis," he explains. "I couldn't think of better people to provide the counseling than freshmen in college who had just gone through the process."

Carter understood the challenge he and his merit scholarship team would face: only one out of every 30 seniors at the participating high school went to college, a standard for most St. Louis schools. But in the program's first year, 24 of the 27 students they worked with were admitted to four-year colleges.

"The data wasn't so much exciting as it was infuriating," Carter says. "We didn't touch their GPA, we didn't touch their ACT scores. All we did was say, based on what you've done in high



Tom Vander Ark, Princeton Review CEO John Katzman, former U.S. Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement Russ Whitehurst, and Co-Founder of Ulu Ventures, Connie Lurie, philanthropist and educator, Founder of the CME Society and the Research Institute for Foster Youth Initiatives at San Jose State University, and former Google Deputy General Counsel Miriam Rivera, to name a few) and

have already established eight college chapters nation-wide.

"It is wonderful to see the full circle of mentorship in STRIVE," Carter says. "The Board and Advisors mentor the STRIVE staff; the STRIVE staff guides the college volunteers; the volunteers counsel the high school students; and the high school students, who are elevating their expectations, inspire us all." ■

STRIVE is continuing to expand with chapters opening in colleges and universities across the country. www.striveforcollege.org



STRIVE Advisory Board Member Connie Lurie, STRIVE COO Jason Stiglitz, STRIVE Founder, President and CEO Michael J. Carter, and STRIVE Advisory Board Member Dr. Rhonda E. Farber.