

SCARLETT FAMILY FOUNDATION

SCHOLARSHIP NEWSLETTER

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The Martha O'Bryan Center Freezing Summer Melt

Kent Miller and the Academic Student Unions

In our [April](#) and [May](#), 2014 editions last year we focused on Summer Melt, discussing what it is, how it occurs, and what can be done about it. Unfortunately, it's not a problem that has gone away. Every year, upcoming freshmen, who've been accepted to college (and fully intend to go) end up not registering...letting their college dreams melt away.

Nashville's [Martha O'Bryan Center](#) is one organization that not only takes Summer Melt seriously, but also attacks it head on.

In a recent phone conversation with Kent Miller, Director of High School and Young Adults, we got an in-depth look at the Martha O'Bryan Center's mission, what exactly it does, how they are addressing this persistent problem.

"We offer a continuum of services, a highway of services, from birth all the way through the life span to help individuals and families out of poverty," says Miller, "specifically, I work with high school students at Maplewood and Stratford high schools, trying to build a college-going culture through what we call our [Academic Student Unions](#)."

Between the two schools, they serve 80-100 students daily and about 900 students in total annually. At the beginning of each year, to get students involved, they launch recruitment efforts that focus on freshmen and seniors. And then, says Miller, "Throughout the year, we invite lots of students out to social events with DJs and cookouts—we really try to create a space where they want to be and want to participate. But unlike other out of school hours programs, there's no expectation about how many days a student has to go or what they have to do." He continues, "We're trying to make a space that inspires them, empowers them, and feels different than the rest of the school, and the best way they hear about us is through word of mouth from their friends."

Engaging students in academic tutoring as well as other extracurricular activities helps build relationships and sets the stage for preventing Summer Melt. According to Miller, "Summer Melt occurs when something changes either in students' mindsets or in their realities that prevents them from going. It refers to the students that are lost between that mid-May graduation date and that mid-August college start date."

For the most part, those who succumb to Summer Melt are first-generation college students, who often come from minority or low-income families. And Miller says that the causes usually fit into three general categories.

First, there is a level of social anxiety among students who are the first in their families to go to college. They often don't really know what a college student "looks" like and can't picture themselves as college students.

With no family member or friend who's had a college experience, it can seem foreign and intimidating. Says Miller, "As they get closer and closer to that day when they will start school, they get nervous, they get scared, and they don't always have a family support system that's familiar with how a post-secondary education campus works."

The second factor is cost. Miller goes on, "College is very expensive, and it's important that throughout the entire process students understand what it's going to cost as a whole, or even what it will be for just one year of college, and usually we are talking about anywhere from 3 to 6 years for a post-secondary degree."

Last, a basic lack of understanding the process can prevent students from even engaging. Miller points out that, "So many of our students think that once they get accepted to college, the process is done...and when you combine that with a little senioritis it's a really dangerous recipe."

Instead of trying to identify at-risk students, the Martha O'Bryan Center treats every student as if they have the potential for Summer Melt. This includes students who been long-time high achievers alongside those who only recently decided to investigate college as an option.

This program is called Senior Case Management, where each senior is matched with a mentor to help along every step of the way. Whether it is helping students complete their college applications, understand their financial aid options, fill out FAFSA, verify income, register for classes, or secure housing, these mentors guide them through the many steps required after that acceptance letter arrives.

Keeping the momentum going in a process like this can be challenging in some cases. Miller says, "A lot of it is done through mail and a lot is done through email, which are two modes of communication that young people don't utilize too much. So it's a little bit more difficult in that regard, making sure they're staying engaged...so it's important that we break it down to every step of the way toward their post-secondary experience, and that they have a really clear map of what they need to do and of what it's going to take to get them there."

To bolster this support system, the Martha O'Bryan Center even uses resources like video to keep potential melters on track. Interviews with former classmates who have already been through the process are shared with seniors who often just need to believe that someone they know had the same questions and concerns but made it through.

This program is an inspiration and it has had an incredibly positive effect on lower income students in Middle-Tennessee. But what about the other kids that are interested in college and don't have a resource like the Martha O'Bryan Center?

There are things we can do as family, friends, acquaintances, or even just friendly neighbors...

What can you do? Remember how nervous you were on your first day of college. Ask questions about what they are excited about or what scares them. Simple questions like "Which dorm are you in?" or "What classes are you taking?" may be enough to start a conversation. Relate their questions and concerns to your own experience, and remember that knowing that someone else has been through it, survived, and succeeded can have a powerful effect on someone who is having doubts.



The Summer Melt Checklist

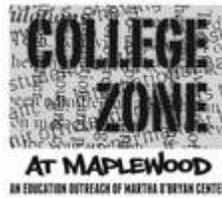
**College Zone and Top Floor have the questions,
make sure your students have the answers!**

Two great programs, part of the [Martha O'Bryan Center's Academic Student Unions](#), are helping prospective freshmen take those important final steps toward getting a degree.

Download these checklists to see who you can help avoid Summer Melt!

[The 4-Year College Checklist](#)

[The 2-Year College Checklist](#)



Stopping 'summer melt' – and getting more kids to college this fall

To help first-generation and low-income high school graduates follow through on the needed steps to get to college, customized text messages over the summer can make a difference, researchers have found.

By Stacy Teicher Khadaroo, Christian Science Monitor

Spring is a time for high school seniors to celebrate college acceptances. But they might be shocked to discover how many ducks they have to get in a row during the summer before they can get their feet wet at college.

For students whose families aren't familiar with the college process and aren't able to nudge them to fill out paperwork and pay bills on time, college dreams can slip away.

Nationally, between 10 and 20 percent of high school graduates who have been accepted into a college and plan to attend end up not starting classes in the fall. In urban districts, it's 20 to 30 percent.

Recommended: Do you have a clue about teenage behavior? Take our quiz!

Researchers call it "summer melt." And they've found a promising, cost-effective way to reverse it: customized text messaging over the summer, paired with counselor support for students who need more than just a series of reminders.

In a trial of text-messaging nudges, the rate of students enrolling this fall bumped up by 10 percent in working-class communities such as Lawrence, Mass., where there's not a lot of college-access help available in the summer. The cost per student: just \$7.

"Six or seven years ago, [summer melt] was really overlooked. As administrators at high school, if we got kids to apply for college and financial aid, and choose where to go ... we felt our work was done and the students would seamlessly transition," says Benjamin Castleman, an education and public policy professor at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, who conducted the summer-melt study with Lindsay Page of the University of Pittsburgh and developed the new text-messaging approach. [{read more}](#)

Resources for Grant and Scholarship Seekers

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