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Metro

# Harvard wants to reach more low-income applicants

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT    OCTOBER 25, 2013

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Harvard University announced a campaign Thursday to encourage more low-income high school students to apply to Harvard and other elite schools, which have been criticized in recent years for not doing enough to recruit and admit academically gifted students of little means.

The Harvard College Connection initiative will feature online outreach — including a website, social media, and videos — along with more traditional methods to highlight information about financial aid options at Harvard and other schools and to help high school students apply.

The sticker price of tuition deters many students and their families from applying because they don't realize what financial aid options are available and that the aid can drastically reduce the cost. Some

students can qualify to attend even the most-selective colleges, including Harvard, for free, officials said.

“Too many of our nation’s outstanding students, particularly those from modest economic backgrounds, fail to attend college or ‘undermatch’ themselves by not considering selective colleges where their chances of graduation would be better,” Harvard’s William R. Fitzsimmons, dean of admissions and financial aid, said in a statement.

Harvard already sends admission officers each year to more than 140 cities and towns to meet with potential students, parents, and high school guidance counselors. But Web pages for admissions and financial aid were run separately and not always user-friendly, Harvard acknowledged.

University officials said the new campaign is based on research that has shown that outreach via text messages and Facebook can help encourage students to apply.

Harvard officials admitted that initiative will benefit the university’s own efforts to attract more low-income students, but they said the primary focus is to increase college graduation rates nationally for low-income students.

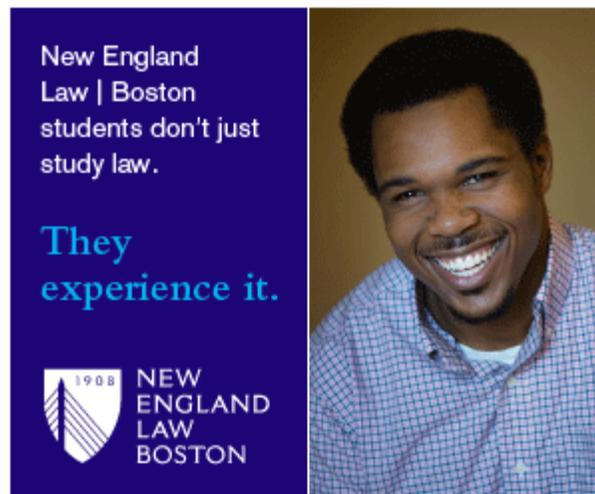
One-third of high-achieving high school seniors from the bottom quarter of America’s income distribution attended one of the country’s 238 most selective colleges in a recent year, compared with 78 percent of those from the top quarter, according to Harvard.

Staff working with the campaign will also urge high school students to consider institutions near their home that have high graduation rates and strong advising support.

Ronald G. Ehrenberg, a professor who heads Cornell University’s Higher Education Research Institute, called it admirable for Harvard to launch the effort because he said studies show students who are better informed about financial aid options are more likely to apply to top schools.

However, he said, better information only solves part of the problem for students who lack financial means.

Wealthy schools like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton can easily afford to take on additional low-income



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*Harvard officials said the primary focus of the effort is to increase college graduation rates nationally for low-income students.*

students. But most colleges “do not have the capacity to take many more low-income students without dramatically ramping up tuition – since that is where their financial-aid dollars primarily come from – or by cutting costs or finding ways to generate new revenue somehow,” he said.

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