College Advising Corps (CAC) was created to address gaps in college access and success especially for first-generation, low-income, and students of color. CAC places recent college graduates in public high schools to assist students with applying to college and financial aid. In 2018-2019, over 700 CAC advisers served in 15 states (College Advising Corps, n.d.).

Purpose & Research Questions
The purpose of this study is to explore how CAC advisers assist high school students with college and financial aid. The RQs are:
1. How do CAC advisers discuss how to pay for college?
2. How do CAC advisers assist students and their families in the financial aid process?

Methods
- We used a single instrumental case study approach to explore the real-life, bounded system
- Our single case includes college advisers from one statewide CAC program, who served in high schools during the 2018-2019 academic year

Participants
- Our sample consisted of 13 CAC advisors. Half were first-generation college students and 8 of the 13 had received a Pell Grant in college
- The majority of our participants were women who identified as Black/African American

Data
- 1-hour interviews were conducted during the CAC in-service training
- Questions focused on the FAFSA, financial aid packages, college expenses, and other financial topics that advisers discussed with students and their families
- CAC training materials were collected

Preliminary Findings
Theme 1: Students’ finances drive the conversation on college choice.
- Sarah: “I don’t like to give much attention to out-of-state [schools] unless they already know kind of how they’re going to finance and how they’re gonna afford it, so I’m big with in-state [schools].”
- Louise: “Well their fourth meeting, now they’re thinking about exactly where they’re wanting to go. So we’re sitting down and calculating costs and seeing how much financial burden will be placed on the family or if there needs to be additional loans taken out or if we need to start thinking about another option.”

Theme 2: CAC advisers act as an information source to connect students to resources.
- Stacey: “We come up with a junior guidebook and a sophomore guidebook that’s like a one stop guide on college… we do fieldtrips… and we put on that college fair that I was talking about.”
- Sarah: “We have a huge scholarship book… so I push that. I push FAFSA. Even though there’s no deadline, the sooner you do it, the better you’re able to prepare for it. [A local scholarship]… Only you have to put your information in, and as long as your EFC isn’t over 8000ish, then you get 5000 a year. So I really push that.”

Theme 3: CAC advisers act as a guide to simplify and explain the financial aid process.
- Aaliyah: “I had one student come to my office and we had to call FAFSA hotline to, she had issues submitting with her dad’s FSA ID… So I basically was like they’re probably not gonna let us fix anything, but I’ll walk you through the phone call…”
- Zoye: “We really have to explain [the] process a lot, like how it works and Pell grant and work study, all of that.”

Theme 4: CAC advisers discuss students’ management of their finances during and after college.
- Jane: “Sometimes we like, instill fear about loans or just like the cost of college and I made them watch this video that we actually watched in training called Broke, Busted, and Disgusted. And it was just about like the increase of debt in America…”
- Chasity: “… We have a discussion about borrowing responsibly. So, for instance, if you need $2,000 for school for your tuition, and you get a $5,000 loan, you may have to take out $2,000… But don’t take out the whole $5,000.”

Policy Implications
- School districts, counselor programs, and advising initiatives need to invest in annual professional development on financial aid
- Institutional financial aid offices need to conduct outreach to local high schools with high numbers of low-income students

Conclusions
- Despite recent attempts to simplify the FAFSA (e.g. DRT, PPY), students continue to have trouble applying to and receiving aid
- Not only do advisers help with the financial aid process, they assist students and their families on planning for their financial futures
- CAC advisers that are knowledgeable about the financial aid process are invaluable for students who may not be able to get help elsewhere

Future Research
- Examine the impact of college advising professionals on postsecondary outcomes (e.g. college applications, FAFSA completion, and enrollment) after adoption of the intervention
- Examine student experiences with financial aid and FAFSA assistance
- Conduct further research on other financial aid and FAFSA assistance programs