

The Story

In 2020, a cousin of Ayan's (co-founder) on the east coast called him two weeks before the college application deadline for help, having not started her application essays or created a profile on the Common Application, which is needed to apply to 80% of colleges nationwide. Ayan helped her, but without starting early, she lost the benefit of multiple revisions, a polished application, and most importantly the time needed to understand which colleges are good fits for her. She's now struggling to stay enrolled and is considering transferring.

Ayan has since volunteered hundreds of hours to help students apply to college and realized that many students are struggling without help. He asked students what a successful future means to them and found that many had no idea.

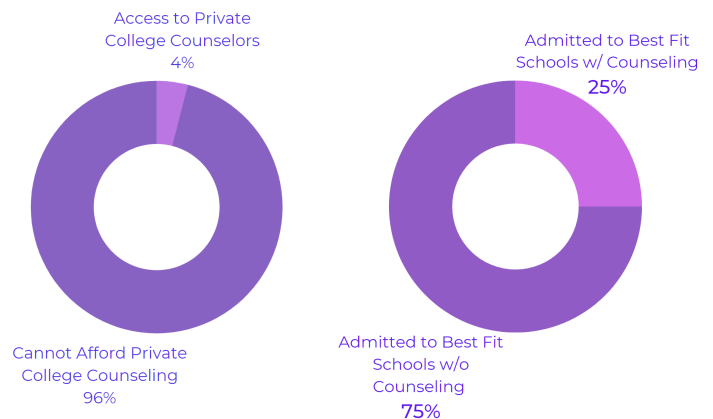
Ayan co-created Cledge, a platform to guide students to find their best college-student fit and increase their chances of getting into those colleges.

The Problem

College admissions is a pay to win game.

Applying to college is perhaps one of the most complicated processes for a high school student's family to navigate. Without a college counselor, it becomes almost impossible to fully understand the scope of tasks and the timeline. Currently, only 4% of families nationwide have access to private college advising. However, a student is 5x more likely to gain admission to their best-fit colleges with a counselor's help.

Students without a college counselor are often left with their high school counseling departments, what they hear from friends, and Google to guide their college search. On average, American students get less than 27 minutes with their high school counselor annually (NACAC), which is not even enough time to file for financial aid. The average American college dropout rate is 40%. The largest reason for dropping out is financial unpreparedness, as well as dislike of the college environment. We hope to help solve these issues for students who use the Cledge platform by guiding them earlier on about the importance of making these decisions and preparing.



Customer Problem Research

There are two ways students apply to college: hiring a college counselor or the DIY approach. We interviewed over 200 students who use college counselors, do not use a college counselor, and college counselors themselves to understand why current solutions do not work and what students would ideally want to see solved on a platform. Through these interviews, we gathered three key insights, with the overall theme being that students and parents alike do not want to search for information; instead, they want it presented to them in an easily digestible format.



Students and families want to feel empowered to make the right decisions, not told.



Students need help creating a college list and increasing their best fit college match



Students need help understanding the college preparation timeline and managing all the steps.



Students/Parents don't want to search - they want guidance

Both the parent who loses sleep over their child's future and the ambitious student who wants to go to a prestigious university need a solution that is personalized, data-driven, and accessible.

The Solution

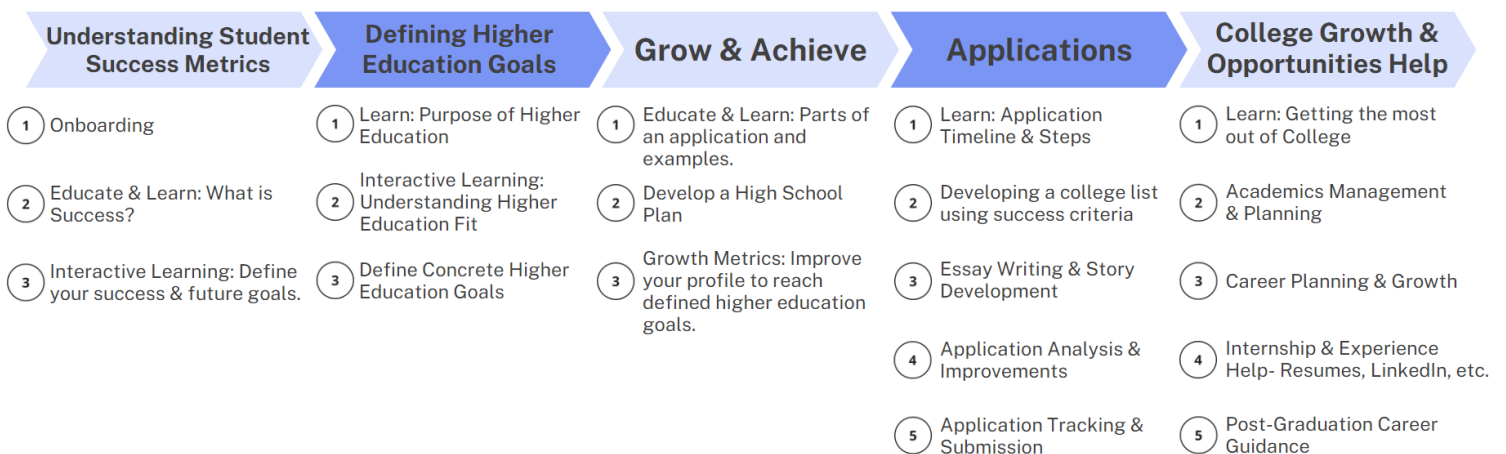
At Cledge, our mission is to bridge the gap between high school and college by creating the first AI powered college counselor.

Cledge is a personalized college advising platform designed to assist students with their higher education aspirations. Our mission is to provide an affordable alternative to traditional college counseling services, bridging the gap between high school and college and focusing on the metrics that matter most for future success.

At the core of the Cledge platform is our AI technology, which analyzes self-reported information from students to provide actionable next steps. We combine this information with public college data to create personalized learning plans for each student, guiding them along their higher education journey.

Our platform is ideal for students and parents who may not have access to a "proper" college counselor or who are looking for a more affordable solution. With Cledge, students can benefit from personalized support that takes into account their unique goals and circumstances, without breaking the bank.

Cledge Customer Journey



Social Impact

Access to Cledge enables students to achieve their full potential by providing personalized support that empowers them to define their own success metrics. In a world where success is often defined by external factors, such as societal expectations or financial pressures, Cledge helps students identify what success means to them and provides guidance on how to achieve it.

By promoting individualized goal-setting and providing tailored support, Cledge helps level the playing field and ensures that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. This is especially important for students who may not have access to traditional college counseling services or who face financial or other barriers to achieving their goals.

In addition to promoting individual success, Cledge also has the potential to benefit society as a whole by empowering students to pursue careers and fields that align with their interests and passions. By helping students define their own success metrics and providing guidance on how to achieve them, Cledge can help create a generation of graduates who are more engaged, fulfilled, and motivated in their chosen fields.

User Personas

The Cledge platform targets two primary audience segments: involved parents who earn between 75k - 300k annually and highly ambitious students seeking admission to prestigious colleges. For parents in the first group, their pain point is wanting their children to attend the best-fit college for them to ensure a successful career. Cledge addresses this pain by providing guidance throughout the high school journey, enabling parents to play an active role in their children's college planning. We recognize that parents are often the ones doing the research, as evidenced by the 1900+ parents in our WhatsApp Q/A group chat.

The second audience segment consists of highly ambitious students with limited disposable income. They look to Cledge for guidance to overcome the challenges of applying to college. By providing comprehensive support throughout the high school journey, Cledge helps these students achieve their goals and secure admission to their preferred colleges. Our platform is designed to be easily accessible and provides the necessary resources to help students navigate the complexities of college applications.

Here are the two personas:



Software Engineer Sam

Sam works at Microsoft and is earning 150k.

He has a daughter who currently has a 3.7 GPA and wants to help her find a college fit

He buys cledge premium and is able to track how his daughter is doing



Ambitious Allie

Allie is a high-achieving student at her school with a dream of going to a prestigious university.

Her parents are not as involved as they did not go to college

In order to accomplish her dreams she uses cledge premium to get personalized guidance for her application

Cledge's Data Pipeline

Cledge collects and uses data to empower families to make better decisions. Here is how:

- Cledge collects user data through onboarding questionnaires and periodic check-ins, which provide insights into students' academic backgrounds, interests, and goals.

- The data is used to deliver personalized Cledge learning pathways based on academic backgrounds and satisfaction after graduation.
- Cledge has collected thousands of different variables of data for colleges nationwide, including average starting salaries of graduates, acceptance rates based on gender, and important admission factors.
- The data has been sourced from government sources, open source data, and FERPA requests to colleges.
- The collected data is utilized by the Cledge AI to provide personalized, data-driven insights to students, including recommendations on which colleges to apply to, which majors to pursue, and which career paths may be a good fit based on the student's interests and skills.
- In the future, the data will be used to help students discover colleges with open seats and find best fit matches.
- Cledge collects college admissions and future job placement data to help the Cledge AI make better suggestions for future students.

Market Analysis

Cledge will be entering the Secondary Education Software Industry which currently has a market cap of \$11.1 billion. By creating value with high schoolers across the country, there is a maximum opportunity of \$4.2 billion, created by all 15.2 million high school students who are using Cledge.

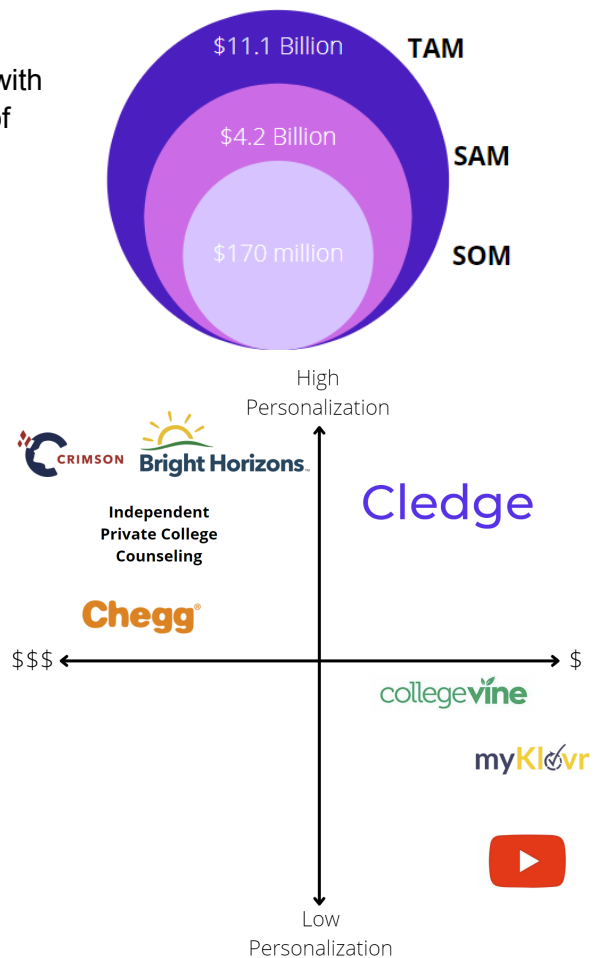
Cledge will be a disruptor in the Educational Software Industry by providing value in the form of centralized and personalized college information for users at an accessible price. According to IBIS world, the education consultants industry has seen just a low-to-moderate level of technological change in the past five years. Cledge is bridging the gap and bringing education consulting to the 21st century. We are looking to capitalize on the existing demand for college consultants and increase demand through an education platform to bring online, automated, college consulting to millions of more students.

Competitor Analysis

Our most direct competitors are myKlovr which is a subscription-based college project management tool and collegevine which is a library of free content coupled with a college search tool and paid advising options. However, neither of them offer personalized college advising at the affordable price.

Competitive Advantage

Cledge will have a first mover advantage in the automated college advising industry because there is nobody in the space who specializes in both AI and college advising. Due to our strategic partnerships with companies such as IBM, Microsoft For Startups, and OpenAI, we have specialization and access to cutting edge AI technologies. As this industry grows, competing products might appear. Cledge is ready to evolve and defend our competitive advantage through several avenues including brand trust and loyalty, providing the most accurate and insightful data given our longer-standing analysis and data library, as well as continued



partnerships with organizations. The focus for Cledge is to provide straight forward insights and actions for students to follow--something other low-cost/free platforms fail to do.

Traction Timeline



Key Traction Milestones:

- Partnerships with Microsoft, IBM, and OpenAI
- Developed a network that can reach 4000+ students on release
- Organically grown WhatsApp community/Waitlist with 1,900+ individuals
- Onboarded first 60+ customers for Cledge AI and 1:1 advising programs
- 6% conversion rate. Out of 3,325 unique website visits, ~200 users signed up for our waitlist (since collecting analytics data)

Go-To-Market Strategy

Developing community trust and data collection via releasing an initial free platform will strategically place cledge in a good position to expand in the PNW and beyond.

Stage 1: Partnering with local college advisors and test prep services for exposure

Initially, we wish to partner with local college advisors and test prep services in the PNW who already have an established clientele. The purpose of this is so that we can get our platform exposure and collect data on students and how they use our software. We will provide value in the form of scale. With our platform, third party services will be able to expand the customers they can service as well as increase the range of content offered due to the uniqueness of our AI tools.

Stage 2: Releasing our platform for free in the PNW

After we have verified the usability of our platform and have gotten an aquadet amount of data for our data flywheel, we will release a free version of the site to users in the PNW. We believe this is a good entry market due to the amount of competitive students and involved parents in the region. These students and parents will be more incentivized to use the platform to assist them in getting into their student-college fit match schools. From this initial market segment, we will develop a community of parents and students from which we will be able to further extract data from and generate hype as students get into their dream colleges. Furthermore, we will be able to develop community trust and awareness.

Stage 3: Expand user base in the PNW, Introduce premium services for paying customers, Upcharge for advising sessions

The third leg of our go to market is releasing a polished product and converting previous customers into paying subscribers. We will be offering all of our technologies, as well as Cledge counselors, to work with students in a hybrid model. By providing both human and AI support, we will be able to effectively allow one counselor to work with 200 students via checkups and engaging activities. In this stage, we additionally hope to utilize data from students to allow colleges to advertise themselves for a specific demographic. Students will also see what colleges are trying to recruit them. Users will be paying for a premium product that will unlock personalized data driven insights and counselor support.

Future Expansion (2024 & Ahead):

- Grow content Library and increase personalization in learning pathways
- Increase & Improve Personalized Insights using increased data ingestion from both college and students.
- Expand to domestic USA
- Expand to International markets: India, China, Pakistan, etc.
- Expand Cledge Services into College to retain customers. Help students write resumes, get first internships, learn financial independence, etc.
- Start licensing B2B to School Districts after gaining necessary legal approvals

Financial Analysis

Financial Summary

After releasing the paid subscription model, Cledge expects to see rapid growth in the B2C model in the following five years- we are projecting to be profitable by the end of 2025. We will use a freemium model to attract new customers as well as word of mouth from satisfied clients.

	2023	2024	2025	2026
Revenue	\$0	240,000	1,152,000	\$8,064,000
Expenses	\$25,082	584,860	1,099,755	7,665,000
Profit	(\$25,082)	(\$344,860)	\$52,245	\$399,000
# of subscribers	5000 free	1000 paid	4800 paid	33,600 paid

Funding

Cledge is looking to secure nearly \$500k in seed funding in order to develop our team, pay for outsourced work/services, and expand our reach across the PNW to secure our market share in the industry. While this number may be ambitious, we are confident that it will be able to provide us with the necessary runway to develop our product within a two year time frame.

Exit Strategy

Cledge will grow with the purpose of merging as an exit plan. We have a personalized business model differentiating us from our competitors in numerous ways. Our goal is to offer an affordable alternative to private college advising and give everyone better chances at top-fit college admissions. We plan on executing our goal even if it requires merging with another company.

Meet the Founders



Ayan Gupta

Ayan is a social entrepreneur who has previously built and led several successful community initiatives which have raised over \$50,000 in funding. He has been named 425 Magazine's 30 Under 30 in 2019, featured in news outlets including CBS News, GeekWire, King5 News, Kiro7, among others, and been a speaker at WE Day Washington. He hopes to continue using the intersection of entrepreneurship and technology to drive change.



Faraz Qureshi

Faraz is currently a sophomore at the UW studying computer science and business. He's been involved with social entrepreneurship since high school where he created AWARE non profit and raised \$25,000 along with peers to fight the stigma against students with special needs. With his passion for technology and business he has led technical efforts in UW labs, conferences with 500+ attendance, and local startups.



Ricky Liao

Ricky is a third year student at the University of Washington studying Computer Science, with a passion for entrepreneurship and emerging technologies. Through his previous internship experience for large companies, he gained valuable experience and skills in software development and project management to inspire his initiatives. His goal is to use his technical skills and entrepreneurial mindset to lead solutions that solve real-world problems and make a positive impact on society.



Aidan Hong

Aidan is a current Sophomore studying Finance and Marketing at the University of Washington Michael G. Foster School of Business. With a passion for problem solving and business solution implementation, Aidan has served as a Strategy Consultant for both the Australian Sports Technology Network and the Washington Environmental Council. As the Marketing Lead for Cledge, he hopes to further expose its AI technology and promote accessibility towards higher education.

Advisors & Mentors



Will Little:
Managing Director at Prota Ventures



Jay Bartot: CEO and Co-founder at Zeitworks
Prev. CTO/Managing Director
@ Madrona Venture Labs