



WHAT I WISH I HAD KNOWN EARLIER: COLLEGE-RELATED ADVICE FROM PARENTS

- Help your child focus on the present by being engaged in current school classes and activities; good things will come from this approach.
- Do not visit a college campus as an underclassman unless you are on vacation in an area you will not likely see again and an interesting school is there. Burnout can result from visiting too early and too often.
- Realize the number of quality colleges is much greater than most BBN parents think and lots of good fits will exist.
- BBN knows what it is doing; it has put in place the necessary resources in college counseling and, when the time is right (winter, junior year), you will hear from them. If you contact them before then, you'll just be counter-productive.
- Our son, a freshman at <COLLEGE,> called the shots throughout high school and the college admissions process. We monitored from a distance and were pleasantly surprised to watch him take ownership and get in early decision. (He had a moment of panic during a February Nor'easter after his December acceptance and said, "Wait. I meant to go to college in California.") Today, he is the happiest of freshmen and proud that it was all his doing. Yes, there were times we said "no way" and times we said "you have to ..." but mostly we tried to help him see the pros and cons of certain choices and let him chart his own course.
- Within general guidelines, there is not a uniform pattern of courses, SAT's, etc., that a student must follow. Each student has different needs, and the college counseling office really does an amazing job of figuring out the right approach for each individual. So don't worry that you're missing something or that someone else is taking a different set of tests, etc. The BB&N college counseling process REALLY does work out.
- You never know how it is going to turn out. The most important thing is to find the right fit for your child, not necessarily the most prestigious school.
- Some anxiety is totally normal and par for the course; unchecked anxiety or rigid expectations only heighten the misery and can ultimately harm your child's self-image.
- While the college process is more stressful than when parents went through it, there are some moments to be savored as well. Visiting colleges junior year and in the summer can be a lot of fun if you and your child have created the itinerary together. If finances are tight, pool resources with another family and have one parent take both kids to see colleges in one region and another parent take both to see a different region. Remember: this has to be about the child, not about the parent's fantasy!
- Figure out how to minimize the focus on college as the endgame for high school while helping your ninth grader understand that good grades – whatever that is for that student -- will keep his or her options open. Freshman grades are 1/3 of the GPA reported to colleges (Senior year grades are reported separately), so parents need to help kids make choices that they won't regret.

- I would say to parents of a 9th grader to help figure out what the child's strengths and weaknesses are, in academics, athletics, music, etc. It is about self-discovery and helping the child find out what he/she enjoys learning and doing. It is also a good time to discover and nurture a true passion the child may have, maybe for an academic subject, a sport, or music and to develop that specific talent or skill.
- I found it important to have an on-going dialogue with my child about what he/she would like to try, improve on, eliminate, etc.
- Hiring an outside college counselor is confusing to the child. Don't do it unless your child has some special need that truly cannot be met by regular college counseling. Teachers are great about helping kids with college essays, but have your child ask a teacher during the summer before Grade 12 if the teacher would help. Teachers can get swamped with requests.
- For college recommendations, it is helpful to remind your student that typically two teachers from junior year write a recommendation, often the English teacher. This is worth thinking about when sophomores pick a junior English course elective: encourage them to pick a teacher who is a good fit for them. Have your student follow the advice of college counseling and sign up teachers for college recommendations at the end of junior year so they aren't disappointed when a teacher has agreed to too many other requests and cannot write one for them.
- Buy the Fiske Guide to Colleges at the end of sophomore year. It is a great resource for students and parents whenever a question about a college comes up – how big? How competitive? What majors are strong?
- **Colleges have changed dramatically from when BB&N parents were in college.** “A rising tide lifts all boats,” and the population surge in college-bound students, along with increased opportunities for first generation college students, has raised the bar. Colleges that parents may have thought of as not that competitive are now filled with a fabulous peer group of very smart kids and are quite difficult to get into. Assume nothing – check the Fiske Guide for the facts.
- Although you may tell your student that finding a college that works best for them is what is really important, your 9th and 10th grader will be watching you carefully, seeing how you react to college news of older students you both know. Don't be judgmental or negative (“Is that the best college that student could get into?”) and don't be overly enthusiastic about an Ivy League acceptance (“His parents must be so pleased!!”). How you react will tell your student a lot about how you really feel about ‘success’ and the college process. Your child is the one who will spend four years at his or her college; let them figure out what appeals to them and be ready to give your thoughtful opinion when asked.