

SPAN CHAT Night College Planning for Gifted Kids March 13, 2012

***Valerie Broughton, Donna Kelly, and Kate Malczewski from College Connectors (CC) (www.collegeconnectors.com) facilitated the event and began with a presentation:**

*Planning is important because of success factors (the majority of students do not graduate in 4 years from the college where they begin their higher education); there are a variety of college choices; conflicting information about college and admissions processes are in the media; there is a wide variety of admissions variables/application criteria; higher education is a financial investment.

*College Knowledge quiz questions:

1. True or False: The most important factor influencing admissions applications are grades and achievement in college preparatory classes. True; CC recommends taking the most challenging courses a school offers.
2. True or False: Often, applicants possessing an unusual ability or skill can ride that special talent all the way to admission. Maybe (but probably false); a student must have extraordinary ability to trump lower grades/lower level of classes taken.
3. True or False: Recommendations from counselors and teachers are very important. True, if such recommendations are required; some schools do not require these recommendations.
4. True or False: Work, volunteer projects and extra-curricular activities can often make an otherwise mediocre application look better. False; key word is "mediocre." Schools are looking at grades/coursework first. If these are in-line with the application pool, then these extras can help.
5. True or False: Admissions test scores are the only important factor used in admissions decisions. False; grades and courses taken are most important. Test scores are important for a student to determine what set of schools would be a good academic fit. If there is a discrepancy between grades and test scores, admissions people will question why.

*A successful college search model starts with the student's interests/personality; moves to college characteristics that fit those criteria; and moves lastly to the actual search for colleges that have those characteristics. Recommendation from CC to start search in MN even if the plan is to go to school far away. Many different types of colleges and universities exist within the state, and visiting the different types of colleges/universities can give a student a "feel" for what type of school might fit them best.

*College myth: Colleges are looking for well-rounded students. Truth: Colleges are looking for POINTY students (think of a star) to build a well-rounded *class*. "Pointy" means passions and leadership roles in particular directions...not every direction.

*By sophomore/junior year in high school, a student should find their special/unique talent(s) and drop off other things. A student will want to communicate that talent to admissions people; this can be done traditionally through an essay but can also be through a website, a YouTube video (especially if the talent is playing an instrument, singing, acting, etc.), etc.

*Key is passionate involvement...showing a history of such involvement, not one thing done during the summer. There is no perfect number of activities in which to be involved; activities do not have to be school-related. Demonstrate follow-through with a passion (volunteering).

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*Test out career interests by job shadowing, interviewing someone in a career interest area, etc. It's ok not to know what you want to do career-wise before college. Studies show that this generation of students will change careers (not jobs) an average of 6 times and that some careers that they will have do not exist right now. When looking at colleges, look for schools that will provide a good foundation/fundamental building blocks for almost any career: public speaking classes, reading, writing, etc.

*College Connectors is offering a free ½-hour consultation to those who attended (and anyone reading this summary) to answer questions and/or to give a brief overview of their services. Their phone number is 612-331-4567.

Question/Answer/Discussion:

Q: How do languages affect the college application process?

A: A select group of colleges require only 2 years of a foreign language; most require a minimum of 3 years. For selective universities, 4-5 years is best. (There are some exceptions for students with learning disabilities.)

Q: Is it better to take 4 years of one language (Spanish, getting 2 years' credit in middle school) and 2 years of another or to stick with the same language?

A: It depends on the reason for picking up the 2nd language; if a student is passionate about learning languages, then switching is ok; if not, best to stick with one.

Q: How do you charge?

A: They offer different services. Full service takes a student through the entire college search process and application process. Partial services would do one or the other (search to find good-fit colleges or just do application process). They also offer an hourly rate for specific issues/concerns. Contact the office directly for costs.

Q: What makes the college search/admissions process different for gifted kids?

A: The kinds of schools at which students look; testing (some elite liberal arts schools don't require test scores; Ivies do). Gifted kids also tend to apply to more schools. It's hard to predict the likelihood of admission to selective schools, as they have very large application pools with students that have similar-looking applications. It can be harder to find a good-match school where a gifted student will be likely to be admitted. (CC doesn't recommend phrases like "safety schools." Any school to which a student applies should be one that they really would like to attend.) CC believes that a student can get a good education anywhere; the education depends on what a student puts into it. Gifted students do tend to be "naturally" pointy kids.

Q: Why do many kids stay close to home in MN?

A: The majority of students everywhere stay close to home; it's not just in MN.

Q: Are PSEO classes a plus or minus on college applications?

A: PSEO has its place. Generally, PSEO credits can be applied only at a public university in MN. Other schools may use PSEO credits to help with student placement in courses but won't "count" the credits toward 4 years of credit needed for graduation. A disadvantage of PSEO is that such classes take a student out of high school; CC believes that high-school students have many opportunities for growth within their schools. There are some students

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who don't feel that they "fit in" in high school and may have interests outside of school; for these students, PSEO can be a good opportunity. NOTE: PSEO registrations often occur after other college students have registered, so desired classes may not be available to PSEO students.

Q: Which is the better choice...AP or PSEO courses?

A: AP courses; they are standardized, and any college/university knows what a student who scores at a certain level on the AP exam knows/can do. AP courses also keep a student in the high school.

Q: For a gifted student who has run out of curriculum at their high school, is it better to take "fun" classes at the high school or PSEO classes?

A: Take classes of interest that are available at the high school and attend PSEO classes in the evening (outside of the regular high-school day).

Q: If a student does 1 year of PSEO and then 1 year of classes as a college student at the school where PSEO classes were taken, is it easier then to transfer all credits (PSEO and college) to another institution?

A: Yes, but there may also be residency requirements at a university that would make it so that a student needed to spend more than 2 years there to graduate.

Q: What are the benefits/drawbacks of a student doing UMTYMP?

A: It depends on the student and their personality. For some students, they thrive in this environment and find a close peer group; for others, they don't find that peer group and don't enjoy the accelerated program.

Q: If a high school student earns a 2-year AA degree through PSEO, will it transfer?

A: Within the state, yes; it might transfer out of state, but the courses in the AA may not fulfill an out-of-state college's individual school requirements for graduation.

Q: Does a student almost always get college credit for taking an AP class?

A: Colleges like to see IB/AP classes on a student's transcript; such classes have standardized curricula and end-of-course tests. Some colleges use AP results more for placement but not credit (this is particularly true for math and science AP courses). Each college has its own specific way of dealing with AP courses.

Q: What types of questions should you ask a student to pinpoint what that student needs in a college?

A: Where has the student been successful in the past (academically)? Break that down...why was the student successful?

Q: How does a student explore passions and be "pointy"?

A: Some students don't find a particular passion. Evidence of exploring different options is then important.

Q: Does a student need 3-5 years of a foreign language even if they plan to go into engineering?

A: Yes.

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Q: When should a student start to plan?

A: Generally, after they take the PSAT (grade 10), as they will have test results with which to compare to different colleges' applicant pools. Gifted kids may want to start sooner, as they are good candidates to become National Merit Scholars (which is based on PSAT scores). These students may want to do some test preparation for the PSAT. Spring of 10th-grade generally is a good time to start planning.

Q: What are good shadowing/experiential things to do? How does a student go about this?

A: What is a student's interest? Look at volunteer opportunities (summer, hospitals for medical, museums for many other interests). Juniors in high school can make calls to people in professions of interest to see about job shadowing or interviewing them about what they do.

Q: Is a gap year a good idea financially?

A: Hard to know. Can be costly for a student not to be going to school, but could save money financial aid-wise to have 2 in school at the same time.

Q: What if a student has their heart set on going to one school and no others?

A: What is it that appeals to the student about that school? There are likely other schools that have similar characteristics, and these schools should be explored. The student may still at the end want just that one school, but the process of looking at other schools is still a good one.