

College Connections Meeting sponsored by Prior Lake/Savage chapter of the MN Council for the Gifted and Talented

January 21, 2020 @ TOMS auditorium

Welcome by Apryl Henry.

Reminder: Coffee Chat at Caribou in PL Lund's on Thursday, January 30, 2020, at 10AM; good time to come and ask questions of SPAN board members as middle school and high school registration is just around the corner.

Presentation by College Connectors (Kate Malczewski and Jenny Buyens)

College Connectors is going on its 20th year; Home office is in Edina MN and they also have offices in WI, IA, CA.

Interesting facts:

- About 40% of students graduate from the same college they enrolled in
- Retention rates (freshman to sophomore): like to see between 70-80 percent as an indication of how happy students are at the school they selected
- Fit of a college to a student's needs is the most important thing
- There are 3500 four-year colleges and universities in the US; this doesn't include the 2-year colleges

Basic background:

Start early and think about the right fit for the student; their needs.

Careful of web sites as resources: some sites are managed by a parent network, student network, college and may be providing biased materials, know you are using trusted sources - school counselors, advisors, university official site, etc.

Financial investment: it is a big investment for many families and one of the first major decisions your kids will make so take a thoughtful approach; start the process as a junior (or earlier).

At private schools you are more likely to graduate in 4 years than in large public schools. Some programs (like engineering and nursing) tend to take 5 years.

Myths vs. Truths

Myths: Standardized test scores are the number one factor colleges consider

Truth: rigorous curriculum and grades (transcript) is one of the most important things a college looks at; are the courses challenging? Is school challenging for you? Students should be looking at finding the right balance between courses that challenge them and topics/interests they are passionate about.

How does the college know if the student is in a HS with a rigorous curriculum? Colleges have high school profiles that provide insight into how rigorous the curriculum is at a specific high school; this is known information to a college admissions office. They want to see the student who challenges themselves because they will be more prepared for college with study skills, time management, etc.

They will look at standardized test scores after curriculum/grades. Schools use standardized tests so they can compare students nationally. More and more schools are becoming test optional. Univ. of Chicago accepts about 6% of applicants but doesn't want to see a standardized test score. You still will need to take an ACT or SAT for most colleges. Some science/technology colleges want to see specific scores from SAT subject tests.

A "good" ACT score is one that reflects the student's abilities. You want scores that match the academic profile of the student.

Myth: The more colleges a student applies to the better chance they have for admission.

Truth: A thoughtful process toward the application process to select schools that fit the student is a better strategy. The more connections as to why a particular school is right for you is what increases your chances of admission.

The common application came out about 20 years ago. It is used for multiple colleges and makes applying to lots of colleges easier.

Acceptance rates:

- UCLA received the most college admission applications this past year with 110,000 applications for 6000 spots
- Applications are going up 10-15% per year for many colleges
- Acceptance rates will go down as the number of applications go up because there is only so much space available; acceptance rates get more play than maybe they need to
- The acceptance rate of a college has nothing to do with the quality of the education
- An individual student's acceptance is also based on the institutional needs of the colleges. You won't know what the institutional needs are, especially for the really selective schools (less than 15% acceptance rates and Ivy League); orchestra analogy
- Universities are crafting a class and consider: grades; diversity: geographic, economic, gender, racial; athletes, fine arts, full pay, international students, special/unique interest, first generation, high school relationships

To help your chances of getting accepted:

- Point out things that make you stand out.
- Look at schools that are outside of schools that are typically applied to by MN students; schools want geographical diversity

- Demonstrated interest in the school; they want to know how serious you are (they want to know that if they accept you, you will come)
- Students typically take between 5 - 7 hours to complete one college application.
- On average, students are applying to 7+ schools. This is time intensive and expensive - be thoughtful about this. They recommend applying to no more than 10 schools (4-7 ideal).
- Some schools are adding video as an option in the application process.
- Presidential scholarships are doing it differently too: adding video applications, pairing up partners for projects, etc.

Myth: Colleges want well rounded students:

Truth: Colleges want a well-rounded class - not a person

Schools are looking for: passion, engagement, leadership, interesting hobbies, engaged direction and/or leadership.

Start out exploring:

What is something new I'd like to try? What brings me joy? What problem would I like to solve? How can I use my summer to recharge and be involved?

In 9th grade there is lots of room to grow and find that passion/interest. In large high schools like PL, there are many varied opportunities to explore a passion/interest. This will hone down in 11th and 12th grade as classes get tougher and commitments tend to grow.

It is recommended that students do things that bring them joy. Like animals: something with humane society, like kids: do something with community education, if an entrepreneurial spirit: start a business with things they are passionate about--dog walking, lawn mowing.

University summer programs will not increase your chance of submission to that university. The programs provided by universities often are expensive and inconvenient for ages that do not have a driver's license.

Students should use summer to recharge, explore intellectual curiosity and engage with their community.

Myth: The more mail you get from a college, the more they want you.

Truth: Colleges are marketing machines; they buy a list with your name on it. If there are schools who send mail and the student is interested in this college, the student should reach out to the school (fill out and send the contact card, see them when they do a college visit at HS). Be authentic in your interaction with colleges.

Don't generally recommend the fast app (contact info and a transcript only) when offered; better to do full application to give the best picture of your student.

Myth: If you haven't heard about a school, it must not be good.

Truth: We tend to know more about colleges in our region than those outside of our region. 'Colleges that change lives' is a book that is a good resource. Look for colleges that specialize in areas of the student's interests, even if they are outside your initial comfort zone geographically.

Rankings: you really need to understand the qualifications they are using; wouldn't use Forbes if you want to be a vet. Colleges have a love/hate relationship with rankings. Rankings are complicated and aren't taking your own student into consideration.

Myth: All colleges give merit scholarships.

Truth: Schools only give merit scholarships when they need to. The more selective the school, the less likely a school is to give merit money. Merit money is given for a special skill/academic.

Most private schools will give discounts for grades and special interest. On average, private schools are discounting 53% nationally. This is not the case for schools that do not need to offer scholarships.

There is also need-based aid given out by: federal, state and the institution can offer financial aid.

Search process:

Start with the student - not the college first

- Intellectual curiosity
- Learning style
- Special interest
- Goals
- Personality
- Values: colleges have values and you can read institutions' mission statements to understand those values
- And if they have special needs, a student should understand what they need to be successful

Then look at the College:

- Value of college
- Method of teaching: adjunct or tenure
- Academic community
- Campus community

- Cost of attendance/ how affordable it is for your family and have a backup; financial fit is very important

Search:

- You have to do a robust research; make sure you are making a conscious choice to select a college that you believe will be right for you.

There is not one perfect college for everyone. Keep an open mind as there are usually many colleges that will fit you.

Transfer students are used to fill spots of students that they lost; this is where retention rates come into play.

Q&A:

PSEO: double-edge sword: if the goal is to graduate as soon as possible or save as much money as possible on college credits then they are an option; MN colleges often accept these credits. It is not a given these will be accepted by the selected college (especially outside MN). PSEO classes pull students away from HS community and the leadership opportunities that present themselves to students in 11/12th grade.

If your student doesn't like HS and it's not a good fit, PSEO can be a good option.

AP: colleges prefer AP courses because they understand this curriculum; it is a national program. Not all colleges may accept all of these.

Honors/Advanced: colleges won't know the rigor of these classes; if you can handle the AP it is better because colleges understand the program and it doesn't have the variety in rigor that honors/advanced classes can have between schools.

MN CAPS: this is different than PSEO; this could look really good on a college application but many colleges still want to see the core curriculum across the HS experience; they recommend 3+ years of a foreign language.

Colleges recognize employment as an activity; they understand that some students need to work to help with family finances.

Colleges are not able to see what other colleges you've applied to. And, they are not allowed to ask.

ADHD/special needs: include it in the 'additional information' section of applications and how you've learned to manage it.

Look for majors that will give you transferable skills: problem solving, communication, etc. Many of the jobs our students will have are not even in existence today.

In-state tuition is only available for public schools. MN has reciprocity with WI, ND and SD.

Average debt, nationally, coming out of college: \$31,000. Take this into consideration and what level of debt the student can handle coming out of college. The higher the starting salary, the more debt they realistically may be able to pay off. You don't want your child saddled with debt that will take decades to pay off.