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Outsourcing College Advising

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.



Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is an educational consultant and certified college admissions advisor. Her goal is to help students and their families understand the admissions process, research college and career options, create a customized college list and submit a strong and cohesive application. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC, and HECA and earned a certification in College Admissions and Career Planning from University of California at Berkeley. Contact her at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com.

It is absolutely not necessary to hire a private advisor. On the other hand, the counseling needed to make timely and informed decisions about the college admissions process can be very helpful under certain circumstances and provide a student with a competitive advantage. Here are some useful guidelines:

As the student to counselor ratio increases, the usefulness of a college advisor also increases. There is a huge difference between a school with a senior class of 168 and three full time college counselors and a school with 550 seniors and one full time administrator who has many responsibilities.

Remember that the road to college should be paved with independence. A student who takes charge of his own college admissions process is likely better prepared to handle the demands of college life. A skilled advisor can help break the process down into smaller, more manageable steps, but the student should be the one to execute each step.

The role of advisor can be filled by a private consultant, school counselor, older sister or brother or caring parent. Whoever provides assistance should be able to remain objective and take the time needed to support, but not control the process.

If a family decides to look into hiring a private advisor, here are some additional guidelines:

Look for an advisor who is not dedicated to "getting a student in," but rather to research and assessments that lead to a list of

Many parents of college-bound students are surprised to find out that they may work with a private advisor outside of the high school setting. This is a relatively new phenomenon and reflects economic developments in California that date back to the 1960s. At that time California public schools ranked nationally among the best in the nation. Since then, as recent surveys indicate, we have fallen to 48th place. This deterioration is attributable to various factors, but many experts point to legislation that affected the financing of public schools as the early catalyst for the decline. A series of rulings in the 1970s by the California Supreme Court declared a property tax-based finance system for public schools unconstitutional. And in 1978 California Proposition 13 was enacted capping property taxes and reducing them an average of 57% state-wide. This resulted in massive and chronic reductions of school district funding.

In the early 1980s families began to feel the effects of these funding cuts. In addition to dramatic reductions in arts and physical education programs, school districts reduced the number of counselors, psychologists, librarians and other resources that provided support for students. Student to counselor ratios increased, leaving fewer hours to do educational planning and counseling, much less college advising. Some families began to hire independent advisors to help guide their students along the path to college.

More than 25 years later there are many college advisors who work in private practice throughout the state, helping families master the complexity of the college admissions process. Now, in our most recent economic downturn, cash-poor state governments have further slashed educational budgets, and many of the nation's public colleges and universities are grappling with deep budget cuts coupled with record numbers of applications. Meanwhile, private colleges are also experiencing a surge in applicants. The phenomenon is so widespread that it has been labeled "flight to quality." The thinking is that in hard economic times the choice to go to college is a good option for many young persons. They can avoid competing in a very difficult job market and acquire skills that will be to their advantage when good times return. Even in a recession, many families believe that a college education is one of the most important lifelong investments.

Does Your Family Need to Hire a College Advisor?

colleges that are good matches for a student's academic, social and community needs. This assessment should take family finances into account.

Advisors should have adequate preparation and experience for counseling.

Certification through a recognized College Advising and Career Planning Program is an important credential.

Active participation in college advisors' professional organizations is a good sign.

A good consultant should not be so expensive that only the affluent members of a community can afford services. Services should be available at several price points for families to choose an affordable "package" or on an hourly basis.

Experienced advisors can provide recent references, including a list of students who have already graduated and are in college.

It is worth repeating that there is no pressing need for a family to hire a private advisor. Every year many students navigate the process themselves and do just fine. Many families require just a few hours of assistance to get on track. Some families may have a student with special needs, like a learning disability or a special talent in sports or the arts that requires additional expertise. Most importantly, as families and as a community, we must seek solutions to halt the continuing erosion of our public system of education, so that our high schools can provide many of these services.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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