
MY COLLEGE ACCESS COUNSELING PHILOSOPHY

I. Objective Statement

As a college counselor helping motivated students find a successful path to college and/or career, my goal is to find a good “fit” for students based on their strengths, interests, aptitudes, motivations, and dreams. I measure my success by how well a student thrives on the path I help them choose and refine.

II. Statement of Philosophy of College Access Counseling

A. Introduction

The process of applying to a bewildering array of colleges can be a uniquely agonizing rite of passage for many. I like to think of it as a rewarding personal challenge rather than a long-term marathon with winners and losers. Choosing college can be made a uniquely positive experience by having the student identify and articulate aspects of college and career to which they are attracted (such as large cities, diverse student body, small class size) as well as those aspects to avoid (a research/STEM school, fraternities, living too close or too far from home, etc). The process of affirmatively making a close match between student interests and college features should be life-altering, thought-provoking, and hugely rewarding. And yes, even fun.

Making important life decisions is not fun at any age. It’s particularly not fun at age 17, when few students feel like they have enough knowledge of themselves or the world to make a decision of that import. But every spring, the dance between student applications and college acceptances continues, albeit with some major procedural changes in the intervening years, both for better and for worse.

I like to make the process of selecting college a memorably positive one. Here’s how we do it.

B. Main Body

The Process: What to Expect

- 1. Introductions.** At our first meeting, I will learn more about you and your aspirations, interests, perseverance, and see how all that is reflected on your transcript. I will ask your parents about their goals and wishes for you, because they want the best for you and they know you probably better than anyone. But I will remind them that you are my client, not your parents. You are the one applying to college.
- 2. Strategies.** I will send you home with a book called *College Match* by Steve Antonoff (2017). It’s full of good questions that are designed to help narrow down the 4,000 or so four-year

colleges in the US to a manageable list of colleges to take a closer look at. At our second meeting, we'll discuss your "must haves" in a college, like a particular sports program, versus the things that would be nice to have (say, near a big city) or definitely do not want (say, colleges with an overtly religious affiliation). There are no right or wrong answers, only better and worse fits for *you*.

3. **Lists.** In our third meeting, I will go over a list of colleges for your consideration based on the information gathered thus far. Some colleges will be ones you have mentioned, some you may have never heard of but might be a uniquely good match for you. We'll generate a list of action items to be able to dig deeper into each one. Those action items may include SAT/ACT prep to increase your score, preparing for college visits and interviews, requesting letters of recommendation, starting a portfolio of high school activities and interests, and anything else that might help show a college why you are a good fit for them and vice versa. I may also have you attend some workshops to build certain skills, such as practice writing essays or learning to advocate for yourself.
4. **Applications.** Here my job is to help you manage deadlines, paperwork, and expectations. We will put a calendar together that accomplishes all these tasks efficiently, which will greatly reduce not only your stress, but also for all of those around you.
5. **Decisions.** You will get into some colleges. You will not get into all that you apply to, but because you have researched each college well before agreeing to apply there, you will have a tough time deciding which of a handful of good opportunities to say yes to. Here I will be able to help prioritize the options, financial aid packages, scholarships, and all the variables that go into making a great decision for *you*.

My Commitments to You

Students: The pennants on the wall you see here include colleges that our students now attend. Each one of these students sat in your chair with the same feelings of terror and inadequacy that nearly all students feel when they are asked to make a life decision as important as college. What many students do not realize the first time they sit in that chair is that there are thousands – again, about four thousand four-year colleges in the US alone – all of which are looking for students that are a good fit for that school, and it is a different fit for each college. So my message to you is, there are many colleges out there – including some you may have never heard of – at which you will not only be happy, but thrive. My job is to help you narrow down the selection from the four thousand or so colleges out there to that select list of colleges that are a good match for *YOU*. This process will be one of you confidently taking control of the application process, and not letting college be something that just happens to you.

Parents: Like you, I am a parent, too. I empathize with your questions and concerns, as I have asked myself all of them at some point. I will do my utmost to address your questions and concerns proactively and thoroughly, and you have my cell phone to reach me at any time with additional questions in between our regularly scheduled meetings. Although your son or daughter is my client, I will keep you fully informed of progress and deadlines so that you can

continue to advocate for your child's best interest. It will be an alarming but ultimately wonderful process to watch your child evolve into a confident, assured human being over the next few months as he or she gets to better appreciate and develop her strengths and capabilities.

Teachers: As you know, your personal knowledge of this student that you document in your letters of recommendation are vital to not only the college application process in general, but also helping colleges understand why this student is a great fit for their college. We also know you are busy with more recommendations and deadlines each year than there is time to do justice to each. Please know I will be working in the background to help this student put together a timely portfolio of information that will help your letter-writing when the time comes. For newer teachers, I also provided a list of suggestions as to what makes a great letter of recommendation.

Counselors: We appreciate how many students you are trying to successfully see through to graduation and we will not be adding to your workload. You can expect to get a list of counselor recommendations this student requests of you in ample time to complete them over the summer, together with a portfolio of their notable achievements in high school for your reference. Thank you.

Admissions Officers: We appreciate you have an ongoing challenging to find the right applicants for your college and ensure the best fit of those that will thrive at your school, and thank you for making yourself available to answer questions geared to finding that perfect fit. For my part, please know I will never recommend an applicant apply to your college unless I believe they are an above-average fit, and conversely, those who do apply have my wholehearted support. I look forward to our exchanges this year.

Siblings: Yes, you, the sisters and brothers of our college applicant. If you have been through this process before, your hard work of getting into college will be an inspiration to your younger sisters and brothers (and no small point of pride to your parents). Take the time to hear their concerns and questions. If by chance you are a younger sibling, watch, listen, and learn from this process the entire family is going through. It will make a big difference when it is your turn to have seen this process close up before.

All: Finally, if you know of teachers or staff who would like me to hold a workshop on how to write effective letters, templates to give students to streamline the information-gathering process, the difference between ACT and SAT, or any other subject of interest to parents, staff, or students, please let me know. I am always happy to do workshops as part of our role as a community-based non-profit. I will let you know of the regular workshops I hold for students.

Conclusion

Despite the inevitable Angst of making major college decisions, there are many ways to make the process of choosing college very positive. They focus on managing paperwork, deadlines, and – most of all – expectations. I look forward to working with all of you on this very collaborative and rewarding process for all.

III. *Statement of Professional Goals*

Educational Goals Achieved and Future Goals

College or University Coursework: I have two masters degrees (in Education and in Public Health) and a Doctorate degree (in Public Health). I will continue to enroll in MOOCs and university courses.

Professional Learning: As a lifelong learner, I will continue to attend conferences and workshops, and visit many colleges each year.

State/National Certification: I am licensed to teach secondary school science in Nevada and Oregon. Neither state offers certification or an exam for college counseling as far as I know. I have no plans for additional state or national certification.

IV. *Personal Action Plan*

In 2011, I founded a school (I-School) in a small community in rural Nevada as a means of providing my sons a better education than the traditional schools could provide. Eight years later, we have evolved into an accredited, mastery-based “school of the future” that offers evidence-based instruction to motivated students across the academic and socioeconomic spectrum. Our students often do not perform well in a traditional school environment, but they thrive in a highly individualized academic environment and pursue unique college and career choices. It has been a rewarding delight, personally and professionally, to leverage the latest in learning science research and help each student find their unique path to success.

My personal action plan is to continue to provide college counseling to our students as well as to the students enrolled in the local public schools.