

Newsletter_Spring 2009

Navigating the Road to College EDUCATIONAL SERIES UPDATE

Dear Students and Parents,

It's really hard to escape these days, but it seems like everyone is either college-obsessed or college-bound stressed. Conversations abound regarding SAT and ACT scores, building a "better student resume", and the increasing competitiveness of the college application process. Whatever the conversation, more and more students and their families are discovering the importance of proper planning. Whether you are a freshman just starting high school or a rising senior with college on the immediate horizon, it's time to take control, become informed, and put a plan in place that's right for *your* future. The first step on this road to better college knowledge is realizing what you have control over and letting go of those things you cannot control.

If you're a freshman, a sophomore, or a junior in high school, you must focus on school work first. According to Associate Dean of Admissions, Weisenburger, at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, "What you do in the classroom will determine the schools you can attend and will most likely want to attend." She adds, "The work you do in high school, the initiatives you take sets you apart, if you take that extra step it will highlight your high school record, which is the first thing all colleges consider." Many times this step requires an honest self-assessment. Students need to work as hard as they can to develop a strong work ethic that allows them to prioritize academic achievement amidst a host of extra-curricular activities, sports, and other commitments.

Did you know? According to the April 6, 2009 issue of Inside Higher Ed, "The average composite score on the ACT dropped slightly this year, to 21.1 from 21.2 on a 36-point scale." Further, "ACT officials noted that, as in past years, there is a direct correlation between completing college preparatory high school courses and test scores. This year, the percentages of students who met what the ACT defined as benchmarks for course preparation were unchanged from last year: 43 percent for math, 53 percent for reading, and 28 percent for science." Overall, this year's results reveal that more than three in four test-takers will likely need remedial help in at least one subject to succeed in college. Although it's important to be well-rounded, colleges do take into account your activities, leadership roles, and community service; the fact remains that your transcript and academic record are the best predictors of how well you will do in college and the most important criteria influencing acceptance. You must remember: schools are investing in you just as you and your parents are investing in them. College administrators want you to succeed and they want to know that you are ready for college level work and that you will eventually graduate. Don't underestimate the importance or the control you have over determining academic success.

I recently attended a Dean's List Academic Awards Induction ceremony. Although the event was well coordinated and inviting, what impressed me most was the address offered by the Dean as he recognized the students. At one point he asked for each of the students who had made the Dean's List for two consecutive semesters to stand. In an auditorium filled with more than one hundred students, parents, faculty, and staff I was stunned to look around and count less than twenty-five students. The Dean applauded these remarkable few and congratulated them on the significance of their achievement. The Dean was quick to note that it takes an incredible amount of commitment and effort to consistently put forth the type of work worthy of such academic recognition. His point was made more profound when he then asked those students recently inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa National Honor Society, the nation's oldest and most rigorous academic society, to stand and be recognized. Four students stood.

I left the ceremony in awe thinking about the decision these students had probably made early on to make the most of their college experience and the discipline required to reach this point. Interestingly, these students weren't obsessed with how their GPA or rank compared to their peers. They had reached a point radically different from their competitive high school days when everyone seemed to be in a race to out-do or out-best one another and when an honor roll was

populated by many. It made me think what those grades truly reflected. Rather, these distinct scholars had discovered that academic achievement was a personal journey and that the rewards were uniquely their own. The reality: college academics require a certain type of rigor, recognition that outstanding merit is conferred only on a few willing to accept the demands of the challenge.

I offer these reflections knowing that the college admissions process has changed radically over the past several years. It is hard to separate the fact that more and more students are applying to schools and as they do, that the competition for acceptance increases accordingly. Add to this, tuition levels are at all time highs and deciphering financial aid has become an art in itself. These days, students and their families need to have open discussions that involve planning of a much different type. Hopefully there is value in sharing this information with students early on especially if it impacts the way in which they choose to approach their high school years differently. Can you imagine the benefit and reward of establishing good study, note-taking, and time management skills now as opposed to waiting until college? Or, even the value of prioritizing learning and education as part of life-long opportunities and possibilities? What are you willing to invest if you knew that college admission personnel are always looking for students who in some way will contribute to their academic community? What's your plan to take control? It's time to put your plan into action.

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Project-Life provides comprehensive educational and college planning dedicated to offering personalized services, helping students achieve their life and learning goals.

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