

College Beat

The College List by Nancy Federspiel

As a college consultant, or as I am now called, an IEC (Independent Educational Consultant), I am frequently asked, “So, what should we be doing at *this* stage of the game?” If this question is being posed by a junior in high school or her parents, the answer contains critical information. The winter and spring time frame of junior year is the time to create “THE LIST”. THE LIST is the linchpin of the entire college planning process and is the area in which families often need professional advice. THE LIST is a relatively short list of colleges and universities that would be a good fit for a particular student. “A good fit” is a loaded term that means so many things. Part of the battle is to determine the essence of who the student is (or is becoming) and then, the even more arduous part of the task is to match the student with the best schools *for her*. This requires a vast knowledge of the colleges out there so that the established criteria can be met. Then, the colleges on the list should be visited and researched and eventually (at least some) applied to. THE LIST brings the overwhelming number of choices to a manageable number of considerations.

Much effort goes into creating a list. For me, the process starts with in-depth questioning of both student and parents to understand critical information about the student: what kind of learner she is, what she enjoys doing, who she likes to be around, how much pressure she will thrive under, what kind of majors/careers appeal to her, how far from home she (and the parents) can stand to be, etc. I give the students an interest inventory to help them identify their interests, preferences, and personal styles. I ask many questions to try to understand what the ideal college environment will look like. Some of the questions are difficult to answer – especially for a 17 year old. However, by forcing a little soul-searching early in the process, we can all be more efficient and even more importantly, confident, when it comes time to make the ultimate college decision in May of senior year.

When I create a list, I break the schools into “Likely”, “Target” and “Reach” categories. Using a student’s transcript, standardized test scores, list of activities, leadership experience, and geographical considerations, I can estimate the chances of acceptance to a particular college. This is essential because we want to make sure that the final “Apply-to” colleges come from all three of the categories. I want to make sure that the student is happy with at least some of the colleges from each segment of the list. The most challenging part is finding “likely” schools that are exciting – they are out there but often less known by the general public. Once we have a couple of likelies established as winners, we know that everybody involved will sleep better at night during those months of waiting for the acceptance letters to arrive.

Indeed, The List becomes the focus of the junior year in high school. It is deserving of the time and effort that it takes to develop. The more effort and expertise put into the early planning stages the more likely you are to “get it right the first time”. If you can save yourself (or your son/daughter) the anguish of having to start the search over again, re-apply, transfer and be the “new-kid” wouldn’t it be worth it? Like most things in life, you get out of something what you put into it. I think putting effort into creating a great college list is well worth the effort.

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