Advice to Parents

Debra Johns, University of Notre Dame

- Remember who is going off to college and please keep this at the forefront as you work with your sons and daughters throughout this process. They need to feel that it's their choices that count.
- Students going through the admissions process are hyper-sensitive and pick up on any cue, positive or negative that an adult sends them. Be vigilant to watch what you say or infer about their strengths, their choices and the college process. They internalize EVERYTHING.
- They need a cheerleader, coach, parent, taxi cab driver, sounding board, personal manager of college related activities, throughout the admissions process through senior graduation. I assume you wouldn't go out and be the striker for the soccer team, or play the clarinet in the orchestra for them or even take the test in history because you know the topic better than your son or daughter. Nor should you edit their essays because you write better than they do, coach and prepare them so much for any type of interview question so that they are unable to be themselves during this activity or able to answer questions that have not been rehearsed or created an activities sheet that is so full of fluff, that the real passion for certain activities is lost and the sheet becomes longer than the Dean of Admissions resume.
- Education, as you know, is a life-long process and attending college is just part of the journey. You want your son or daughter to be in an environment where they maximize their talents, and grow and mature in ways you may not be able to imagine right now. You want them to continue the process of discovering their best self. The highest "ranked" college that your sons and daughters have on their list is not always the best match in order for this to happen and there are multiple places where this could happen well. Please keep this in mind and help them to look for this type of match for their college experience.
- This whole process, from probably before this evening, through going off to college next August is an amazing opportunity for your sons and daughters to self-reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, academic desires, to engage and direct and to manage a big event in their young lives and to take charge of their future. Make sure they learn to own this process, do a lot of the heavy lifting associated with the college admission process for themselves. One of your many hats this year, make sure they do not procrastinate – Yep, be a nag when needed.
- Make sure they remain authentic – we expect them to be 17/18 – not fully formed.
- Take advantage of all the resources that are available to your sons and daughters – fee waivers if necessary, web information for each college and universities, alumni, current students, school counselors, teachers who teach in academic areas that are of interest to the student, parent nights, information sessions in the area, etc. There are also great

websites with general information that is very helpful: The College Board, NACAC, Fairtest, the Education Conservancy.

- Resist attempts to turn the process into a status competition. Develop a healthy, educationally based and family-appropriate approach. Gaming, being too strategic, can create a very unhealthy process for your son or daughter and I've seen over the years, many times these tactics backfire.
- Make clear any limitations on the search early in the conversation. If there are geographic limitations or if there are financial ones, have that conversation early and be consistent with these messages.
- Make sure to not make every conversation going forward with your son or daughter be about college. This process and these conversations get overwhelming for students quickly. If needed, create a time and place where it's safe and appropriate to talk about college search, application and selection. Keep to what you ALL agree on throughout the process. Or conversely, create a space where college cannot be discussed – for example at the dinner table.

- Know that you will have to adapt to the occasional pain of biting your tongue when on campus tours or reading essays where your opinion is not asked for. However, speak up if you find your son or daughter is frozen with fear about his or her future. That prodding typically is healthy and gets them moving.
- Trust Naviance data and your school counselors. If you see an outlier who gained admission during the process, I can guarantee you there is an explanation and it typically isn't "the student was an amazing all around student, big leader even though the grades were soft or the testing is below the mean"
- Make sure your sons and daughters are realistic about their choices. I would encourage you, with good guidance and research, to visit appropriate schools for your son and daughter – make sure "reach" does not mean reach to the point of unattainability. That type of reach can create a very unhealthy college search. Conversely, make sure the colleges that maybe are not at the top of the list are institutions your son and daughter still would attend.
- Be patient with the occasional irrational behavior exhibited from the young person you thought you knew. This too shall pass and it's important for you to maintain perspective when they have lost it.
- Please help your child keep this process in perspective. In this region, students lose their perspective too often. There are over 3500 degree granting institutions out there and most are good matches for the students who ultimately enroll at them. There is not just one perfect school and college choice does not mean that their entire life is determined by this one decision.

- Be wary of neighborhood gossip about the college search process and also be wary of the media. Ask the source – college admissions offices and school counselors about "what you heard from my friend about XYZ college or student or what NBC just highlighted on the Today Show or what you just read in the New York Times Blog about XYZ college and the college admissions process."
- The most important parts of the application will depend on the institution and how much emphasis is given to the following. This should not be where a student begins:
  - Almost all admissions offices will say first and foremost: High School Transcript/Rigor/throughout 4 years
  - Recommendations from Teachers
  - Recommendations from School Counselor
  - Extra-Curricular Activities
  - College Essays
  - Standardized Testing
  - Interview
  - Special Talent/Legacy (will depend on the college)