

DHSPA Meeting – October 25, 2011
Program Summary: Woulda, Coulda, Shoulda

Phyllis Weihs, moderator, introduced the panelists: Lisa Eppley, Susan Lattimer, Antonia Basu, Megan Pryor & Carolyn Kyritz. What follows is a summary of the program:

Q: When & how did your child begin the college admission process?

- If your child is interested in playing sports, he/she can begin by looking into schools where he/she could play. Then go through the list with other criteria, such as wanting to be close to home, or wanting a smaller environment where one would know his/her teachers and thrive.
- Peers can influence when your child wants to start the process, then you can help them with locations. Begin looking over February and April vacations of junior year.
- It is important to wait for the student to be ready. This student drew a radius around Darien because he/she wanted to be within a certain drive time.
- Start looking in the fall of junior year if your child is a spring athlete. Take advantage of Columbus Day and Election Day.
- Sometimes your child just knows, i.e. small school, liberal arts, New England. Then you can go from there.

Q: What tips can you offer to help keep a student organized during the college application process?

- It is important to make it their process.
- Because it is one aspect of the process that you can help with, you can organize a bin with files; use the time together to find out more about how your child sees him/herself in college. In the bin, also put a binder with all the standard information: SAT scores, ACT scores, social security #, unofficial transcript and a resume (if there is one). Encourage your child to keep track of activities beginning in freshman year.
- Have a central file for information required by all applications. Create an email account for all college correspondence; link it to the parent's email account.
- As a parent, you can do all the organizing without it becoming about you because it is all "back office" work. You can be an administrative assistant and add value that way.
- When leaving a college campus, have your student write down (or discuss and you write down) all the pros and cons.
- With your email account, set up a sub file for each college where you can move correspondence.
- Keep a page of passwords and usernames.
- Keep a list of first impressions of colleges.
- Keep a checklist of deadlines for each college. Include the name of the admissions rep for Darien.
- Don't use darienps.org as an email address because it will disappear after you graduate.
- Keep a central account with College Board so they don't get test scores confused.

Q: Did your child take the SAT or the ACT? When would you recommend taking the SAT Subject Tests?

- Took the SAT in January, March and May. Took the SAT Subject tests immediately following the relevant class. Took the ACT in April.
- Took an SAT prep class and took the SAT in March and May, but was really not satisfied. Recommend that you take the SAT and the ACT early enough without any expectation that you will send the scores but use them to assess your results to determine which test is a better for your student. Then prep for that test, and retake is as often as desired.
- Took the SAT in March and May. Wish they had taken it in January so they would have had those test scores for the February break college visits. Many schools don't require SAT Subject tests but if you are going to take them, take them immediately following the relevant class. Didn't take the ACT.
- Took the SAT in January, March and the ACT in April.
- Different kids took different tests. Boys took SATs twice and the ACTs once and then stopped. All had prior prep. Be mindful of taking subject tests or the SAT in May when kids may be void of energy having studied so hard for the AP tests.

Q: What preparation did your child use for standardized testing? Did you use other college prep services?

- Carnegie Pollak SAT Prep. College prep companies have a tremendous resource of tutors, counselors. Strongly recommend doing the essay over the summer and get an outside person to read the essay, can be a neighbor, friend, especially if they have some experience in English.
- Princeton Review on line was an excellent resource. It was great at helping them figure out how to take the test.
- Used a private tutor at first and then moved to a class. Had a paid person read the essay.
- No ACT prep, just bought the big book. Attended Carnegie Pollak. Had family friend who is a college counselor and read the essay.
- Recommend that you choose whatever fits into your schedule the best.

Q: What resources did you use from DHS to help you with the process? How did you use the Guidance Department?

- Guidance counselor didn't really know the child which is why the junior packet information is critical. It is completed by the parent and the student and essentially the guidance department will use this information in writing their letters of recommendation. Guidance counselor did not provide a list of schools.
- Student didn't have a rapport with his/her counselor. It was a little like having a stranger write a recommendation for your child.
- Advice: don't put anything in the junior packet which will reflect negatively on your child. (Agreed and confirmed by another parent).
- Used Guidance to help the student select a challenging course load which would also be manageable.
- With one child, guidance helped them narrow down a list of potential schools, subsequent children did not use their guidance counselors for school selection.
- Child did know her counselor pretty well and they used Guidance on the administrative side.

Q: Do you have any experience with Financial Aid that you would like to share?

- No financial aid experience.

Q: Can any of you please share information on the athletic recruitment process?

- Important that students not go to a school just for the sport. You have to want to be at that school if you were to stop playing sports.
- If your child finds some schools they like, find out when their summer sport camps are because coaches look at those kids during camp.
- Daughter did not specifically want to play a varsity sport but then decided she might, so she broke down her list of schools into ones that she could compete at. When she visited those schools, she emailed the coach ahead of time. Subsequently, she kept the coaches informed as to how her season was going. Ended up applying ED and had the coach pre-approve her application with the Admissions Office.

Q: How many of your children went ED?

- Three out of the 5 families represented went ED.
- You need to know where you really want to go.
- It is a huge relief for students to find out in December. Takes a lot of pressure off the student.
- Be aware that if you apply regular decision, you will find that out on about April 1st and will need to make a decision May 1st so you won't have a lot of time to go back and visit schools. Encourage your child to give some thought –over the winter months – as to how he/she will make a decision between these schools and how he/she will handle a 'waitlist' situation.

Q: What was the toughest issue you and your child faced?

- Received a lot of acceptances (which is a good problem) and had a hard time deciding which school to attend.
- Finishing the college essay.
- Ditto. Set a time each week when you talk about colleges, what is due, what needs to be done. Print all the supplements so that you can see if there is some overlap.
- Set mutually agreeable deadlines with your child.
- When parent said pick 10 schools to start with, the student had a hard time coming up with 10.

Q: What is one thing you would do differently with the process?

- Nothing. I let it be their process, their decision and they all ended up where they were meant to be.
- Be supportive, supportive, supportive. Don't pressure them. Reassure your child when all the athletes start getting in ED in mid-December that sports are their talent, everyone has a talent.
- Be realistic about your expectations and your child's expectations.
- Make it a partnership. Be the one who asks the tough questions.
- Don't let it become about you. This is the first of many decisions you don't get to make. If you cross the line, apologize and step back.
- Get more of the essays done before school starts. Senior year is fun and they aren't going to want to be writing essays. The student's best supplements were done before September.

Q: How many colleges did your child apply to?

- Of three children, they all applied to schools which would have been safeties.
- 8 total: 3 reaches, 3 targets, 2 safeties
- 6 total: 2 reaches, 3 targets, 1 safety

- 8 total: 2 reaches, 4 targets, 3 safeties
- 11 total: 6 reaches, 3 targets, 2 safeties
- 11 total: 3 reaches, 5 targets, 3 safeties
- Keep in mind that if you decide not to go to a college, let them know asap as it could be someone else's favorite school and they might be sitting on the waitlist.

Q: Do you have any tips about visiting college campuses?

- Visit colleges in session. If you have been to one information session, you have pretty much heard them all. If you only have 2 hours to spend, take the tour (you get a lot of the information from that) and spend an hour in the cafeteria.
- Don't be too concerned if you don't "jive" with your tour guide.

Q: Can you share information on scheduling interviews at colleges?

- If the student is really interested in the school, then yes, schedule an interview. If they are not, don't add that stress to the visit.
- Interviews in general are on a downward trend. Some schools simply do not do them, others make regional interviews available.
- Don't allow your first college interview to be at the school which is your first choice. Get a practice interview in.
- Ask a friend to do a 'mock' interview.
- If doing an interview, see if you know of a recent DHS grad who attends the school. He or she might be able to help you with your expectations.
- Some smaller schools have small info sessions which can become like an interview. Best to be prepared.

Q: Can you speak a little about Letters of Recommendation?

- Some teachers have a maximum number of students they will write for, be sure to line yours up early.
- Some teacher make the students prepare an activity sheet or write a short essay.
- Get a teacher who knows your child well.
- Can't hurt to get recommendations that span two disciplines.

Phyllis thanked the panelist for sharing their wisdom with us.