

Zen and the Art of



The college admissions process is an exciting and revealing experience which gives students a chance to look at who they are, what they value, and what they might want to do with their lives. It is the time when students can develop greater self-awareness and confidence as they advance through this process and prepare for the transition to the next exciting phase in their lives. At the same time, it can also be a complicated, demanding, and time consuming process which can cause stress and anxiety, if not approached in a measured and calm manner. As described by the psychologist Michael Thompson in an essay titled "College Admission as a Failed Rite of Passage", college admissions "can make normal people act nutty, and nutty people act quite crazy." As college admissions will continue to be competitive over the next several years with the increased number of students applying in the U.K., Canada, and the U.S., it is important to understand the role of the student, parent, and counselor and to develop an approach and awareness to make the university application process enlightening and rewarding.

Parents are often concerned with when and how college preparation begins at school and if they are already behind in the process. Enrolling students at ISP, even as soon as the Early Years Program, is already a beginning in the process. Our students, as IB learners, are already striving to be inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective – all characteristics that selective universities seek in students. The IB curriculum is a pre-university program that has already put students on a path for college preparation. Even in the PYP and MYP, intellectual inquiry and critical thinking are encouraged and students are supported in pursuing extracurricular activities as well as volunteering for community service. Universities world-wide recognize the rigors and value of the IB program as evidenced by the higher rate of acceptance for IB diploma students in comparison to other academic programs.

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The Student as the Center of the Application Universe

Students need to realize that it is important for the future that they are in control of the application process which will lead them to a good decision about life after ISP. How do you take control of the process and when does it start? You have already begun building the structure of your education by selecting courses in your IB curriculum which challenge and interest you; in addition, you have continued activities in which you have an interest or passion, such as music, art, film, and sports. The college process formally begins in Grade 11 as you start to evaluate and assess yourself, understand what you are looking for in a college, research schools, organize your application information, attend

college visits at ISP, and go to visit colleges. Throughout the college selection process the emphasis is on the student - you, an individual looking for a special college or university that fits you. After all, it is you who will be attending school and the most important factor in college success is that the student feels it is a right choice once there and becomes actively engaged in her/his university education. Therefore, the student is the focus and should be in charge – not your parents, not the counselor; you have the final word on what is best for you. With this important decision comes

independence, self-fulfillment and great responsibility – the responsibility of being well organized, keeping records of your college search, knowing and meeting deadlines for any required tests, as well as college deadlines, and the responsibility of requesting teacher recommendations (if required), meeting with the college counselor, filling out applications, and writing a personal statement. Although this responsibility may seem overwhelming, you should remember that the college selection process also involves a team – a team of teachers, the counselor, and your family who are there to support and guide you. Selecting a university can be an enriching process for you as well as being an important step towards maturity and personal development.

College Applications



By Diane Hopkinson, College Counselor

The Role of Parents/Family

Families are instrumental in helping students seize control of their lives and take the initiative in developing skills that are important for their future. So how and when do parents start preparing their children for higher education? As Bill Mayher states in *The College Admissions Mystique*, parents play an important role in nurturing their children to internalize "concepts such as mindfulness, integrity, respect, curiosity, self-direction, flexibility, and resilience which are important for a lifetime and not just immediate college admissions." He further lists "A Parent's Starter Kit: A Dozen Things Parents can do Early, Very Early" several of which include 1. Read to your children, 2. Turn the TV off, 3. Volunteer together somewhere, such as a homeless shelter, 4. Resist shopping as a vocational/ recreational activity, 5. Find ways to relate to the place where you live, 6. Talk about goals; discuss building an education as if it were a piece of architecture going together brick by brick rather than a monolith that just appears at the end of school.

In the college admissions process, parents may find themselves more stressed and anxious than their children. Their dreams and ambitions for their children along with the ending of one phase of their child's life and the beginning of a new one all contribute to a very emotional and challenging time. However, it can also be a very collaborative effort as well as a rewarding and memorable one. Family/parents can help their children by

empowering them to take the initiative and control in the college process, by helping them to get organized, discussing their options, understanding and planning for the financial commitment, listening to their opinions, and supporting their choices.

The Role of the College Counselor

The primary role of the college counselor is to guide students and families through the college search process which formally begins in Grade 11. Specifically, the counselor helps students get started on their college research, develop college lists, complete applications, and make final decisions. The counselor also plans college related events and presentations, hosts college admission officers, and prepares important documents for students. During Grades 11 and 12, the counselor can significantly help students by counseling students and parents in realistically assessing the chances at various universities and then in advocating for the students' acceptance at universities that are a good match. Throughout the counseling process the focus is on the student, learning about her interests, strengths, and experiences, advising on choices, and advocating on the student's behalf in letters of recommendation, visits to colleges, in telephone calls and emails to college admissions officers. The success of the ISP college counseling program can be measured by the high rate of placement success in schools that are a good match for our students (a list of university acceptances is included in this issue).

Conclusion

Finally, applying to university is a complex process that presents intellectual, emotional, and organizational challenges. Students and families should see it as an important learning experience in itself as well as the next step of a new learning and life adventure.

Please note: In order to help make the college application process more efficient and to improve communication with students, parents, teachers, and counselors, beginning in the Fall of 2008, ISP will use Naviance Family Connection, a program which provides information on universities, college visits, student questionnaires, recommendation letters, and SAT/ACT preparation. In addition, the ISP website provides important counseling information.

