Riley Baker Educational Consulting

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September 2015

10th and 11th grade students—Register & prepare for New PSAT

Seniors – Finalize college list, work on applications & essays, review transcript for accuracy, request recommendation letters from teachers and counselors, meet with visiting college reps

12th – ACT and ACT plus Writing

October 2015

10th and 11th grade students—Review test materials & take New PSAT

3rd — SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests (register by 9/3 — late registration 9/22)

24th — ACT and ACT plus Writing (register by 9/18 — late registration 10/2)

Attend area college fairs and meetings

Meet with college reps visiting high school

Seniors - Continue work on college applications; complete Early Decision/Early Action applications

Complete CSS Profile if required by colleges

What Makes a College "Good"?

How can you know when a college is "good"? In assembling your final college list, look beyond the rankings to the characteristics that make each college right for you. What really determines the quality of a school is not how hard it is to get into but what that college does for its students.

One factor to look at is the retention rate. Are students returning after freshman year and do they finish their degrees? Students are more likely to stay and thrive at a college where they are actively engaged in learning and feel part of a community that supports their intellectual, social and emotional development.

A college that emphasizes teaching rather than research attracts professors who enjoy mentoring undergraduates. It's a good sign when a school's mission statement emphasizes a student-centered approach. Universities may tout their Nobel Prize winning professors, but that doesn't mean much if undergraduates don't have opportunities to study with them. Current students are a great source of information about professors, and you can ask them about their experiences when you visit a campus.

Advising is another important area where some colleges excel. Students who receive ongoing support as they explore majors and careers make better decisions. Advising doesn't get much attention in the college search process, but it becomes very important once you're in college. Ask if each student has an assigned advisor or whether students need to go to advising centers and see whomever is available. Also, how often do students meet with their advisors each semester, and are they required to discuss their course selections before registering for classes? Good advising helps students make smart curriculum choices and enables them to graduate in four years. For students who are planning to go on to law, medical or graduate school, try to meet the advisors who help students with these applications and ask how many students have recently applied and been accepted into these programs.

Starting college is a major life transition, and a strong first year experience is another indicator of quality in a college. While most colleges have a formal orientation program, a comprehensive first year experience that continues beyond the first weeks of school is desirable. These programs often provide peer mentors as well as seminars with professors who serve as academic advisors during freshman year.

Academic learning has more impact when paired with experiential learning. Colleges that have internships and service learning built into the curriculum provide a rich education that connects what you learn in class to the world. Students develop marketable skills that look great on resumes, and these experiences also enhance graduate and professional school applications. While many college websites mention internships, it's helpful to know where students have done internships and whether they get support from a designated internship advisor or need to find internships on their own.

Some colleges require students to complete a senior capstone project before graduating, and that is an excellent way to synthesize what you've learned in your major, get research experience that prepares you for graduate school and connect your major with potential careers.

Tour guides rarely take families inside a college's career center. But knowing that a school has a strong career services office that provides career exploration, resume and interview preparation, alumni mentor programs and on-campus recruiting, is just as important as seeing a well-equipped campus fitness facility.

Looking for these indicators of quality results in a more satisfying and productive college experience, so populate your list with "good" colleges.

Majoring in Construction Management

Ever wondered how skyscrapers get built? While architects and engineers may create the designs and blueprints, in most cases construction managers are the people who actually insure that construction projects get built on time and on budget. From start to finish, these managers plan, coordinate and supervise all of the details involved in building anything from an office complex to a bridge.

As construction processes become more complex and technical, employers are increasingly hiring managers who have four year degrees in construction management. Over 100 colleges and universities now offer accredited bachelor's programs in construction science and related fields in order to meet the increased demand for construction managers. Job prospects for students with a B.S. in Construction Management degrees are strong. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, demand for construction managers is expected to grow much faster than the average over the next five years. The median salary for all construction managers in 2012 was just over $83,000 a year, with salaries at larger firms reaching $140,000/year or more.

What do construction managers do? Some work closely with architects and developers to plan and design new projects, while others specialize in the budgeting and financing of these projects. Other managers work in field offices at construction sites overseeing the myriad of details that go into erecting a new building. Still other construction managers focus on maintaining and retrofitting existing buildings and facilities. Many construction managers are entrepreneurs, running their own construction contracting firms.

Students majoring in construction science take classes in project management, architectural design, construction methods, building codes, and contract administration. They also take courses in physics, materials science, information technology and business and finance. Nearly all construction management programs incorporate hands-on experiences as part of the program. These can range from working on construction projects for class assignments to internships at construction firms.

Some universities offer specializations within the construction management major. For example, at Arizona State University's Del E. Webb School of Construction, students can choose specialized concentrations in commercial building construction, residential construction, roads and highway construction and the concrete industry, depending on their career interests and goals. At other schools, students may take additional courses in business, entrepreneurship and real estate to further their career options.

Students considering earning a B.S. in construction science need strong analytical and science skills. They should enjoy combining theoretical learning with practical hands-on learning. Since construction managers often supervise other people, public speaking, communication, and leadership skills are also a plus.

Most recent graduates will start their careers as assistant construction managers, working under the supervision of an experienced construction manager. Some universities report that nearly all of their construction management graduates have jobs lined up before graduation. In addition to a bachelor's degree, some construction manager students may opt to continue on to Master's degrees in construction management, increasing their career opportunities even further.

Want to know more? The American Council for Construction Education has a list of accredited universities with B.S. in Construction Management programs on its website, http://www.acce-hq.org.

Careers for Construction Management Majors

- **Field Engineer** - Provides technical engineering information to meet engineering standards.
- **Assistant Estimator** - Assists in gathering, calculating and compiling cost data for use in bid proposal estimates.
- **Assistant Superintendent** - Assists in supervising craft employees.
- **Cost Engineering** - Collects cost data needed to monitor project budgets and estimates.
- **Buyer** - Purchases expendable construction materials, supplies, parts.
- **Schedule Engineer** - Collects data required to monitor project schedules.
- **Quality Control Engineer** - Oversees a variety of quality control engineering and inspection work.
- **Labor Relations Assistant** - Provides administrative and technical research support to corporate and/or project relations personnel.
- **Contract Administrator** - Coordinates, administers and supervises on-site contract (or sub-contract) work for a particular project.

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Financial Matters: The Monetary Value of a College Degree

Everyone knows that college is expensive, but what is that degree really worth in today's dollars? According to a study by the U.S. Census Bureau, educational levels had more effect on earnings over a 40-year span in the workforce than any other factor. According to 2014 data, the average salary associated with different educational levels was:

No High School Diploma: $25,376

High School Diploma: $34,736

Associate's Degree: $41,184

Bachelor's Degree: $57,252

Master's Degree: $68,952

Doctoral Degree: $82,732

Professional Degree: $85,228

Besides money, however, college degrees also open doors to opportunities that are closed for those without higher education. The absence of a degree may limit how far you can rise in a company. Individuals with only a high school diploma often find themselves trapped in less stimulating careers. Various studies have determined that college graduates are more likely to live longer and be healthier. College graduates appear to have fewer incidences of unemployment, and can qualify for a greater variety of jobs. So when considering if you should continue your education, think about the cost of college as an investment in your future.

Tips for Writing the "Why This College" Essay

Why do you want to attend our college? Many colleges ask applicants to write an essay answering a variation of this question. It may be tempting to jot off a quick response, but doing so is a mistake. These essays deserve your careful thought and attention.

Admissions committees don't want to waste acceptances on applicants who aren't likely to attend. So, they turn to these essays to sort out which applicants have thought through their reasons for applying and are most likely to attend and which ones are just tossing in an extra application to a college they know little about.

These essays are also an opportunity to let admissions learn more about your interests, goals and how you'll contribute to campus. In other words, these questions are not just about why a particular college is a match for you, but also a chance to explain why you are a match for the college.

Here are five tips to help you write effective "Why this college?" types of essays:

Start with you. Begin by thinking about what you're looking for in a college experience, and your reasons for seeking a college education. You may find it helpful to create a list of 3-5 characteristics that you hope to find in your future college.

Carefully read the essay question. Some colleges provide clues about what they want you to focus on in your essay. For example, Tufts University asks, "*Which aspects of Tufts curriculum or undergraduate experience prompts your application?*" By putting the word curriculum first, Tufts is signaling that they are most interested in hearing about your *educational* reasons for choosing Tufts. So, before you begin writing your essay, make sure you understand what the question is asking.

Keep it personal. Remember, this is a chance to show admissions why the college and you are a match made in heaven. There's a big difference between saying, "I like University XYZ because it has a strong science program" and saying, "I'm very interested in animal behavior and hope to have a career as an animal researcher, so when I discovered that undergraduates can assist with research in XYZ's Primate Research Center, XYZ became a top choice for me."

Don't tell admissions the obvious. The admissions committee already knows their college is highly ranked, has a beautiful campus, or is located in an exciting city. Your essay needs to get *beyond* the obvious reasons people apply to this college. Again, keep it personal and your essay will stand out.

Be specific. The devil is in the details. Generic statements about the college are not as convincing as specifics that show you've done your homework. Don't just say, "I was impressed with your library when I visited." Instead, take a moment to look up the name of the library and then explain exactly what it was that impressed you about it (beyond, of course, the coffee bar in the lobby.).

Here's the litmus test to know if your essay is specific enough: Try changing the name of the college in the essay. If you can drop in the name of a *different* college and the essay still makes perfect sense, it's a sign that you've written too generic an essay. Dig deeper and get more specific.

Finally, if you find yourself struggling with explaining why this school is a unique match for you, it may be time to sit down and consider whether this college or university is truly a good match. If, after additional research and thought, you still can't explain why you want to attend this particular college, you might want to think twice about applying.

The Myth of the Well-Rounded Student

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A persistent myth in college admissions states that "colleges are looking for well-rounded students". And students, striving to be admitted to their dream colleges, happily join numerous clubs and activities in an attempt to appear "well-rounded". But this is a myth; the truth is that admissions committees try to build a well-rounded *class.* Such a class is made up of students with a variety of interests –

jocks, artists, scientists, newspaper writers, computer nerds, politicians.

It's best to choose your high school activities by following your interests, not with an eye to impressing an admissions officer. Some students find their interests early – music, or sports or writing may be early passions that you can further develop during high school. For others, the first two years of high school are a time to explore a number of activities – join several clubs, write for the newspaper, try team sports, do anything that catches your interest but still allows you to have time for your primary job – getting a strong education.

Reduce the number of activities as you progress through high school, concentrating on those few which really interest you. The goal here is to gradually take on more positions of responsibility and leadership. Extracurricular activities should allow you to sharpen your organizational skills and to improve your people-to-people skills. In choosing activities, go for depth rather than breadth. And keep in mind that unless you're the star player of your state-ranked sports team, extracurricular activities will not make up for mediocre grades and test scores. So follow your passion, while keeping balance in your life.

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