

Boston April'04

Recently returned from my semi-annual IECA (Independent Educational Consultants Association) Conference in Boston, I am in the process of digesting all the valuable insights I gleaned while visiting a number of colleges and attending a series of seminars on college issues and trends.

NextStep

Helpful Links

www.CollegeBoard.com
www.ACT.org
www.CommonApp.org
www.CampusTours.com
www.FastWeb.com
www.WinScholarships.com

Without a doubt, the bar for admission to many fine colleges keeps rising. Visits to schools such as Curry College, Stonehill, Wheaton, Babson, Northeastern, Emerson and The Boston Museum School of Fine Arts confirmed that reality; but visits also confirmed each of these schools has a distinct “personality” with unique program offerings and campus communities that provide an opportune match for the right student. As I met with Deans of Admissions, toured campuses with selected student guides, discovered exciting facilities and talked to encountered students, I found myself saying, “Yes, I have the perfect student for you”, a different student each time.

The escalating admissions statistics were sometimes startling, but an emerging concept gave me encouragement: *shaping a class*. As a result of the Supreme Court decision in 2003, testing the University of Michigan’s process for creating diversity in its student body, many colleges have adopted a more holistic approach to admissions. Increasingly, admissions offices are reaching beyond statistics to evaluate the whole student to shape a class of diverse individuals. They are not only seeking academic strength, but also special interests, talents, commitment to public service and unique characteristics that can be communicated through the personal résumé and the personal essays. They are also looking for students who demonstrate interest in their college.

There is no better city than Boston in which to study and explore. So many fine schools, so much cultural activity, a wealth of history. But then I get excited by each place the IECA meetings carry me. In the Fall, it was Arizona; next Fall it will be New Orleans; and in the Spring of '05 it will be Denver. Generally, as I tour each college campus, I am ready to re-enroll. Each has something to offer. These visits in different pockets of the USA, coupled with the conference seminars that bring me together with my peers and leaders in education, facilitate my ability to stay current with the college world. They also reinforce that there are outstanding colleges in every corner of our country and that I am able to help students discover and choose carefully among them.

Congratulations



Another year, another chance to see students take the next step. And oh the places they go (Thank you , Dr. Seuss): Cal Tech; Northwestern; U Penn; Columbia; Providence College; Florida State; Lynn University; College of Charleston; U of Richmond; McGill; UVA; Tulane; U of New Haven; U of Miami; Emory – by way of example. A variety that suits a variety of students and permits some very good matches.

Congratulations for a job well done!

I look forward to tracking your progress! It is always hard to believe when I receive calls that it is time for law school, medical school, social service, vet school, business school, physical therapy, journalism. It is great to discover the wonderful study abroad programs you have participated in, from Australia to China to Europe. And it is satisfying to see a student discover a special interest in working with the deaf or children with special needs. So keep in touch, and do let me know if I can be of any help along your promising way.

It is That Time Again



It is time for a new class of rising seniors, a new group to pick up the gauntlet of choosing a college. It is also the time for parents and students to separate their personal goals and aspirations, to recognize there may be differences.

It is the time when I meet with new parents and hear, “I want John or Amy to have every opportunity... opportunities I never had...opportunities I did have...” It is a time when parents often confront that what they want might not be what their child wants or needs or can attain. It is also a time when all discover that maybe a student will reach for a desired school, and maybe make it, or maybe not.

It is a time when parent and student may discover that deserving students do not always gain admission to a school of their dreams, even though another seemingly less deserving student does. And it may be a time when it helps to acknowledge, as Jay Matthews of the *Washington Post* reminds us, “Very few of our heroes went to Princeton.” He points out that Colin Powell went to City College; Warren Buffet to U of Nebraska; Steve Jobs to Reed; Oprah Winfrey to Tennessee State; Bill Cosby to Temple; and Steven Spielberg was rejected by UCLA and USC, so he made films anyway, only to recently earn his degree at Cal State Long Beach.

It is a time when I can be of the greatest help by offering an appropriate array of colleges to select from and a dispassionate assessment of realistic possibilities. Hopefully, all will find that there is not just one school, but several that would provide a good match. It is always my goal to see parents and students come through this challenging year, each having a sense of satisfaction that the school of choice is a good choice.

Visit



Visit, visit, visit wherever possible. No amount of reading, browsing on the internet, second-hand information can replace your own close and up-front discovery of a college under consideration. Often a visit will produce a visceral reaction: this is the school for me... this is not for me... or it is a possibility because of a certain program, a great pulse, the people encountered. While you will choose schools with your head, you must listen to your intuitions. There is more than one fine college to offer you an education, but where do you want to live, as well as learn, for the next four years?

Call ahead to set up visits. When calling admissions, make arrangements for a campus tour and information session. Request a personal interview if the college offers it. Ask about a local area interview if a campus interview isn't offered. Request an appointment with a professor if you're interested in a particular subject or with a coach if you want to play a sport. Sit in on a class if time allows and eat in one of the dining halls. Go to a sporting event. Arrange an overnight if available (usually not until senior year).

Early visits might include a sampling of schools: city and rural; big and small; divergent in geography and climate. Keep a record of each visit, capturing your reactions and observations (perhaps on a tape recorder) about the facilities, the students, the academics, the housing, the food, the social scene, career and intern resources. React to the locale, the size and the climate. Take a camera; pictures will help you to remember what you saw and think you will remember.

And while you are at it, have an honest conversation with yourself about the environment in which you learn and live best. Do you like to participate in class discussion? Then, would you thrive in small classes? Or would you rather be in large classes listening to lectures? Do you function best under pressure or in a laid-back atmosphere? How important is diversity in the student population? Do you seek a social life that grows out of campus activities? Does Greek life seem to be a plus? Or do you think you would need the city scene to round out your college experience?

Do prepare for your visits. Be informed! Be aware of the courses of study that interest you the most. BUT don't be alarmed if you don't know what you want to study, yet. Learn as much as possible about each school from recommended guide books and web sites and from people who can share personal experience.

And have fun kicking the tires.

A Travel Note



Boston College has notified counselors that students visiting Boston area colleges in July should avoid scheduling visits during the Democratic National Convention, July 26-29. Major highways and arteries will be closed down each day at 4 pm, and traffic will be snarled. It is impossible to get a hotel room throughout Greater Boston.

On the other hand, if you must be in Boston at that time, check to see what each college is doing to accommodate campus visitors.