

IECA⁺
INSIGHTS

THE JOURNAL OF THE INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATION

Winter 2022

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ACHIEVING A HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE



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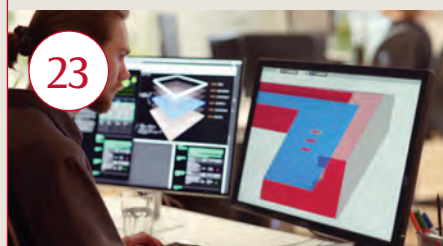
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IECA⁺ INSIGHTS

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President's Letter

Why Mentoring Matters

mentor (noun): a trusted counselor or guide

As a newly minted independent educational consultant (IEC) in 2008, I remember scouring the websites of IECA members trying to see just “how” they were presenting themselves and their services. I had so many questions about things like types of services to offer, how to market my new business, and where to even begin with visiting schools and colleges. In addition, I was living abroad in a big new city and had no idea how I could possibly grow a business when the only person I knew was the doorman at my apartment building. He, unfortunately, had no children so even that lead was a dead end.

Fast forward to my first IECA Conference as a full-fledged IEC: San Francisco, April 2009. I remember looking through the list of sessions and feeling a bit overwhelmed by all of the options. During the pre-conference member dinner—which in those days was a much smaller gathering—I sat with some veteran IECs who provided me with invaluable advice about navigating the conference. This was my first experience with the organic mentoring that I’ve come to value from my colleagues in IECA.

Over the next few years, I began to connect informally with other members also living outside of the US. We had a shared experience of working with international students and the mentorship I received from people like Rebecca Grappo and Sandy Furth helped me navigate many of the complexities of a cross-cultural practice. In 2012, I received a message from Judge Mason, then coordinator of the IECA Mentoring Program (now called Mentor Match), asking me to become an “official” **mentor** myself. There was a new IECA member in Colombia who had requested a **mentor** also living in Latin America. That request led to a wonderful two-way **mentoring** relationship that turned into a friendship with my IECA colleague Jennie Kent.

I share these stories because it feels like now more than ever our colleagues need one another to traverse the many challenges and potentially transformational pivots in our work in a post-pandemic world. Having **mentors** to support other IECA members is a hallmark of our community, and one that has personally impacted me in much of the work I have done over the past 14 years.



Kristina Dooley

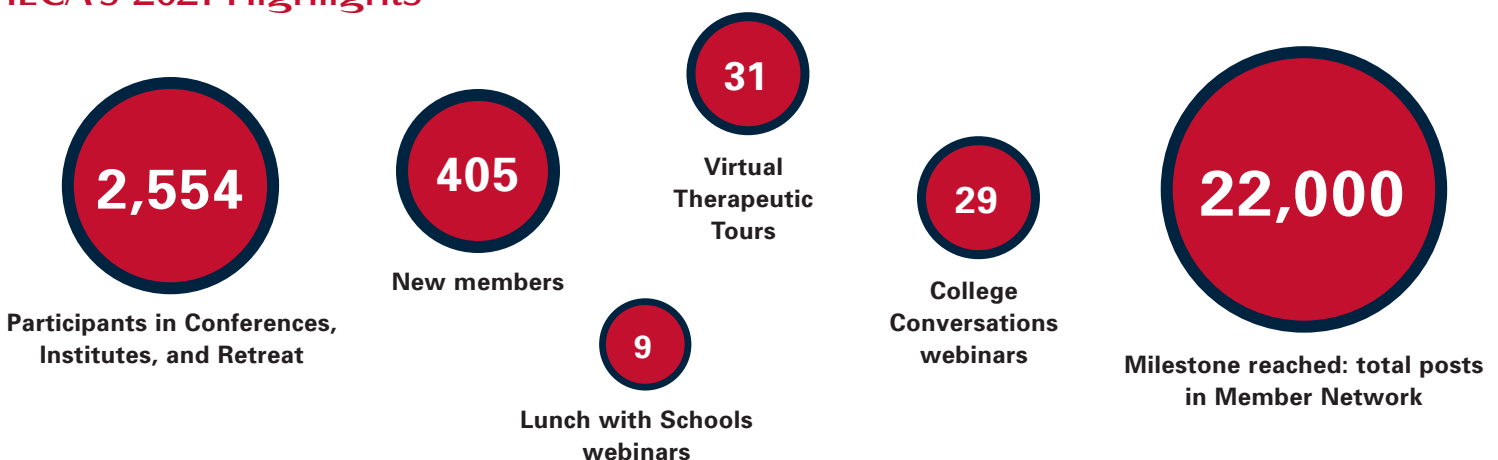
According to the Association for Talent Development, more than 70 percent of Fortune 500 companies have formal **mentoring** programs. The value of **mentoring** programs crosses all industries, ages, and periods of professional development. Whether you are someone new to this profession and seeking advice on growing your practice, or a seasoned IEC focused on your exit strategy or sale of your business, there is likely an IECA member who could **mentor** you through these stages. More importantly, the value that lies in these **mentoring** relationships is multi-directional, with rewards for both the mentee and the **mentor**.

As our Association grows, so does the number of members seeking support and **mentorship**. We all have skills or areas of knowledge that could benefit another member. In fact, the **Mentor Match** application actually has more

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In Focus

IECA's 2021 Highlights



Calendar

For the most up-to-date calendar of events and more details, visit the home page of the IECA Member Network: network.iecaonline.com

MARCH	02 Monthly MBA Roundtable	09 Gateway to Graduate School Consulting	10 NJ Regional Group Meeting Black IECs Affinity Group Meeting	16 European Regional Group Meeting Monthly Medical School Roundtable
	17 GA Regional Group Meeting	18 Professional Members Virtual Roundtable	23 LD/ND Virtual Roundtable	25 Associate & Student Members Virtual Roundtable
	29 Gap Year Discovery Roundtable	30 Global Gathering Open Forum	31 NJ Regional Group Meeting	
APRIL	06 Monthly MBA Roundtable	07 Black IECs Affinity Group Meeting	13 Gateway to Graduate School Consulting	14 Bimonthly New Member Welcome
	15 Professional Members Virtual Roundtable	20 European Regional Group Meeting Monthly Medical School Roundtable	21 GA Regional Group Meeting	22 Associate & Student Members Virtual Roundtable
	27 Global Gathering Open Forum			
MAY	05 Black IECs Affinity Group Meeting	11 Gateway to Graduate School Consulting	16 IECA 2022 Spring Conference	17 IECA 2022 Spring Conference
	18 IECA 2022 Spring Conference	19 GA Regional Group Meeting	25 Global Gathering Open Forum	27 Associate & Student Members Virtual Roundtable

Save the Date: IECA Spring Conference May 16-18, 2022

The IECA 2022 Spring Conference will be held in person in Philadelphia, PA, May 16-18 with post-conference campus tours and workshops on Thursday, May 19 and Friday, May 20. Registration will open in February. Don't miss this opportunity to reconnect with your colleagues in the independent educational consultant community! Visit our website for the most current information link.iecaonline.com/upcoming-conference



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Are You Working to Live or Living to Work? Achieving a Healthy Work-Life Balance

By Charlie O'Hearn, Founder and Chairman of the Board of Summit Educational Group

According to a recent Gartner study, just over 10 percent of the workforce is “largely satisfied” at work and nearly half are “largely dissatisfied.” Those are sobering statistics when we consider that many of us spend more than half of our waking hours working. There are many reasons for the low satisfaction rates, but one is most definitely a lack of “work-life balance.” Work often takes precedence over everything else in our lives, weakening one, two, or all three pillars of a happy, human life—mind, body, spirit. If we're not careful, we can put our own happiness, our relationships, and our physical health at risk.

In today's world, achieving a healthy work-life balance can be challenging, even for those of us in the education field who have jobs that generally bring high degrees of satisfaction. Many of us own and run our education businesses, and whether you are both the Chief Cook and Bottle Washer, or you have a staff, the weight of the world on your shoulders can be an all-too-common feeling. Moreover, you are constantly working hard to serve and satisfy a demanding clientele as they work through a stressful admissions process. But as

challenging as it might be to give our personal lives the proper care and attention, it's worth making that effort. Life is too valuable and too short to do otherwise. Creating a harmonious work-life balance will not only help you to become a fuller, healthier, happier human, but it will likely lead to greater job satisfaction and, perhaps unexpectedly, more professional success.

Many different forces and mindsets can conspire to throw us off balance.

- Your business is growing, and your responsibilities and overall workload are increasing.
- Your identity is wrapped up in the business, and you can't let go.
- You feel like your work will suffer if you take a break or even if you stop thinking about it.
- You give your clients, staff, and others 24/7 access to you. You feel the need to get back to everyone immediately.
- Every issue seems like a fire that needs to be extinguished right now.

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Charlie O'Hearn
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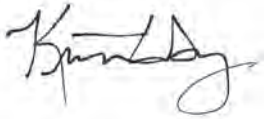
President's Letter, from page 4

than 20 different areas of expertise you can indicate fall within your wheelhouse! I can speak from my own experience of **mentoring** many IECs since that first request in 2012 that it is incredibly rewarding to help another member in this way. The time commitment is minimal as a **mentor** but the lasting connections make this experience worthwhile in every way.

Alternatively, if you are a newer IEC, or simply someone in need of guidance on anything from business practices to expanding your knowledge base in a specialty designation area, I encourage you to request an IECA **mentor**. My hope is that **mentoring** becomes cyclical in our Association and that relationships grow and reproduce to a point where members feel supported and want to join our corps of **mentors**.


I do hope you'll consider 2022 the year when you step up to support your IECA colleagues through **mentorship**. For more information on becoming or requesting a **mentor**, be sure to visit the **Mentor Match** section on the IECA Member Network: network.iecaonline.com/mentormatch. Thank you in advance for supporting one another through this valuable experience!


Be well,




Kristina Dooley, MA, CEP
IECA President

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And here are just a few signs that you're off kilter.

- You're always tired.
- You're constantly stressed.
- You bring your work home, physically, mentally, and/or emotionally.
- You don't exercise.
- You've forgotten how to enjoy yourself.
- You're not taking days off.

I've spent 33 years building a business, and I've had my share of struggles finding out how to fit all the pieces of my life into a 24-hour day. (It's impossible, by the way!) There is no perfect in this equation, but here are a few tips that might put you on a better path.

Spend time with those you care about and those who genuinely care about you.

Yes, your students and their families may really like you, but they won't care about you, love you, and appreciate you the way your loved ones do. Take the time to spend unfettered, mindful time with those close to you. Schedule dates with your spouse, partner, kids, or close friends. Get them in the calendar and protect those dates so nothing else can intrude upon those relationships.

Take the time to spend unfettered, mindful time with those close to you.

Create boundaries.

Yes, we're helping families through what can be an emotional process, but that doesn't mean you have to respond immediately to the Friday 9:30 p.m. text from the anxious mom or dad. You can still deliver professional, caring expertise without asking "how high" when the family asks you to jump. Communicate early in the relationship your process, expectations, availability, and response time. Consider spelling out these items in an engagement letter that sets the parameters and structure for the relationship.

Prioritize your health—mental, physical, and emotional.

Without our health, not much else is possible, so shouldn't this be our main concern? If you're feeling unhappy or depressed, consider therapy or at least talk to someone you trust. If you're not exercising, start small. Something is better than nothing. Instead of trying to do an hour of running a day, three days a week, start by scheduling a 15-minute walk around lunchtime. Those small steps can turn into habits that can grow. Above all else, though, whatever steps you take toward improving your overall health, put the activities in your calendar, and treat them as sacred.


Dedicate time for yourself. Unplug each day.

Prior to the pandemic, I would often eat lunch in my car. Strange, maybe, but it was a conscious, daily unplugging for me. Nobody

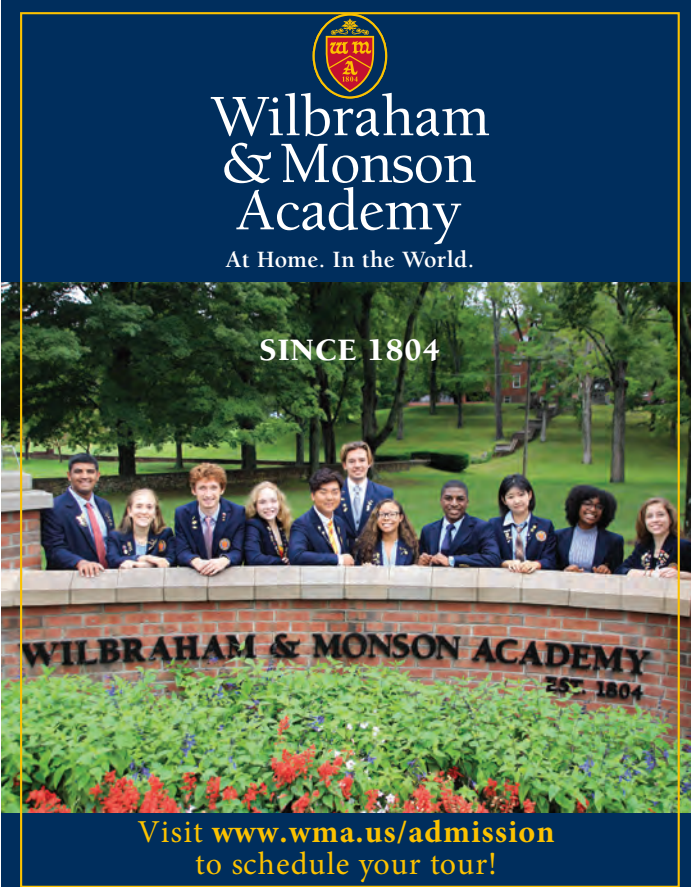
asking me questions, no email, no phone calls—just the quiet solitude of my car. Sometimes, I'd meditate afterward, or, if I was tired, I might lean the seat back and take a 15-minute nap. It was a time to relieve stress and recharge. We're not robots, but even robots need to recharge! Whether it's meditation, reading, or napping, unplug from the world for at least a few minutes every day to de-stress and recharge.

Work to live. Schedule vacation.


I'm certainly guilty of going long periods of time without taking vacation. Or, when I did take vacation, I was often working for some or even most of that time, depriving myself, my wife, and my kids of this precious time together. While the daily unplugging is maybe analogous to a partial recharge of your phone, a more substantial break is more like a complete reset and recharge. You need that! The start small idea can help here as well. If you're having a hard time scheduling a full vacation, plan a one-day "staycation" during which you completely unplug from the office and do something for yourself—a hike, a spa day, a warm bath with a glass of chardonnay...the world is yours.

Work-life balance will mean different things to different people, depending on your life circumstances. But no matter your life stage, letting your work consume you is not healthy. Nourishing your physical, mental, and emotional well-being is essential to being a healthy, happy human being. This life is yours. I encourage you to examine it, cherish it, and make the most out of it. 

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Advice For Working with Under-Resourced Students from Someone Who's Been There

By Hilary Lehn, MEd, IECA (Canada)

It is no secret that the cost of higher education in the United States is fast outpacing the population's ability to pay. As a result, independent educational consultants (IECs) are already or will soon be working with increasing numbers of students with need, and many of those who would be considered "under resourced."

Who are they?

Finding a fit between our students and their postsecondary direction and options is at the heart of our shared philosophy. So, depth of understanding of the kids we serve is of critical importance if we want to identify a "good" or "best" fit beyond just a superficial level. Still, sometimes, we find common characteristics within student subgroups, based on where they are from, what kinds of schools they attend, or even the types of activities in which they are involved (like athletes, musicians, and student leaders). Having fit well into the under-resourced category myself, and having worked with more than a few of these kids in my time in admissions and college counseling, these are some of the common characteristics of this population that I see and that merit extra consideration and exploration when working with them.

Common challenges and special strengths

First, their challenges: these kids can often be operating with high anxiety, a fear of the unknown and unfamiliar, and an aversion to risk. This is especially true when it comes to the overwhelming ticket price of a formal education beyond high school, and concern about its practicality or perception of return on the investment. Sometimes, they feel a sense of guilt for wanting something more than what their family—parents and/or siblings—have had, and for the idea of leaving them behind. There can be a lack of support from parents, peers, their school—and sometimes even active discouragement—due to a lack of knowledge or experience they have to draw upon, themselves, or due to their own negative past experiences.

At the same time, these kids often are mentally tough. They have learned to be resilient by necessity, and to get by with less, and to expect less. They are persistent, and they have often learned that they have to work hard for material, opportunity, and achievement. And most often they are self-reliant and tend to expect that they need to figure things out for themselves, versus asking for help.

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Understand where they are coming from

So, when this student crosses your path, be aware that they may be particularly unfamiliar with your role as an IEC and what you can offer, though they often need your help the most. It is really important to first consider how they came your way in the first place and where they are coming from, and what their specific challenges and needs are. And this level of understanding must be reached before you even ask the first question about what they want to do with their lives or what type of college they are seeking. Some key topics to address:

1. How have they come to you, and what is their sense of how you might help them? Are they able to frame what they want and need?
2. Learn about their family and friends—what are their circumstances, roles, and levels and sources of personal, emotional, and financial support? Are they on their own, or is there a person/people out there in the wings who could form a supportive circle for them?
3. What is the degree of support coming from the school—its systems in place and its staffing and experience, especially for support of under-resourced kids?
4. Do they allow themselves to dream? What do they imagine for their life ahead? What do they fear, hope for, and value?
5. What level of knowledge do they have about how to access an education? Do they have a sense of possible pathways and options, including different kinds of degrees, training, certifications, or experiences?

Educate them about their options

And then, educate. I often find (with all types of students) that the language of higher education is full of ambiguity and foreign terminology. And an under-resourced student, depending upon their circumstances, may have even less exposure to this language. Pick up from wherever they are, and educate them from big picture to small: structures of a degree, including major, minor, elective, core; undergraduate versus graduate school; associate's degree versus bachelor's degree versus certificate or diploma; a major versus minor; and professional versus liberal arts. Help them to see the range of what they can study, and the nontraditional as well as traditional ways of getting an education. This will dramatically increase the student's understanding of their options and sense of control over their own choices. It does a great deal to alleviate that fear of the unknown, as well as a sense of distrust that can result.

Of course, the financial piece must be acknowledged at each stage of the planning process. This is a fundamental thread from the first stage—understanding their circumstances—to the second stage of teaching them the terminology and options that have to do with aid; sticker price and how it can be lowered; and scholarships/grants/gift aid vs. borrowing, as well as potential return on investment. Next, building the college list, including options likely to generate the best awards, and setting application timelines, with

recognition that those earlier deadlines can result in access to the greatest merit opportunities.

You may find that some of the resources you rely upon most heavily for these students are different. Here are just a few that I recommend that can help evaluate plans from various angles, and that I hope you will find useful:

Adventures in Education (aie.org): a great resource for educating students on cost, aid terminology, exploring nontraditional routes, and money management


Questbridge (questbridge.org): for high-achieving, under-resourced kids

Advisors (advisors.com/plan-for-college/college-admissions/need-blind-admissions): need-blind and related terminology

CollegeTransfer.Net (collegetransfer.net/Search/Search-for-Transfer-Articulation-Agreements): search engine for college and university transfer agreements

National Center for Education Statistics and College Score Card (nces.ed.gov)

Tuition Tracker (tuitiontracker.org): updated college tuitions

FTC Consumer Information (consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-avoid-scholarship-and-financial-aid-scams): how to avoid scholarship and financial aid scams 

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Letters of Recommendation: A Global Overview

By Julia Gooding, EdM, IECA (ME); Teo Salgado, MA, IECA Associate (Canada); and Sarah Loring de Garcia, MEd, CEP, IECA (Mexico)

Cultural Norms, Translation Issues

Julia Gooding

US high school teachers and counselors are accustomed to and often even expected to write glowing letters of recommendation (LORs) to support students' college applications. However, in the rest of the world, cultural norms about LORs vary dramatically, or don't even exist. As independent educational consultants (IECs) advising students crossing borders for education, it is important that we educate ourselves about how varying cultural contexts and norms might impact our students requesting and receiving effective LORs.

There are five key areas of the cultural context of your student and their high school that you may want to consider. First, the existence of recommendation letters. In most education systems, entrance into universities is largely, or even solely determined by high-stakes tests or final grades. A local teacher may therefore not understand what a LOR is, its role in admissions, or how to write one. This means they may likely mismatch the LOR content and tone with what the university considers helpful.

Second, in non-English speaking countries' local schools, teachers may not be fluent in English. If this is the case, the teacher could first compose a LOR in their primary language, arrange for an English translation, and submit a bilingual LOR. Third, if LORs are uncommon or nonexistent in a student's school, teachers may be unaware of the concept of LOR ethics, such that teachers may ask students to draft the requested LOR on their behalf.

Fourth, US culture is known for generously and effusively praising students. This is not the case in other cultures where praise is moderated or withheld altogether. Without LOR guidance and

examples, teachers might use a brusque tone and only include factual information, like confirmation that the student was enrolled in their class. Finally, some cultures with "high power distances" (Geert Hofstede) will prioritize a LOR from a principal or a "high-ranking teacher." It is our work to educate students and help them understand what elements of a LOR will and will not improve the strength of their applications.

When we recognize differences and address misunderstandings, we can help our students better navigate and match the cultural contexts of the LOR writers (high school teachers and counselors) with the expectations of the receivers (universities).

Understanding the Systems

Teo Salgado

Outside of the United States, university admission is generally based solely on academic achievement. Eligibility is determined by assessing a combination of interim or final high school marks and university-specific or standardized test results. However, some universities may require additional elements as part of the admission application, such as a statement of purpose, interview, or portfolio. These may be used to determine whether or not a student possesses the qualities and/or academic potential desired by an academic program or institution. Increasingly, and likely in response to increased competition for available spaces, counselors and teachers are invited to write reference letters or to complete referee reports in support of admission applications. Before your students ask counselors or teachers to write letters, it's useful for them to research the content and format required by universities and/or programs on their list.

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Country	Reference Letters
Australia	Generally not required or considered
Canada	Generally not required; may be required by some universities/programs
France	Strongly advised though not required
Germany	May be required by some programs
Hong Kong	Strongly advised though not required; some programs accept employer references
Latin America	Generally not required; may be required for medical programs
Ireland	Reference(s) may be required for each course to which a student applies
Italy	Generally not required or considered
Korea	One to three may be required by highly selective institutions
Singapore	Not required
Spain	Not required for public universities; may be required by private universities
The Netherlands	Generally not required; selective programs may require one or more
United Kingdom	One required
United States	Most institutions will ask for at least one written by a counselor, teacher, or other

A Case Study

Sarah Loring de Garcia

“Gonzalo” is a Mexican student who was interested in applying to bioengineering programs in the US and the UK. He attended a high school directly affiliated with one of Mexico’s most prestigious universities. As a “feeder” school, over 95 percent of students at Gonzalo’s high school go directly from the high school to the university. A handful of students at Gonzalo’s school complete the full IB diploma program, as Gonzalo did; these tend to be the students most interested in applying elsewhere. University advising from the school is essentially nonexistent.

Gonzalo needed three LORs for his US universities (two teachers + one school official) and a referral for UCAS. These would all have to be very different from the typical Mexican LOR, which simply states that the student attends the school and is expected to graduate in good standing. I needed to work with Gonzalo to ensure that he could request his LORs, devise a “blueprint” for a letter within that request, and pass along resources to his LOR writers to give them the support they need. He shared all of his communications with me so I could support him (and through him, his LOR writers) throughout this process.

Initially, Gonzalo asked me if he should request an additional LOR from the governor of our state. He had volunteered on his campaign and had briefly met the governor twice. Though this type of LOR

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Letters of Recommendation, from page 17

may be impressive or helpful in some cultures, I advised Gonzalo against this plan as it would not provide information that is helpful to his application in either the US or the UK.

For the US, Gonzalo asked his math and biology teachers for LORs, and his IB coordinator as the school official. Gonzalo drafted emails using the Khan Academy example (see resources), requesting and offering a “blueprint” for his LORs. When his biology teacher replied asking him to write his own letter that she would sign and submit, Gonzalo responded that it wasn’t allowed. He referred the teacher back to the blueprint, while also offering to provide more information as needed. The teacher admitted that she didn’t feel comfortable writing in English, so with my support, Gonzalo responded that she could ask any trusted English speaker to translate her LOR, and then upload both the translation and the original as pages one and two, respectively.

At Gonzalo’s request, we held a quick virtual meeting with the math teacher to review the expectations for a UCAS referral.

For the UK, Gonzalo needed a single referral/LOR from “someone who knows you academically and can talk about your work ethic, interaction with other students, and your suitability for higher education or a future career,” as the UCAS website prescribes. Gonzalo asked his math teacher to write this letter, but also wanted his biology teacher’s thoughts included, so he asked her

to share her US LOR with the math teacher. At Gonzalo’s request, we held a quick virtual meeting with the math teacher to review the expectations for a UCAS referral. Gonzalo was then able to successfully submit his applications, with appropriate LORs, to the engineering programs of interest in both the US and the UK. 

Resources

For students:

- How to Get a Great Letter of Recommendation (College Board Big Future): link.iecaonline.com/CollegeBoardBigFuture-great-LOR
- Sample Note to Provide to Recommending Teachers (Khan Academy): link.iecaonline.com/Khan-Academy-sample-note
- References for UCAS Undergraduate Applications (UCAS): link.iecaonline.com/UCAS-undergraduate-applications-references

For teachers and school officials:

- How to Write a Great Teacher Recommendation (Tufts University): link.iecaonline.com/write-great-recommendation
- Insider’s Guide to Writing a Great Letter of Recommendation (Vanderbilt University): link.iecaonline.com/writing-great-LOR
- How to Provide a Reference for an Applicant to Higher Education (UCAS): ucas.com/advisers/references



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Considerations for Working with Homeschoolers

By Holly Ramsey, MAT, IECA (TX) and Lisa Rielage, MEd, IECA Associate (VA)

Will the swell of pandemic homeschooling result in more families permanently choosing home education? Or will a temporary bump give us years of "messy" transcripts as students bounce between different forms of schooling? Once a niche option, 5-10 percent of American students now homeschool, according to recent Gallup polls. This is similar to the number of US students enrolled in private or charter schools. Some homeschoolers seek relief from untenable situations like bullying, racism, or unmet academic needs, while others are drawn to integrating education with daily life. In this dynamic environment, independent educational consultants (IECs) would be wise to consider both the needs of individual families and the expectations of college admissions offices.

Who is a homeschooler? The answer is often complex. Some students learn at home but are considered a public or private school student by the state. Generally speaking, a student will apply to college as a homeschooler if the parent controls the transcript and issues the diploma.

The stereotype of socially isolated students doing every class at the kitchen table is rare. More than half of all homeschoolers are "flexi-schoolers," taking at least one class from a non-family member. In addition to home-based education, homeschooling often includes co-op groups, online classes, dual credit college courses, and tutors. Frequently, students spend just a year or two homeschooling in order to meet specific academic or social needs.

Access to sports, partial enrollment at local schools, and even PSAT and Advanced Placement testing varies by local jurisdiction. IECs working with homeschooled students need to understand the nuances of laws and opportunities where their students live. The International Center for Home Education Research (icher.org) offers a synopsis of US homeschooling regulations by state as well as a global view by country. State and local homeschool support groups also often offer detailed guidance for homeschooling.

continued on page 21



Holly Ramsey, Thoughtful Homeschooling, can be reached at thoughtfulhomeschooling@gmail.com



Lisa Rielage, Admissions Decrypted, can be reached at lisa@admissionsdecrypted.com

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Clear Documents Are Essential for Homeschoolers

Homeschooling families present an opportunity for IECs to work with both students as applicants and parents as counselors. Parents create a counselor account within the Common App to upload the transcript and other documentation that provides context for the student's education. Home educators often want help presenting their child's high school years in a compelling way. IECs might partner with a homeschool specialist IEC to draft these documents

For instance, many homeschoolers take classes from a variety of outside providers. These providers may have different grading scales. Some homeschoolers take courses that do not fit neatly into traditional categories. Would a vivid course title like "Roots of Steampunk Lit" be better than "English 3"? Would a chronological, subject-based, or hybrid transcript be the best option? An IEC can help parents concisely, clearly, and accurately communicate a complicated transcript. Coursework, educational providers, and grading scales should be clear at a glance.

Parents who combine elements like in-home instruction, student-led interest (also known as unschooling), and classes taken outside the home often need help writing succinct descriptions that explain content and evaluation methods.

Additionally, home educators typically provide course descriptions separate from the transcript. Not every college requires descriptions, though most ask for details about curricular choices. Course descriptions help establish rigor, regardless of whether the classes are from accredited providers or not. Parents who combine elements like in-home instruction, student-led interest (also known as unschooling), and classes taken outside the home often need help writing succinct descriptions that explain content and evaluation methods.

Not surprisingly, the school profile also differs for homeschoolers. In this document, the parent narrates their philosophy of education, why they chose to homeschool, grading scales and weighting practices, and a synopsis of each outside provider. IECs should not assume that an admissions reader will be familiar with homeschool providers or what is locally available to homeschoolers.

Many IECs are surprised to learn home educators usually write the counselor letter. This offers another opportunity to provide context and nuance. For example, some homeschoolers live in states where getting an AP exam seat is nearly impossible. They may choose dual-enrollment classes instead. The parent can clarify those challenges, choices, and limitations in the counselor letter or in the school profile.

Even if a home educator submits a clear transcript with supporting documents, colleges may require more. Test-optional schools may not be test optional for homeschoolers. Some schools want a formal lab write-up; others may require

homeschoolers to submit an academic paper, even if it is not a requirement for other students. Certain institutions may ask for state-specific items like an Individualized Home Instruction Plan or a letter from a local school district superintendent. Out-of-state homeschoolers may not have these items. A college might mention a GED, though this is rarely required and often not appropriate.




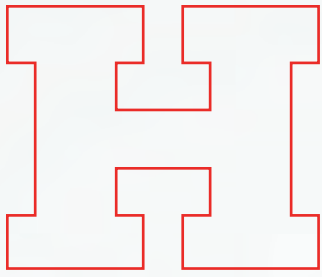
Some parts of the college application package take on greater weight for homeschoolers, notably letters of recommendation from non-family members. In situations where parents taught core courses, colleges frequently accept recommendations from elective teachers, coaches, mentors, or supervisors of volunteer activities. Admissions officers may accept recommendations sent directly if the online application doesn't accommodate letters from that category of recommender.

Homeschoolers often benefit from doing interviews, and some colleges require them for homeschoolers. Face-to-face meetings give students a chance to explain details of their homeschool experience and discuss areas of deep interest. A lively interview can erase stereotyped concerns that a homeschooler would struggle to adjust to campus life. Since these interviews are part of the admissions evaluation for homeschoolers, they are worth practicing.

It can be challenging to identify additional admissions expectations for homeschoolers. Students and IECs should scour websites to find all the requirements. Parents in their role as homeschool counselor may contact admissions offices to ask for clarification about documentation.

Help Is Out There

There is support within IECA. IECA members can download "Information and Best Practices for Homeschooling and Homeschooled College Applicants" from the Peer-to-Peer Resources section of the IECA website (link.iecaonline.com/peer-to-peer, under College Specialty). Any interested IECA member is welcome to join IECA's Homeschooling Affinity Group (link.iecaonline.com/affinity). The HAG offers a discussion list for questions, roundtables for IECs, and webinars with admission officers focusing on homeschooled applicants. The HAG also maintains a list of homeschool experienced IECs sorted by state, available in the HAG's Community on the Member Network. Please reach out with questions about homeschooling or to partner with a homeschool-specialist IECA member to support a client. 



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Deconstructing Technical Statements of Purpose for Engineering Programs

By Tripti Singh, MA, IECA Associate (China)

For every engineering graduate program in the United States and in most other countries around the world, the Statement of Purpose (SOP) is a vital part of an application, along with letters of recommendation and a resume. For technical programs, this document must elaborate on specific technical skills, and especially if the applicant has relevant work experience.

When helping a student with a technical SOP, independent educational consultants (IECs) must look for an overarching pattern that accurately covers the technical topic being applied for. Keep a look out for technical vocabulary and terminologies that will signal to someone who is knowledgeable in the area (should a faculty member be involved in the admissions process) that the applicant has domain knowledge. While regular SOPs tend to focus on personal experiences, thoughts, and motivations, the technical SOP also requires facts, figures, and analysis to be presented in a clear and concise manner.

A strong introduction in a technical SOP can start by referring to the area of interest, like a thesis statement, which can then be elaborated on in the following paragraphs. Engineering school admission committees are looking for applicants who stand out with regard to the clarity they bring to their area of research focus. So, it is in the applicant's best interest to be specific about their interests within the field. For example, an applicant can highlight analytical abilities and showcase technical knowledge acquired while interning or working full-time. Describing a specific related project, the subject areas researched for the project, the obstacles faced during testing, and the revisit to the drawing board make for a great read and highlight the key attributes. Explain to the applicant that using such examples is far more valuable than stating traits like diligence, perseverance, etc. This detail is far more impactful than merely stating that you value perseverance.

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Tripti Singh, The Red Pen, can be reached at tripti.singh@theredpen.in

Technical Statements of Purpose, from page 23


The body of the technical SOP can comprise of an elaboration on how the proposed study will connect the previous academic and practical experiences to the applicant's short-term goals. Mentioning realizations gained through academic readings is also a good idea here. The applicant can share details about their motivations, as well as their short-term and long-term goals. There is also an opportunity to include statistics and data that can be linked to the short-term goals and showcase its viability.

Typically, activities unrelated to the subject area do not find priority in a technical SOP. Most universities allow a limited word count essay and as such it is best for applicants to only include extracurricular and co-curricular activities that are relevant.

Typically, activities unrelated to the subject area do not find priority in a technical SOP. Most universities allow a limited word count essay and as such it is best for applicants to only include extracurricular and co-curricular activities that are relevant.

Applicants should also be aware that their subject area of focus must align with the research being carried out at the universities and be the area of interest of the faculty members of that

specific school. Stating the above by mentioning the relevant courses, concentrations, and out-of-class engagements that are of interest can help. This highlights to the admissions committee that the applicant will add value to the department's culture by participating in discussions, projects, and club activities that are related.

Overall, a technical SOP must demonstrate the applicant's technical strength in a compelling narrative that goes beyond their resume. 

IECA members: Join us for the new College Conversations in Focus series focused on engineering/CS to learn more about specific programs. Visit the Member Network (network.IECAonline.com) and click on *Events > Upcoming Events* for details on upcoming sessions.



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Rediscovering My Professional Worth at the IECA Summer Institute

By Melanie Hawley Litzinger, MA, IECA Associate (NJ)

Though it was more than a decade ago, I clearly remember the day when a story on National Public Radio about independent educational consulting and membership in a group called IECA piqued my interest. At that point in my career, I had been an admissions counselor at two universities and always wondered if I'd like to do what my friends on "the other side of the desk" did daily.

"They have a summer training program at Swarthmore, you know," a colleague said when I asked him about IECA. Dreams of staying on campus for a week to learn about college counseling filled my head. But at that time, the reality was always: two young kids at home, little allotted summer vacation from work, and the inability to justify the cost (let alone on something for five days for just me!).

Years passed, and while I did eventually transition to the "other side of the desk" to become a college counselor at a boarding school, the dream of joining

IECA persisted. But so did that nagging internal voice that said, "You can't do this; you can't go out on your own." I knew that attending the Summer Institute would be the first step I needed to take. Though unsatisfied and feeling burned-out, I was too afraid to take the risk.

Like many, COVID-19 and the quarantine to follow changed how I viewed my current lifestyle. Since I was able to work remotely, I found that counseling virtually was a much more efficient use of my—and my students'—time. Long days didn't drag; they flew by. I finally felt like I had hit my stride doing what I loved. Going back to my old ways didn't make much sense for me; I knew I had to make a change.

Fifteen years after I'd first heard of IECA, I decided it's now or never. With the registration deadline looming, I signed up to attend the virtual 2021 IECA Summer Institute. Admittedly, though, the doubt persisted: "A whole week in front of a computer

continued on page 27



Melanie Hawley Litzinger can be reached at mhlitzinger@gmail.com

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when I could be at the beach? I have been doing this for 25 years! What am I going to learn anyway?"

I am happy to say those thoughts proved to be what they always were: just excuses. From the day I received my trusty notebook until I had to say goodbye to the members of the Institute, it was the single best investment of my time and money. I was reminded that, in this profession, we always have new things to learn. And I did learn a lot—about different ways to view topics I thought I already knew, how I can do things better, the resources available to me, and the supportive community of colleagues and network of independent educational consultants out there.

But most of all, I discovered my professional worth again. I took to heart what IECA CEO Mark Sklarow told us on the last day of the Institute: "Your knowledge is your inventory."

I am so grateful for the experience of the IECA Summer Institute. It made me remember why I do what I do and why I love being part of this profession. I can now confidently say, "Yes, I can do this! And I can do it well." I am proud to now be an Associate member of IECA. My only regret is that I didn't do it sooner. 

Summer Training Institute

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The five-day IECA Summer Institute is designed for those who are in the early stages of working as an independent educational consultant (IEC), and for those who are considering becoming an IEC. Whether you are just beginning to think about joining the profession or have been in business for a year or two and seeing clients on a limited basis, the IECA Summer Institute will help to set you up for success as you learn more about managing and promoting a business, working effectively with students and families, building a knowledge of the wide range of options available to students, and establishing a professional, competent, and ethical practice. For information about the 2022 Summer Institute, visit: link.iecaonline.com/si



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An IECA member is selling their practice and would prefer to sell it to an IECA colleague. If you're interested in this opportunity, visit the Career Center and search "IEC" for more information: link.iecaonline.com/careers





The IECA Foundation Presents the 2021 Katz Award Recipient: Antoinette Battiste

The Irvin W. Katz Award is presented each year by the IECA Foundation. It was created to honor consultants for their volunteer work with organizations providing educational opportunities to children. Irv Katz was a beloved IECA consultant who worked passionately for the good of children.

This year, the IECA Foundation is delighted to present the Katz Award to IECA Professional member Antoinette Battiste in recognition of 35 years of service to her community.

Battiste is the founder and president of Educational Pathways with Antoinette Battiste, a consulting practice that provides college planning and counseling services to high school students and their parents. With an unwavering passion for equity and access in education, she continues to be actively engaged in her community, helping underserved youth break down barriers to educational opportunities through workshops and pro bono services.

Battiste earned an AB in psychology and African & African-American studies from Stanford University and an MBA in information systems from Golden Gate University. She also received a Certificate in College Counseling from UC San Diego Extension.

She is accepting the Katz Award on behalf of the Ivy & Pearls Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Rho Delta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

"I first worked with the Ivy & Pearls Foundation in 2010. I joined the Foundation's board in 2013 and have served since then as the lead grant writer and chair of the Scholarship Committee and Black College Awareness Fair. I'm thrilled to say that the Ivy & Pearls Foundation just celebrated its 30th anniversary as the longest running annual, free Black College Awareness Fair in the San Francisco Bay Area. It's been a point of pride leading this event and watching students learn about the rich history of HBCUs. In addition, I continue to run College Admissions Process (#CAP) Workshops, a signature program of Alpha Kappa Alpha to provide additional support for students navigating the college application process.



Academic excellence is a cornerstone of the Ivy & Pearls Foundation and my work with them has been a natural extension of my career. What motivates me to do the work I do is the need for these services in marginalized communities, and it is a joy to be able to lend my expertise alongside other like-minded women."

—Antoinette Battiste, MBA, IECA (CA)

IECA Foundation Celebrates 25 Years!

For 25 years the IECA Foundation has served as the charitable arm of the Independent Educational Consultants Association, the nation's leading professional organization for educational advisors in private practice.

The Foundation leverages knowledge, professional skills, and funds provided by IECA members, sponsors, and donors to help underserved students map pathways to success.

Learn more about the Foundation on our website: iecafoundation.org



Connect with Your Colleagues in an IECA Affinity Group

Affinity Groups are run by IECA members with similar interests in a specific topic. These member-led groups provide an opportunity to network with a smaller group of your IEC peers to share knowledge, ideas, and goals.

To see the list of existing groups or the steps required to form a new one, visit: link.iecaonline.com/affinity

You can join Affinity Group discussions on the Member Network: network.iecaonline.com/communities/affinitygroups

Affinity Groups Recently Formed

Day School Consulting

This group is for IECs who work with day school students for PK through Grade 12 educational options (including independent school, private school, public school, homeschool, and tutorial services) to share resources and communicate with fellow day school consultants. Coordinator: Lindsey Valente (lindsey@lindseyvalente.com)

Rural/Small Town Students

This group is for IECs who consult with students from rural areas and small towns. Coordinator: Anne Holmdahl (anne@cscollegecounseling.com)



Transfer Students

This group provides support and discussion for IECs who work with (or want to work with) college students exploring undergraduate transfer opportunities. This includes both planned transfers (students attending two-year colleges with the stated goal of applying to four-year universities) and unplanned transfers (students switching schools or returning to a different school for any number of reasons). Coordinators: Jaime Smith (jaime@jsmithiec.com) and Priscilla Vivio (priscilla@onmywayconsulting.com)

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Introductions

Please Welcome IECA's New Professional Members



Alicen Adams (MA) has been an IEC for five years and was an Associate member. She has worked in many areas of student affairs including residential life, student activities, and academic support services. Adams earned a master's in education with a concentration in higher education counseling from Bridgewater State University. She attended IECA's 2019 Summer Institute and is a member of NACAC. Adams volunteers with ScholarMatch and Matchlighters, and with her local Pop Warner organization and the Pop Warner All-American Scholars Committee.

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Specialty: C*



Shari Chappell (PA) has been an IEC for two years and was an Associate member. Previously, she worked as a college counselor at a public high school in New Jersey for

16 years. Chappell earned her MEd in school counseling and BA in psychology from Lehigh University. She attended IECA's 2020 Summer Institute, and volunteers with the nonprofit organization Matchlighters Scholars Program and the West Chester Area School District Parent Advisory Committee.

*Shari Chappell, MEd
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Deborah (Debbie) Blume (PA) has been an IEC for five years and was an Associate member. Prior to becoming an IEC, she taught fourth grade in suburban Philadelphia for 10 years and was an adjunct professor at various colleges, teaching education courses.

Blume earned an EdD in teaching learning and curriculum and a BS in psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, and a College Counseling Certificate from UCLA Extension. She attended IECA's 2017 Summer Institute.

*Deborah (Debbie) Blume, EdD
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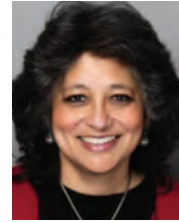


Sara Clarkson (IL) has been an IEC for six years and was an Associate member. Prior to joining College Bound Consulting in 2015, she worked as a freelance writer and

community columnist for the *Chicago Tribune* newspapers.

Clarkson earned an AB in public policy studies from Duke University and studied Japanese at International Christian University in Tokyo. She has volunteered as an alumni interviewer for Duke University and on the boards and councils of various community organizations.

*Sara Clarkson
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Jonake Bose (CA) became an IEC seven years ago after a 25-year career in financial services, most recently as a senior VP at Wells Fargo Bank. She pivoted to the CEO role of DreamCatchers, a small education-based nonprofit, before opening her IEC practice in 2020.

Jonake grew up in India, came to the US as a foreign student, and received her BA from Mt. Holyoke College, her MA from USC, and her College and Career Counseling Certificate from UC Berkeley Extension. Jonake has been an active and passionate volunteer within the Palo Alto youth and education community for many years.

*Jonake Bose, MA
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Yvonne Espinoza (TX) has been an IEC for eight years and previously worked as a college counselor for the Austin Independent School District for nearly 20 years.

Espinoza serves on the Colleges That Change Lives Board of Directors, Kalamazoo College Counselor Advisory Board, the Latinas In Progress Committee for the Hispanic Women's Network, and as a Varsity Coach for ScholarMatch. She graduated from Boston University and is a native Austinite.

*Yvonne Espinoza
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Specialty: C*



Deidra Fisher (TX) has been an IEC for six years and was an Associate member. Previously, she worked as a recruiter for Southern Methodist University's Simmons School of Education, an English teacher in an IB school, and a management consultant.

Fisher serves as Stephen Minister for grief and crisis counseling at Highland Park United Methodist Church, and leads college bootcamps through SMU. She earned an MEd from Houston Baptist University and a BA from Baylor University, and is a member of NACAC.

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Jennifer (Jen) Riggsby (CO) has been part of the education community in Colorado for almost 20 years as a consultant, teacher, curriculum developer, and tutor.

She values her time as an independent educational consultant helping families identify the best-fit school for their children beginning in preschool and guiding them through high school. She currently sits as a member of The History Colorado Educational Advisory Board.

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Specialty: S*



Elizabeth (Liz) Jackson (WI) has been an IEC for two years and was an Associate member. Prior to becoming an IEC, she was a college counselor at independent schools, including University School of Milwaukee, Newton Country Day School, and Friends Academy.

Jackson earned EdM and AB degrees from Harvard University and is a member of NACAC. She has served on the boards of the Harvard Alumni Association and the Harvard Club of WI; founded ClassACT; and supported the Milwaukee Academy of Science Charter School.

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Jane (Teebie) Saunders (CA) has been an IEC for two years. Previously, she worked in admissions at Groton School and Castilleja School and in counseling at the Hamlin School.

Saunders earned an AB from Princeton University and an MBA from Duke University. She is chair of the Groton Women's Network and an alumni interviewer for Princeton University. She also works with Summerbridge, an access program based in San Francisco, and is a founding member of BASSC (Bay Area Secondary School Counselors).

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Marcie Kay (CA) has been an IEC for over five years and was an Associate member. She embraces a holistic approach to the college admissions process, prioritizing the mental health and well-being of the families she serves.

Kay has an MBA from Harvard University and an IEC Certificate from UC Irvine Extension. She is also a psychotherapist, with an MS in clinical psychology from Notre Dame de Namur University. Kay is an active member of NACAC, WACAC, and the American Psychological Association.

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Specialty: C*



Kathryn (Kathy) Speer (CA) has been an IECA member since 2019, when she joined as an Associate member. Based in California, Speer enjoys sharing her knowledge and

expertise of the UC/Cal State application process with colleagues and families across the US.

Kathy earned an MS in accounting (taxation) and BS in commerce from the University of Virginia and a Specialized Certificate in College Counseling from UC San Diego Extension. She is a member of WACAC and NACAC.

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Specialty: C*



In the News

Rebecca (Becky) Cluster (DC) was quoted in “Everything You Need to Know to Complete the CSS Profile” in *US News & World Report* on October 1.

Jeff Levy (CA) was quoted in “10 Financial Aid Tips for College Students” in *US News & World Report* on December 20.

Laurie Kopp Weingarten (NJ) was quoted in “How Parents Can Offer Homework Help” in *US News & World Report* on October 5; “The Kids are NOT All Right” in the *Chicago Parent* January/February 2022 issue; and “The 6 Most Common College Mistakes and How to Avoid Them” in *Best Colleges* on October 25. She, along with **Kristina Dooley** (OH) and **Helese Sandler** (GA), was also quoted in “11 Ways to Make, Save Money Over Winter Break” in *US News & World Report* on December 15.


Rebecca Stuart-Orlowski (CA) was quoted in “Test Optional May Not Apply to Homeschooled Students” in *Inside Higher Ed* on December 13.

Dale Price's (Associate, TX) article “How to navigate the ‘test-optional’ landscape,” was published in the *Austin American-Statesman* on December 13.

IECA was referenced in “Acknowledging Identity for a Better College Experience for All” in *Forbes* on October 8 and in “The Valuable Role of a Private College Counselor” in *My Central Jersey* on October 30.

Alexandra Rhodes (CA) was quoted in “3 Types of US Students Who Should Consider Earning a Degree Abroad” in *Yahoo News* on October 26.

Teo Salgado (Associate, Canada) was quoted in “Is earning an MBA worth the cost? It depends.” in *The Globe and Mail* on November 11.

Rachel Zimmerman's (Associate, IL) article, “The Real Reason Why You Should Hire an Independent Educational Consultant,” was published on the Chicago North Shore Moms Network on November 5. 


IECA members: Send us your media appearances to share in a future issue of *Insights* and on the IECA website! Email details to Insights@IECAonline.com.



Initiatives

Ibrahim Firat (TX) and his firm, Firat Education, have partnered with the Houston Dynamo Football Club, a Major League Soccer team, and their Dynamo Academy to help players achieve their educational goals. Firat Education will meet weekly with players in their Pre-Professional Phase (ages 16-23) to provide a subject-specific open lab during study hours for direct academic support. Additionally, Firat staffers will check in with each player once every two weeks during the school year to discuss grades, classes, and their progress toward their academic goals.

Barbara Connolly's (MI) TEDx talk, “How College Obsession Can Be a Force for Good,” ranked in the 50 most popular TEDx Talks released in 2021 on YouTube.

Carolyn Mulligan (NJ) of the Insiders Network to College in Summit, New Jersey presented “The College Search Process for Students with Disabilities” for the Windward School Homecoming on Thursday, October 21. This was the fourth year (second year virtually) that Mulligan presented to Windward, a school for students with learning disabilities with locations in White Plains and New York City. 

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Regional Groups

Meet IEC colleagues living in your geographic area! Member-led IECA Regional Groups offer collegiality, communication, and personal interaction among your peers. New members are always welcome!

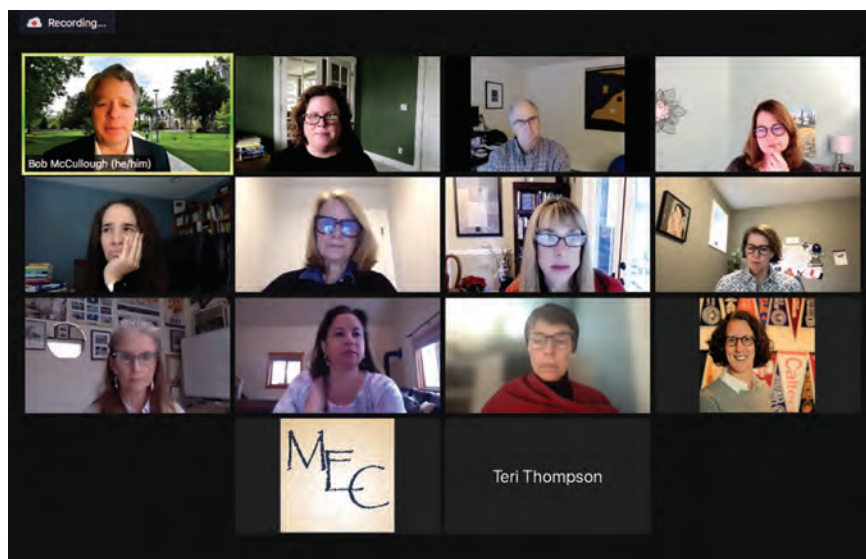
To join one of the more than 40 existing Regional Groups, visit the Member Network: network.iecaonline.com/communities/regionalgroups

If you don't see a Regional Group in your area, start one today! Contact IECA Membership Manager Caitlin Myers at Caitlin@IECAonline.com for information the steps to do so.

Regional Group Updates

California: Bay Area

If you are interested in joining this newly formed Regional Group, contact Pip Sanders (pip@collegecurve.com) or Lauren Joyce (lauren@joycecollegeconsulting.com).



Connecticut

The CT Regional Group has been busy! In addition to their own W(h)ine event on November 9 in conjunction with the IECA Fall Conference, they held a December 14 webinar on Discovery Mood & Anxiety Program, led by Kristin Walleshauser. In January, the group had a meeting on financial aid. The overview of the financial aid landscape for boarding schools, colleges, and therapeutic programs was presented by Nancy Cleary, director of admission and financial aid, The Loomis Chaffee School; Vicki Vollweiler, founder of College Financial Prep; and Daria Rockholz, PhD, a special needs educational consultant and Professional member of IECA. Contact: Jennifer Dooher (hittingthemarkcc@gmail.com) or Shyamla Menon (shyamla@gmail.com)

Georgia

The Atlanta Regional Group meets by Zoom every third Thursday of the month from 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. If you're in Georgia and would like to join the discussion, we would love to have you!

Contact: Mark Cruver (georgiaiecs@gmail.com)



Latin America & Caribbean

The Latin America & Caribbean Regional Group relaunched in the second semester of 2021 with great reception from members who work in this region. The group held an introductory virtual meeting on August 27. After a welcome message from the group coordinators and Kristina Dooley, there were introductions and a presentation on admissions trends during 2020 by Jenny Kent. A second meeting on October 22 opened the floor for participants to share their hidden gems and most significant challenges they have faced in the current application cycle. The year 2022 will bring bimonthly meetings, with the first one scheduled for February 11 on navigating admissions to public universities in Spain and the "homologacion" process. Contact: Monica Orlich (orlichmonica@gmail.com) and Susana Urruela (surruela3@gmail.com)

Mountain West (Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming)

The Mountain West Regional Group hosts monthly Third Thursday Zoom talks with college admissions officers. Upcoming meetings will feature the College of Idaho and Boise State University. A Salt Lake City college tour and meetup is planned for spring, as well as a meeting at the IECA 2022 Spring Conference in Philadelphia this May. Special thanks to Idaho IECA member Andrew Bryan for openly sharing his vast background in this region, including rural consulting nuances and cost issues for students. Area IECs are welcome to join our growing group! Contact: Barbara Klein (CounselorBarbaraKlein@gmail.com) and Jackie Woolley (summitcollegecounseling@gmail.com) 



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