

**With COVID-19's End in Sight,
WILL ADMISSIONS—AND CONSULTING—
EVER RETURN TO NORMAL?**





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President's Letter

A Season of Growth

We're well into spring and seeing peonies and lilacs **growing** in my yard is something that brings me joy. Perhaps it's the reminder that while Ohio winters can be cold and dreary, there is so much beauty if we're just patient enough to wait for it. In fact, when I see those little buds popping up in our flower beds, it's hard for me to recall the many inches of snow that once sat on top of those very spots just a few months prior.

I will admit that over the past year it's been challenging to even think of the beauty that could spring from the many challenges we've faced. But if you're like me, you may have the voice of frequent IECA conference speaker Dr. Carol Dweck in your head asking if you're using your **growth** mindset, or a fixed one. The answer should be, of course, a **growth** mindset.

This spring I agreed to coach my daughter's Girls on the Run team. The focus of this group is developing strong self-esteem and leadership skills in elementary-aged girls. During one of our first sessions, the girls were tasked with thinking about how they could counteract negative self-talk. Our team had to develop

a phrase that they'd use if they heard a teammate or coach venturing into what Dr. Dweck would call a fixed mindset versus one of **growth**. Their phrase?

"That's baloney!"

So, whenever a girl would say "I can't run another lap" or "I'm not good enough to do that," the girls would yell "That's baloney!" and it immediately shifted the self-talk from negative to positive (with some giggles in between). Over the coming weeks, it was inspiring to see girls who doubted themselves at the start of the season **grow** in their own self-confidence and in their support of their teammates. Watching their **growth** mentally, physically, and emotionally was incredibly powerful for me as both a mom and as their coach.

As I put my IECA hat on, I think about the **growth** mindset of our leadership team when making decisions that have significantly impacted our members since the start of the pandemic. We've had to move away from doing things "the way we always have" in order to support our members in their professional **growth** in a new, virtual space. Our volunteer



Kristina Dooley

Strategic Planning Steering Committee has successfully launched their process with significant consideration of our future **growth** as a profession. The **growth** in the number of regional groups within IECA—now at more than 40—has allowed us to stay connected with others more locally and share insights into issues impacting students in our surrounding areas.

In addition, the sheer **growth** in our membership numbers over the past year (20 percent!) has shown the value that so many IECs find in what our association offers to both new and veteran consultants. It's hard to believe that our now robust association was created in 1974 with just seven independent educational consultants meeting in one of their homes. We've come quite a long way since then!

Finally, I am consistently impressed by how efficiently the IECA staff and committee volunteers have pivoted our professional

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In Focus

IECA's Board of Directors created these "We Believe" statements to describe the key beliefs that guide the association.

- ★ We believe all students should have access to individualized educational guidance that will help them achieve their goals.
- ★ We believe independent educational consultants should act respectfully, honestly, compassionately, ethically, and professionally with every student.
- ★ We believe in the potential of all students regardless of cultural, religious, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, sexual orientation, unique needs, or learning differences.
- ★ We believe that education should be available and affordable to all families.
- ★ We believe independent educational consultants are uniquely equipped to guide and support students toward their personal, academic, social, and professional goals.
- ★ We believe in the power of education to widen opportunities for everyone, which will ultimately improve society for all.



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

MAY

05 NJ Regional Group Meeting School Consultant "Drop-In"	06 Lunch with Schools Global Committee Mental Health Awareness Event	07 IN Regional Group Meeting	11 LD/ND Roundtables WI Regional Group Meeting
12 Global Committee Meeting	13 Black IECs Affinity Group Meeting	14 Business Roundtable	19 European Group Meeting Talk with Author Yingyi Ma
20 NJ Regional Group Meeting Truly Global 21st Century Education: A Panel Discussion	25 North Jersey/Hudson Valley Group Meeting	26 Global Gathering Open Forum	28 Virtual Roundtable for Associate & Student Members

JUNE

02 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Book Group	07 IECA Spring Conference Day 1	11 IECA Spring Conference Final Day	16 Global Committee Meeting European Group Meeting
17 Black IECs Affinity Group Meeting	18 Global Committee Meet the Heads of Boarding Schools in England	22 North Jersey/Hudson Valley Regional Group Meeting	25 Virtual Roundtable for Associate & Student Members

JULY

09 Business Roundtable	13 WI Regional Group Meeting	21 European Group Meeting	26 IECA Summer Institute Day 1
30 IECA Summer Institute Final Day			

IECA Summer Institute Monday, July 26–Friday, July 30, 2021

This five-day **virtual** 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. *All educational sessions will be recorded and available exclusively to registrants through August 15, 2021.*

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With COVID-19's End in Sight, Will Admissions—and Consulting—Ever Return to Normal?

By Mark H. Sklarow, IECA CEO

[Editor's note: In the December 2020/January 2021 issue of *Insights*, we explored changes to the operation of IEC offices. Today, we look at the long-term impact on the admissions process.]

No face-to-face meetings. No essay workshops. No testing sites. No campus tours. Meaningless GPAs. Canceled admitted student days. Plans for isolating new arrivals to campus. IECA conferences attended in bunny slippers. Fake backgrounds for meetings in your kitchen. Virtual campus tours. The most amazing thing about the pandemic may be how quickly we adjusted to changes we never saw coming.

Our worlds were upended overnight, but it took weeks before we realized that the changes forced

upon us would last—at least many months, and eventually over a year—and would require modifications to how we and our students approached their studies, their activities, and their college search and application process.

Independent educational consultants who always required face-to-face meetings quickly learned that virtual meetings can be as effective, once students were convinced that joining Zoom meetings from their beds was not appropriate. Likewise, colleges, schools, and programs all rapidly announced a suspension of campus visits and tours, and then accepted that virtual visits, filmed campus tours, and events like IECA's College Conversations could bring about tremendous rewards. Some schools and colleges realized that their efforts at outreach

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Mark H. Sklarow can be reached at Mark@IECAonline.com

President's Letter, from page 4

development opportunities to support the educational **growth** of our nearly 2,500 members. The sheer number of webinars and virtual meet-ups currently offered for our members each month is incredible. We've **grown** from hosting one webinar per month to dozens. The staff has developed unique programming based on member suggestions and each week I hear from committee chairs asking if we can add a new offering to support our colleagues. This is a fantastic example of a **growth** mindset in action.

So, as we begin to feel hopeful about what's happening in our world, I hope each of you will think of how your mindset will impact our return to "normal" times. Will you use the personal and professional **growth** I hope you've experienced during these challenging times to help you try new ways of doing and being? Or will you revert back to a fixed mindset with the belief that these new ways of working can't possibly be sustained in a post-pandemic world? For those who choose the latter, I have something to say:

"That's baloney!"



Kristina Dooley, MA, CEP
IECA President

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Return to Normal, from page 7

to underserved communities—including those unable to afford campus visits—were actually enhanced as virtual events opened the school with greater equity and inclusion.

Many changes in admissions were forced upon schools: students' applications were likely missing standardized test scores as the vast majority of test sites closed, not to mention odd GPAs since many schools switched to pass/fail grading when they went online. Applicants had to make do without a year's worth of extracurricular activities—sports, band, theater, a job, volunteering, and anything else that would help distinguish them from a classmate.

Admissions leaders had to calibrate: how do they read applications without these usual markers of student achievement?

Admissions leaders had to calibrate: how do they read applications without these usual markers of student achievement? Now they are forced to think further: have any changes made in an emergency actually helped us produce a better class? Are there changes that could become a permanent part of the way we review student applications?

One area that has gotten quite a bit of attention has been the pandemic-inspired switch to test-optional in the college admissions world. For many, this change was necessitated by the inability of students to take ACTs or SATs. The question many are now confronting: as test sites come back and students return to the test, will scores remain optional or will colleges reinstate the requirement? This impacts IECs, who will need to recalibrate advice to students on whether to take tests or share results, a decision that may be made on a case-by-case basis.

Colleges and schools tell us that they placed greater emphasis on student essays and letters of recommendation than ever before. Today these admissions leaders are evaluating whether that strategy was a boon or ineffective. Some schools added new options for student interviews to help the admissions office get a better sense of the applicant. These, of course, were held virtually. Now colleges must confront the

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Voices of the Pandemic

IECA Members

Zoom is the new normal communication for college, internship, graduate, and career advisement. Clients are finding the mode of communication very efficient given not only COVID-19 restrictions but also due to busy school and work-related schedules. Before COVID-19, 30 percent preferred Zoom. Post-COVID, I predict 75 percent or more will request Zoom meetings only. Financial advisement on investment return has catapulted with serious discussions on tuition discounts, transfers, gap year and postgraduate opportunities, career resources, and job placement.

—**Deborah B. Davis**

I think the hardest part has been guiding families who haven't been on campuses. Connecting clients to current students at colleges isn't always easy. I think the efforts that some have made to formalize this connection will be a positive result of the pandemic moving forward.

—**Sue Crump**

We certainly saw far more students this year for college planning than in any other year—including a higher percentage in out of state and international—and I was thankful I had expanded my educational consulting team the previous year. More parents actually participated in our meetings than in previous years, which helped provide a higher level of support and collaboration for our students. I love that convenience! Our students applied to an increased number of schools, especially more selective ones. Almost all of them have had decisions that they are very happy with, with just a few surprising disappointments.

—**Judi Robinovitz**

Strangely enough, I have not seen a big impact on my practice. I had already been doing a fair amount of work virtually. For international families and families in other parts of the US, I have been doing everything virtual for

years. The families have taken virtual in stride. What they have missed is seeing the beautiful orchid plant sitting on my windowsill that has bloomed three times!

—**Betsy F. Woolf**

As the Global Committee Regional Rep Coordinator, I reached out to our reps around the world and here are their comments.

China

- We've seen a 20 percent increase in applicants choosing to apply to the UK.
- Parents fear for their children's safety in the US due to Trump's handling of COVID-19, racial tensions, and anti-Asian hate crimes.
- Parents wonder if it's worth sending their children to the high tuition boarding schools and universities in the US. There will always be a market for "Brand America" but parents don't regard it as highly as before.

Latin America

- COVID-19 has hit Latin America very hard. Luckily, with regards to our clients we are still doing well. We have been asked for discounts more than usual but still have a lot of interest.

EU/Turkey

- More students are choosing EU/UK universities due to cost and safety.
- Although, many clients express their first preference is US, unless it is a college that is well-known around the world.
- There is much more interest in the UK. Safety is a big factor with clients. This year, being back in the States, my clientele has declined but my education in collegiate counseling climbed thanks to all the great webinars and courses offered. Being in the same time zone helps too!

—**Patricia O'Keefe**

I'll be hard-pressed to return to in-person counseling once it feels safe to do so. Working remotely has allowed me to take on more clients, and even though I

continued on page 10


reality that a return to live interviews will likely hurt efforts at increased diversity and access. We will soon learn if Zoom interviews remain.

Colleges and schools have emphasized engagement in recent years as getting students involved in the life of a school was seen as key to retention. Colleges are still unsure about the impact of dorm-based classes, canceled social events, and even closed dining halls.

Colleges are still unsure about the impact of dorm-based classes, canceled social events, and even closed dining halls.

Recent research has suggested that an existing crisis in adolescent mental health is likely to have gotten significantly worse during the past year. As these students return to campuses—whether in schools, colleges, or therapeutic programs—there will be increased demand on campus mental wellness programs already overwhelmed by demand. Educational institutions will need to find ways to accommodate students dealing with anxiety and depression issues in alarming numbers.

An area that schools, colleges, and programs hope to see disappear: the need to isolate new and returning students before they can be integrated back into the mainstream of campus life. Of course, experts are unable to know whether COVID-19 and its numerous strains could pop up, causing a return to isolation strategies from time to time.

Many schools have indicated that lessons learned during COVID-19 will be kept: outreach via social media, online tours and information sessions, and similar opportunities that allow for a much broader outreach effort are being universally applauded. Whether students will continue to desire to connect virtually is the question not yet tested. 

Voices of the Pandemic, from page 9

am working more hours, I have the flexibility to schedule my time over the course of the week. I can't point to any real detriment to counseling remotely other than the ability to hand out materials such as IECA and college brochures. It's also easy to cut a meeting short if a student has not appropriately prepared for our session.

—Linda Kern

Uncertainty often drives anxiety, and the pandemic has created even more uncertainty around college admissions. As a result, I find I spend more of my time addressing the anxiety families have about the process. Families are also more focused on finding colleges within driving distance of home "in case anything happens," so some of our searches are more localized. And for the first time, we need to understand how our students respond to hybrid and remote learning so we can advise them accordingly.

—Eric Endlich

As a gap year counselor, my practice was highly impacted by COVID-19. The good news is that while international travel was extremely limited, the number of students taking gap years still increased three-fold compared to fall 2019. Because I have always emphasized gaining life skills through a variety of activities and experiences, the lack of international travel options did not feel like a big adjustment for how we work with students. A silver lining of COVID-19 is that students who did want to travel found increased US options as international programs pivoted to the US and other domestic programs launched in 2020.

—Katherine Stievater

1. COVID-19 LET US REDEFINE OUR PRACTICE—in ways we would never have considered before.
2. There is more freedom in working with clients from a distance by Zoom (and it is more accepted).
3. EXPANDED PROGRAM TOUR OPTIONS—this is fabulous! Virtual tours greatly expand our expertise.
4. COVID-19 educated every single citizen, even grandmothers, how to work from a virtual platform. This might never have reached the critical mass that it did without the COVID-19 experience.

5. Telehealth and other trainings gave us a new set of virtual skills.
6. Silver lining: we could regain balance in work and family/home life.

—Dana Doering

College, School, and Therapeutic Program Colleagues

These comments were shared exclusively with Insights.

I think that post-COVID, virtual events will remain to some degree, as the access they give to students who may have financial constraints is robust. It provides these students with a significant amount of information with respect to university programs and majors that they normally can't attain, so I really like that we've been able to reach more rural, international, and financially challenged students. Since college admissions is certainly a "relationship business," I don't see high school visits or college fairs going away, and universities that try to get by without attending them in the future will be making a huge tactical error. The other trend that I believe will remain is test-optional admissions. While we were admittedly forced into being test-optional at The University of Tampa due to COVID-19, we discovered some data and metrics that correlate so well with test scores that we no longer need test scores to predict college success.

—Brent Benner, Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management, The University of Tampa

I'm sure we're in the virtual space to stay. In many ways, the pandemic pushed us to do things we needed to be doing anyway. Almost immediately it was clear we were reaching a far broader audience than we ever could before Zoom became part of our daily lives.

While campus visits remain paramount, virtual "visits" are part of our future well after the pandemic. So too will be the delivery of special interest programming, including Facebook Live sessions, virtual chats with faculty and students, and constant updates to the virtual campus tour so families can decide if they will visit in person.

In a lot of ways, we've added an entire recruitment layer to existing programming. We'll continue to travel because the face-to-face experience will be more important than ever. But when will college fairs as we have known them be back? Will high schools allow visitors the way they once did? Will large group gatherings be as large as they once were? We don't know. So, continuing to meet students and families where they are is absolutely a priority. And for many, that's meeting them in front of their computer screen or phone.

—**Greg Zaiser**, Vice President for Enrollment, Admissions, Elon University

The challenges of the past year have included a thorough review of all aspects of our work. This review will continue in the spring and summer—and beyond. For example, our virtual tour has been greatly enhanced and our virtual visiting program for admitted students in April, our on-campus general information sessions, and all of our outreach efforts are under review. Having the right mix of virtual options will help provide access to Harvard for students from all backgrounds now and in the future.

—**William R. Fitzsimmons**,
Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid,
Harvard University

Being forced to step up our virtual game in the midst of COVID-19 resulted in some great benefits for far-flung audiences domestically and internationally. We are planning continued emphasis on high-quality virtual opportunities (synchronous and asynchronous) across the enrollment funnel. Necessity is the mother of invention, and we are really proud of the expanded access that we built during the pandemic—it is here to stay!

—**Douglas Zander**, Executive Director of Admission, University of Delaware

Certainly, COVID-19 prompted us to do more videos—of our campus, of our clinicians, of our expeditions, etc.—and I think parents have found those helpful; we will continue to utilize that medium post-pandemic (it also has helped a lot with Search Engine Optimization).

We have always had overnight visits in the middle of our wilderness program and have had to suspend those due to COVID-19. We have been doing one-hour Zoom meetings for kids and their families without a staff person in the room. I suspect when we go back to overnight visits it is likely that we will perhaps try a one-hour Zoom without supervision to see how it goes before moving forward with an overnight visit.

I think we will continue to offer virtual meetings and tours for independent educational consultants.

Lastly, I think as an organization we have fine-tuned our organizational decision-making process around difficult policy implementation that has to happen fast to respond to a crisis. I think that post-COVID, we will be far more responsive and adaptable as an organization to whatever the next crisis is.

—**Nichol Ernst**, Co-Owner, Executive Director, Therapist, Summit Achievement

From what I am hearing from colleagues still in the trenches, many of the changes brought about by COVID-19 will be retained. Virtual tours and programs will not replace traditional campus visits but will be offered to those who cannot make a campus visit. Video conference interviews will continue in an effort, for smaller colleges, to interview as many students as possible.

I think we are also going to see a continuation of the virtual high school visit. I predict that colleges will still travel for in-person visits to critical schools, but will do virtual visits to important schools that they otherwise could not schedule. Perhaps they will move to a scenario where they visit a school in person every other year, with a virtual visit in between. This will significantly increase their ability to connect with more counselors and students, and will save a bit on travel as well.

Regarding selection, colleges will continue to rely less on tests and more on the student's curriculum, grades, and context. Non-academic factors such as character attributes will take on more importance

if they can be evaluated in a consistent way within each college. I do believe that standardized tests will play a role in highly selective college admission (to paraphrase: "the rumor of their death is exaggerated"), though the optional movement will retain many more institutions than pre-COVID.

Finally, I believe that letters of recommendation from outside of high school—especially for current high school juniors—will become more important because many students "know" their teachers (and vice versa) just through Zoom.

—**Robert J. Massa**, Vice President Emeritus, Enrollment & College Relations, Dickinson College; Adjunct Professor of Higher Education, University of Southern California

One admission practice we started that we'll keep is having the option for a student to Zoom with current students before their move-in day. This has noticeably reduced anxiety for incoming students and their parents as well. Initially, we started the video call as a substitute for student tours, but soon learned there were more students who would benefit from a call where they can meet some staff and students than we would ever have seen physically tour as part of the school selection process.

—**David LePere**, Executive Director, Cherokee Creek Boys School

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us a great deal in the past 13 months. In our admission office, one of the main takeaways is that we can rely on technology much more than we thought to engage new families, host tours and informational visits—and even conduct some academic screenings to place students into the most fitting class levels and make tutorial assignments. On campus, one of the major changes we will keep is having the head of the high school and the dean of students greet students each morning as they arrive and send them off at the end of school. While this was established to ensure mask-wearing and physical distancing, it's become a great addition to building community.

—**Robb Genetelli**, High School Dean of Students, Landmark School

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There is so much educational content that we realize you'll need more than one week to view it all—which is why we've ensured that all educational sessions, Q&As, and tours will be available to registrants until July 18.

Post-Conference Workshops with Live Q&As

Thursday, June 10

Introduction to Medical School Admissions
Gaining Insights into College Financial Aid Decisions
Technology Solution Demonstrations: Part 1

Friday, June 11

Ethical Law School Consulting: Equity, Rankings, and Debt
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Post-Conference Virtual Tours

Tours will be held on Thursday, June 10 and Friday, June 11.
For details, visit: link.iecaonline.com/campus-tours

College Tours

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Spring Conference, from page 13

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Recently Created Affinity Groups

Intellectual Disabilities & ASD Affinity Group

Contacts: Dana Doering (dana@deandoering.com), Brendan O'Neil (brendan@cloverleaconsulting.com), and Imy Wax (imy@theaspiregroup.com)

Latinx Affinity Group

Contact: Maite Halley (mbhalley@yourcollegeconnector.com)

Technology for IEC Practices

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How is Working with Families Likely to Change as Result of the Pandemic, and How Can we Prepare Ourselves Now?

By Stephanie Meade, CEP, IECA (CA)

One of my favorite parts of the college process is helping students learn more about themselves. Teens are naturally curious about who they are becoming, and therefore eagerly embrace tools which help them articulate their growing insights. This encourages them to start their college processes from a place of self-inquiry, increasing the likelihood that their college lists will more accurately reflect who they are and how they learn best.

One of my long-standing favorite tools for this process is Dr. Steven Antonoff's "Self-Survey for the College Bound" because it helps students to both consider their readiness for college across several domains, and develop greater clarity on their purpose for attending college which, of course, is critical to their college search. In fact, I find this survey so powerful that I use it with every single one of my students.

Early Trends

Even this year of "nothing is normal" was no exception, but as I worked through the survey with all the high school juniors in my practice, I noticed some trends signaling differences from the many previous years I have used it. The impact of the

pandemic and its disruptions will be analyzed for years to come, but I wonder if the survey results from my class of 2022 may already be shedding light on the effects of the last year of mostly-remote education and isolation on teens.

As context for my observations, it is important to note that most of my clients live in Southern California, which has endured a more difficult and sustained effort to contain the virus than many other parts of the country. As a result, every single one of my students has attended school remotely for about a year and been essentially house-bound. Students' extracurricular activities have been severely curtailed and their social interactions sharply limited, while they've spent much more time with their immediate families than they might have in a more typical year.

Some parents have reported benefits of this circumstance, including having dinner together at home every night, enjoying greater insight and understanding about what their students actually do at school all day, and developing deeper family bonds. But the survey results suggest these have come at a considerable cost to teens' social and emotional development.

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Stephanie Meade,
The Collegiate Edge,
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What the Survey Scores Tell Us

As I analyzed student responses to Dr. Antonoff's survey, I noted significantly lower scores in two sections: "Independence" and "Self-Understanding." The independence section assesses basic elements of self-sufficiency, ranging from the extent of reliance on friends for leisure activities and parents for homework reminders, to making decisions without parental input, level of comfort when disagreeing with others, and homesickness. The self-understanding questions probe self-awareness in a range of contexts. So, what do lower scores in these domains tell us about the class of 2022? In short, these students seem developmentally younger than they usually are at this point.

As with so many trends, the pandemic seems to have accelerated the pre-existing trend of students developing independence from their parents more slowly.

As with so many trends, the pandemic seems to have accelerated the pre-existing trend of students developing independence from their parents more slowly. (*How to Raise an Adult* by Julie Lythcott-Haims or *iGen* by Jean M. Twenge are two excellent books on this topic.) And of course, this is not a surprising result. If students are not getting their driver's licenses or not leaving the house alone, they are deprived of the micro-rehearsals in independent decision-making usually developed by choosing their

own shampoo brand at Target, or deciding whether to stop for ice cream after soccer practice. If a teen needs to make even a minor decision now, why not just consult the parent in the next room? The same is true for social and emotional development, as teens are not navigating the hundreds of daily interactions with peers, teachers, coaches, and even store employees that they would have in non-pandemic years. There are few opportunities to hone the necessary skills and the confidence in their ability to respond to future interactions.

Where the Trend is Headed

One critical consideration is that this is likely to be a long-term trend. Not only will students need some time to re-engage with their worlds and to catch up to their ages, developmentally, but remote or hybrid learning may also be here to stay.

According to the results of an NPR/Ipsos poll, as reported on Morning Edition on March 4, 2021, "...fully 29 percent of parents said they were either somewhat or very likely to choose remote learning indefinitely...And many districts are already setting up district-wide virtual learning programs. This is a change that could have ripples far beyond the pandemic."

As a result, some high school students may remain enmeshed with their parents more deeply and for longer than their predecessors, rendering them ill-prepared for the independence associated with many traditional college experiences.

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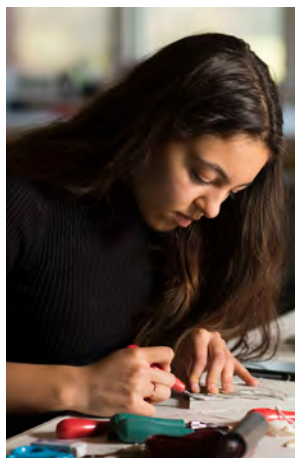
Here are a few thoughts about what we might anticipate, and how we might support families and encourage more student independence in these new circumstances:

1. **Expect parents to be more involved in their students' college processes than ever before.** In our practices, we may need to either develop stronger and clearer boundaries for parent involvement, or embrace the change and find healthy ways to include them.
2. **Be prepared to encounter more students who are academically strong, but inadequately prepared for the non-academic elements of college life,** ranging from time-management to social skills and emotional coping strategies. We may need to incorporate tools which assess this, help families understand how critical this preparation is, and offer tools and resources to strengthen the necessary skills.
3. **A gap year may be appropriate for more students.** Consider encouraging and helping families structure gap years to give students more time to mature. Learning about gap year options may offer an opportunity to diversify or expand our services, or to collaborate with IECA colleagues who specialize in gap years and other alternative placements.

4. **Anticipate more mental health challenges.** We may need training in recognizing warning signs and recommending additional support, perhaps in partnership with expert colleagues or mental health professionals in our networks. This is an excellent time to work on a list of allied professionals to refer to and sharpen our abilities to recognize when families need services beyond our expertise.

5. **Expect boomerangs.** Higher percentages of students will not succeed in college and will land back in our offices. This could be a good time to learn more about how to support transfer students, or those who need to completely reimagine their college journeys as they embark on a second attempt.
6. **Pay attention to self-care.** We, too, have just endured a challenging year, and the coming cohort of students may demand more from us, both in keeping up with all we must now learn and from our emotional reserves. Finding the balance between offering support and empathy and preserving our own boundaries will not only be critical to doing good work as IECs, but also provides an opportunity to model healthy behavior to our clients.

I have never tired of working with students and families in the college process, even now in my fourth decade of doing so, primarily because of the stimulation provided by the continuous need to learn. Recent events have forced an acceleration of that learning, and I hope that, as a profession, we dive in with enthusiasm to refine our professional competencies to meet this challenging moment, and to become ever more helpful and relevant to the families we support. 



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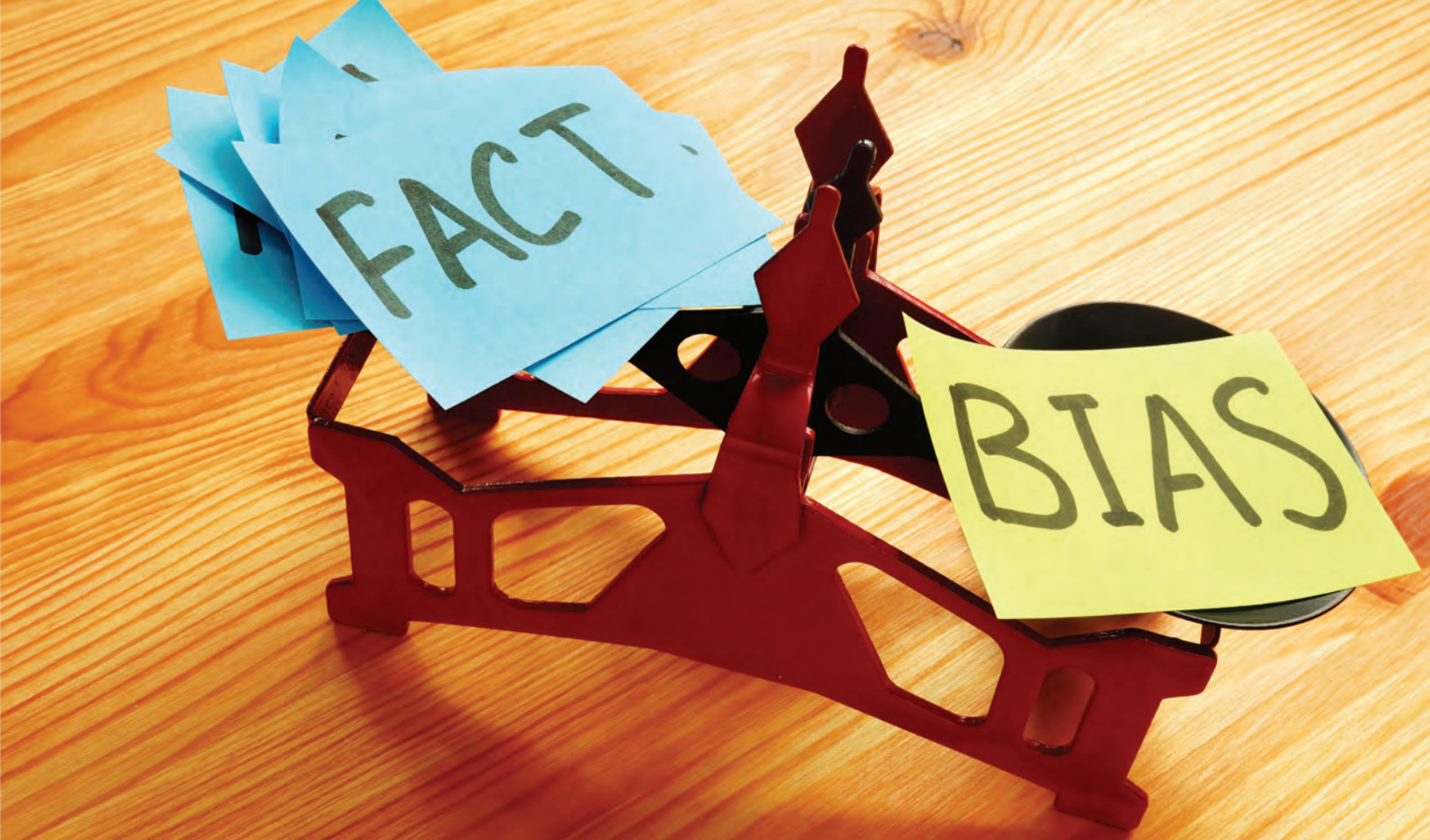
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Pictured: Members of the Vista community at a local beach near campus. Image was taken in 2019 prior to COVID-19. Note: 2021 Exploring Independence program will follow all COVID-19 safety protocols Vista has developed and implemented into all of our programming over the past year.



Anti-Asian Bias is Never Okay

By Sydney Montgomery, Esq., IECA (MD)

This seems like a simple enough sentence, but there are places and industries where I believe this sentence needs to be said a little louder: Anti-Asian bias is never okay.

As an admissions consultant, especially one that works in the college admissions scene, it is not hard to find anti-Asian bias. I work hard to champion diversity, equity, and inclusion ideals and values not only in my own independent educational consulting practice but also in the profession as a whole. While it is never easy, it is seen as virtuous, it is praised, and it is uplifted to be a champion for Black and Brown students. The majority of colleagues applaud the commitment to fighting systemic racism in education as it relates to students of color, even if they themselves are not yet ready or willing to take on the fight.

It is less popular, however, to talk about another form of discrimination that is prevalent and rampant within higher education. We do not speak about the emotional toll of our Asian students to try to rise above the model minority stigma. We do not speak about the *even higher* test scores Asian American students are expected to achieve. We do not speak

when we see our Asian American colleagues and consultants silent in the corner, *silenced* by the fear and feeling that their advocacy for their own community would not be met with warm welcome.

In 2020, I penned an article titled “Combating Systemic Racism as an IEC” (link.iecaonline.com/combating-racism), which appeared on the front cover of *Insights*. In that article, I posed the question:

If you are genuine about anti-racist work and committed to dismantling White supremacy, the question you must ask yourself is whether you feel just as passionate about helping dismantle systemic racism for the wealthy Black student with a 4.0 GPA as you do the archetypical “low-income” Black student from a poor neighborhood.

Understanding, of course, that the issues are nowhere near the same, and that I am not equating the struggles of one group with another, I now pose a similar statement: If you are genuine about anti-racist work and committed to dismantling White supremacy, the question you must ask yourself is whether you feel passionate about helping dismantle systemic racism for Asian American students.

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Anti-Asian Bias, from page 25

Since the beginning of COVID-19, we have seen a rise in anti-Asian racism, violence, and discrimination. The media coverage of this has been nowhere near what it should have been. However, prior to this rise, the question of bias, especially as it relates to college admissions, was not a new topic. This question was posed on a public stage with the 2014 federal lawsuit filed in Massachusetts by a group representing Asian Americans claiming that Harvard University's undergraduate admissions practices unlawfully discriminate against Asians. On October 1, 2019, in the case *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, the Honorable Allison Burroughs rejected the plaintiff's claims, ruling that Harvard's admissions policies did not unduly discriminate against Asian Americans and did not violate the constitution. In February 2021, Students for Fair Admissions petitioned the Supreme Court of the United States to hear the appeal.

Since the beginning of COVID-19, we have seen a rise in anti-Asian racism, violence, and discrimination. The media coverage of this has been nowhere near what it should have been. However, prior to this rise, the question of bias, especially as it relates to college admissions, was not a new topic.

Within the Asian American community, there is a deep divide on this issue. The voice that spoke to me the most, however, was that of one of my favorite Harvard Law School professors, Professor Jeannie Suk Gersen. Her August 2017 article, "The Uncomfortable Truth about Affirmative Action and Asian Americans" (*newyorker*.

com/news/news-desk/the-uncomfortable-truth-about-affirmative-action-and-asian-americans) highlighted nuanced issues that were being lost in sensational headlines and oversimplified bylines.

Gersen explains:

At selective colleges, Asians are demographically overrepresented minorities, but they are underrepresented relative to the applicant pool. Since the 1990s, the share of Asians in Harvard's freshman class has remained stable, at between 16 and 19 percent, while the percentage of Asians in the US population more than doubled. A 2009 Princeton study showed that Asians had to score 140 points higher on the SAT than Whites to have the same chance of admission to top universities.

Gersen goes on to explain the uncomfortable "wedge" felt by Asian Americans on the issue of affirmative action. Many are caught between being used as a political pawn to support anti-affirmative action policies that may hurt Black and Latinx students and pretending as if the current affirmative action policies do not disadvantage Asian American students. The questions she poses are ones that I have wrestled with for some time:

Is an admissions process that disadvantages a minority group benign, or even desirable, if that minority group is demographically overrepresented in higher education? Should colleges pursue their interest in a diverse class by limiting admissions of a minority group whose numbers may otherwise overwhelm the class?

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What I know is that seemingly “benign” discrimination can spread like wildfire into overt, hateful, violent, and even deadly racism. If we tell ourselves it is okay to discriminate in one area because it is better “overall,” what signals and messages are we sending over time? What messages are we telling our Asian American students about their value and worth?


I have had students ask me if they should take up a non-stereotypical sport just to “stand out” from other Asian applicants. What I want to say is that they should engage in the sports and the instruments that bring them joy....

I have had students tell me that they are afraid to mention they play piano or violin on their applications for fear that they will seem “too Asian.” I have had students ask me if they should take up a non-stereotypical sport just to “stand out” from other Asian applicants. What I want to say is that they should engage in the sports and the instruments that bring them joy, regardless of external appearances. I want to say this, but sometimes I do not.

To be consciously anti-racist is to actively seek out ways in which we can change both in ourselves and in society. Ibram X. Kendi in his book, *How to Be Anti-Racist* explains that racist is not a static label affixed to a person permanently. Rather, we are all *at once* racist and anti-racist: upholding and perpetuating certain racist policies while dismantling others.

I know that I have both racist and anti-racist thoughts. Even as I strive to do this work, I am constantly checking, correcting, and re-evaluating myself. Yes—it is hard work, and it is exhausting at times, especially as it relates to internalized racism. But it is necessary work, and it is work I will never be finished with.

On March 19, IECA released a statement (link.iecaonline.com/anti-Asian-violence) and in that statement posted these resources. I share those with you below as an invitation to begin this work.

- “Supporting the Well-Being of Asian Students during COVID-19” *Insights* August/September 2020: link.iecaonline.com/supporting-asian-students
- “Anti-Racism Resources to Support Asian American, Pacific Islanders Community,” NBC News: link.iecaonline.com/anti-racism-resources-aapi
- “Donating, Volunteering, Reporting Hate Incidents: Here’s How to Combat Anti-Asian Violence,” *Time*: time.com/5947603/how-to-help-fight-anti-asian-violence
- “Standing Up to Anti-Asian Racism,” American Friends Service Committee (blog): afsc.org/blogs/news-and-commentary/standing-to-anti-asian-racism
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice: advancingjustice-aajc.org 

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Students and Stress: Challenges and Solutions

By Eric Endlich, PhD, IECA (MA)

Kate was a thriving high school junior before COVID hit, active in the French club and the tennis team. After the switch to remote instruction, she missed socializing and exercising with her friends. When the SAT was repeatedly canceled and in-person university tours ended, Kate began worrying about college selection and applications. She isolated herself in her bedroom, and started developing anxiety and depression.

While Kate is a fictional compilation of students, her plight is very real. As Jenna Knauss, MS, LMFT, program director at CIP Berkshire explains:

The pandemic magnified or intensified mental health challenges that had not yet fully surfaced for many young people. Take, for example, the adolescent who...may have relied on coping mechanisms such as exercise, meaningful peer relationships, and the distraction that comes with extracurricular activities...Then comes the pandemic. She cannot connect in the same way to her peers, and struggles to initiate exercise

in the usual ways. These healthier coping mechanisms, now removed, illuminated or intensified her struggle to manage stress.

Keep in mind that various students may respond differently to the same events, such as the pandemic shift to remote learning. Ilan Goldberg, MD, president and founder of Semester Off, observes, "Some students have made out just fine, academically, this past year. Students with a high degree of intrinsic motivation...have been unaffected or may have even benefited from the new paradigm."

On the other hand, a student's initially positive response to change can evolve over time. Jed Applerouth, PhD, founder and president of Applerouth Tutoring, reports:

In the very beginning, I noticed quite a few of our students showed a decrease in stress as they pivoted to at-home learning and pressures

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Students and Stress, from page 31

decreased. But as the pandemic wore on, stress increased for many of our students. We began to see students, typically strong students, begin to wear down under the monotony of remote learning...Suddenly we were supporting bright kids who were collapsing academically.

Dan Levine, MBA, president and founder of Engaging Minds, points out that “During COVID, we’ve asked students to essentially uproot and adapt to an entirely different approach to school. That’s stressful!” Knauss says:

Combine many of the environmental changes we have all experienced in this pandemic with the already heightened emotions and developmental shifts that come with being a young person and it is no wonder we are seeing an uptick in serious mental health diagnoses, suicidal ideation, or self-harm behavior in the adolescent and young adult population.

Stress also develops when the demand of a situation—say, deciding which colleges to apply to—exceeds our perceived ability to manage it. Our “fight, flight, or freeze” response evolved to help us make split-second decisions about emergency situations. When it comes to facing challenges such as the uncertainty of college admissions—especially during a pandemic—we may be less well-equipped.

How can we determine if our students are under too much stress and, more importantly, what can we do about it?

Applerouth outlines the following signs to watch for: “Students may begin to show changes in sleep habits, in eating and exercise habits, and ultimately in academic performance...When students have excessive stress, their self-talk changes, they begin to imagine negative outcomes in the future, and that will slip into their language with you.”

In addition, Knauss explains:

Some individuals act out their stress or distress through high-risk behavior, substance use, or aggression. While acting out or externalizing behavior may look harmful on the surface, it may also reflect a sense of hope and a willingness to seek out help. Other individuals isolate, turn inward, and appear as if they have become invisible. Those who isolate are often at higher risk for self-harm behavior because they may have lost the drive or energy needed to signal distress and/or fight to be noticed and helped.

Test anxiety is a particular student concern worth highlighting. Despite the elimination of SAT subject tests and the rise of test-optional college admissions, students are still faced with numerous tests in high school—and again in college. While a modest amount of anxiety can sometimes improve performance on simple tasks, higher anxiety undermines the complex thinking required on exams. Dr. Gwennyth Palafox, clinical psychologist with Meaningful Growth, recommends “helping students develop a system of studying before the test that they can rely on. I find that well-intentioned parents take on a bulk of the responsibility



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of test preparation. Not being directly involved in test preparation leaves students anxious and without the experience of test preparation. The more a student is involved in their own test preparation the better.”

Applerouth, who has written and presented extensively on test anxiety, offers several suggestions:

We can teach them to identify areas they’ve managed anxiety in other domains of life...and bring those skills to bear on the academic domain. We can help normalize test anxiety... teach them that some stress is actually quite beneficial for performance on testing and help them reappraise stress and arousal in a more positive light. We can encourage students to become more reflective and self-aware...potentially writing about their experience. We can teach students simple centering techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing, mindfulness, meditation, or tapping.

We can encourage students to become more reflective and self-aware... potentially writing about their experience. We can teach students simple centering techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing, mindfulness, meditation, or tapping.

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- **Listen.** It’s tempting to jump in immediately and offer advice. But as Stephen Covey says in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, “Seek first to understand.” Being truly heard and understood can be deeply reassuring to students. It can start with a comment as simple as, “I understand that you’ve really been missing your friends at school.”

- **Express concern.** Let a student know in a compassionate way what you’re observing: “It seems like you’re having a hard time making deadlines lately. How are you managing?” Knauss advises, “Don’t wait for the student to come to you. Many students assume that they are the only one struggling and that asking for help will not be well received...If you see a student struggling, say something. Offer to meet and problem-solve together and never assume that students know what they need.”

- **Encourage a growth mindset.** When students describe their challenges in fixed, immutable ways (“I’m just no good at math”), try introducing a more flexible view (“I know it’s been hard for you, but these are skills that you can improve if you’re willing to work at it”).

- **Consider cultural factors.** “Certain students have families that pay more attention to and apply more pressure to academic performance,” according to Applerouth. Moreover, Knauss observes: Cultural factors may impact how a person views their behavior or symptoms, whether or not they seek help, who they might turn to for help, and what kind of support a person has around them. Words like stress, anxiety, depression, or learning difference are not necessarily acceptable vocabulary within certain cultural circles. In some cultures, mental health challenges are viewed as weaknesses...For these individuals, the stigma...is the first barrier to treatment...In this time of telemedicine and remote therapy, it is certainly becoming easier to find a treatment provider who is more sensitive to the needs of particular cultural groups and I encourage young people to seek out counselors who are culturally competent and sensitive to the ways that culture plays a role.

- **Provide tools.** Levine notes, “Providing direct coaching around strengthening executive function skills is one way to help students feel more in control of their academics and, in turn, help reduce academic stress. Focusing on explicitly teaching executive function skills isn’t a cure-all for stress, but it is undoubtedly a key piece of the puzzle for many students.”

- **Remind them they’re not alone.** Knauss advises, “Normalize the experience. Many individuals are struggling right now. While each of our experiences is unique to our own situation and may vary in intensity, knowing that one is not alone can be comforting... Encourage the young person to seek out and identify a trusted support team. This may include a psychiatrist, therapist, mentor, coach, teachers, family members or friends. Many of our best resources are right in front of us on a daily basis.” 

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Advising Students on UK University Applications

By David Hawkins, MA, PGCE, IECA (UK)

Introduction

Winston Churchill famously said that the United States and the United Kingdom are two nations “separated by a common language,” and in the world of university admissions this is definitely true. The UK and US educational systems, from compulsory education through to the tertiary sector, are founded on two very different principles, and though much of the terminology we use is the same, the cultural understanding underpinning these is very different. Much like American football and what we (on this side of the Atlantic) would call “real” football, we use the same words to describe two different systems. Students, families, and IECA members advising them need to act in the same way as a wide receiver would if suddenly asked to play left-back: learn a new language, new rules, new strategies, and an entirely new way of approaching things.

I find this analogy useful in helping students and families navigate going from one system to another. Rather than assume that coming to university in the UK is the same as in the US, but perhaps with a different accent and much older buildings, those exploring study in the UK need to approach the system in a completely different way. To do so effectively, you need to understand the wider context of UK education.

UK Secondary Education

In the UK, the secondary education system has two distinctly different approaches to high school education. Rather than retaining academic breadth at high school, as they go through the last seven years of their education, students become increasingly specialized. As they enter

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eighth grade, most student will choose their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects, typically involving two different English classes, one math(s) class, various options leading to one, two, or three GCSEs in science, and three or four other options which may include a foreign language. These courses are studied for two years, with exams happening in the May and June of Grade 10. A student may choose to drop languages at age 14, or the creative arts, or indeed all humanities. It would not be unusual for an arts-focused student to be taking GCSEs in English literature, English language, maths, double award science, French, music, drama, and fine art exclusively while a more STEM-oriented student could switch out some of these for design technology, computer science and further mathematics. At A Level or BTEC, the specialism comes further, with students pursuing an even narrower curriculum, choosing to focus on typically three or fewer classes that they will take through Grades 11 and 12. In my own personal example, I have no classes in maths, any science, or English after the age of 16, yet my four A Levels in history, German, drama, and music gained me admission to the University of Oxford.

Assessment works on a very different way too. There are no report cards in the UK, no GPA, and no focus on grading in an official way that takes account of class participation, pop quizzes, termly projects, or anything that is at a teacher's discretion. All that counts is performance in the elements that make up the GCSE and A Level exams: most of the weight falling across three to five formal public examinations that happen at the end of the GCSEs

and A Levels in a way that will be familiar to those working with IB Diploma students. A bright but lazy student can get away with it; a diligent student who struggles in exams may find that their diligence counts for little.

This inherent specialism is why the UK university entrance procedure works the way it does: with clear entry requirements, subject prerequisites, and a streamlined process.

How UK Students Approach a University Search

Students entering their last two years of high school will already be thinking about what they want to study at university. Note the focus on what, not "where." Here lies the big difference between the UK and the US advising. The need to specialize in the last two years of high school means that students need to be taking the right subjects, and so need to have identified the subject, or related subjects, they wish to pursue at university. Students have to be counselled on finding the right academic fit. Though students may have an idea that they'd perhaps like to target "Oxbridge" or a "red brick" university, the subject choice will come first. Rarely will a student have identified a particular university that appeals to them in the same way as US students may be considering.

Fit, in the UK context, is therefore purely academic. I decided I wanted to study history first, and then thought about where I might study it. The latter point was determined by the grades I was likely to achieve, which brought the most competitive



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universities in play. I then looked at how history was taught at a range of universities and found myself attracted to the tutorial style at Oxford, as well as at departments with strengths in imperial history such as Durham, Lampeter (now Trinity St. David), King's College London, and Nottingham. The idea of choosing a university based on size, culture, extracurricular opportunities, or even where my family attended did not come into play at all.

Students entering their last two years of high school will already be thinking about what they want to study at university. Note the focus on what, not "where." Here lies the big difference between the UK and the US advising. The need to specialize in the last two years of high school means that students need to be taking the right subjects, and so need to have identified the subject...they wish to pursue at university.

The Challenge from the US Perspective

This focus on what to study rather than where poses a challenge for a family raised in a very different culture, who may approach the UK with an idea of their child wanting to study at Oxford, or Edinburgh, or somewhere in London. They are focusing on the university rather than the academic subject. The US families we deal with are often surprised when we explain that it doesn't work that way, and that most UK students don't feel any real loyalty to the university they attended after they leave. We don't choose a university to be our alma mater, we choose somewhere that's good for the subject we want to explore further.

To those advising these families, the challenge is therefore to get your head around this completely different way of doing things. The idea of how to visit a UK university falls down on the basis of that not being something that we do here. Why would you need to understand the culture of a university when it's the subject that matters? UK universities don't offer daily info session and tours, they don't have Welcome Centres, and indeed many students will apply to universities without ever setting foot on campus.

For IECA members, this massively different cultural shift becomes important when considering how to work with a family. The "I" specialty designation can be helpful here. If you encounter a process built on a completely different cultural ground, like the UK process (or those in Europe, Ireland, and beyond), having colleagues who are embedded in the very different underpinning assumptions involved in a different country's system can be hugely helpful. On the IECA Global Committee, we are working hard to prepare resources on where to go to find help with international applications. Being based here in the UK, I'd always love to meet any IECA members coming through the country to find out more about the wonderful opportunities of UK higher education. 

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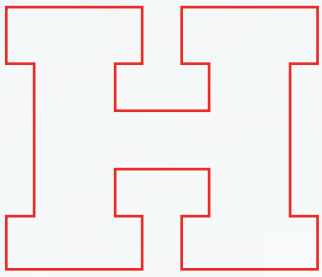
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Why Are Chinese Families So Crazy about Rankings?

By Kan (Steve) Li, MA, IECA (China)

“What SAT and TOEFL scores will guarantee my son’s admission into a *US News & World Report* top 30 university?”

—A frequently asked question by a Chinese parent

Even if you are not working with Chinese families, you probably have heard that they care a lot about rankings. If you already work with them or plan to do so, you’ll find that it’s true. Besides the question above, you must have heard another question from time to time, “What college or university can you help my child get into?” This is a question almost all Chinese parents ask during a first meeting with a counselor, no matter if s/he is an IEC or a school-based counselor.

Honestly, like many of my fellow IECA members, I don’t like the emphasis placed on rankings. Having worked in college counseling and test prep since 2006, I have struggled with contextualizing the *US*

News rankings to Chinese families. In this article, I’d like to share with you what I have observed in my practice over the years, analyze some reasons behind these observations, and finally attempt to offer a new perspective to IECs who are already working with or plan to work with Chinese families.

Over the past decade or so, I have met over 600 hundred Chinese families in person, a majority of whom applied for undergraduate programs and a smaller group of graduate applicants. Admittedly, most of them wanted to discuss the above two questions with me before signing a contract. Even for those who didn’t, when I tried to understand their expectations, they would still frame their expectations with relationships to rankings, such as: “We hope that s/he will get accepted by, at least, a top 50 or 30 or 20 college.” It seems that these families take rankings as the sole criterion to evaluate the college application process. However,

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finding a “good fit” for the client is the actual ultimate goal of every IECA member. Thus, the fact that Chinese families are so crazy about rankings poses one of the largest obstacles for IECs to stick to the “finding fit” philosophy.

Despite even more ways to find information about schools, the presence of rankings in China continues to grow. In March 2018, *US News & World Report* registered an official WeChat account (WeChat being the most widely used multi-purpose messaging, social media platform in China) named “US News Global Education” to better promote its products in China, i.e. Best College Rankings. A series of official events were run in China to introduce the new ranking and its methodology, which was welcomed by parents, students, and even counselors. The *US News* has also appointed a manager for the Greater China region to showcase the company’s future strategy and develop even more of a presence. In addition, there are many competitors of US News ranking drawing wider attention, *Princeton Review*, *Niche*, *Forbes*, *QS*, to name a few. So, why are they becoming increasingly popular?

To better understand this trend, allow me to start with some fundamental truths about our educational system and culture:

1. There is no “holistic review” in the undergraduate admissions process of mainland China universities. The only criterion is the test score result, known as the *gaokao*. High school academic performance, recommendations, essays, interviews, and extracurricular activities are not taken into consideration.

2. The national university entrance exam (the *gaokao*) is organized only once every year by the Ministry of Education (MOE), meaning that every senior student only has one opportunity in his/her lifetime. (There are very few who could retake the exam in the following year, but the government is tightening the number of retaking students.)

There is no “holistic review” in the undergraduate admissions process of mainland China universities. The only criterion is the test score result, known as the gaokao.

3. The above two contribute to the fact that the entrance requirement of every Chinese university is crystal clear and published in newspapers and others kinds of media.
4. The rankings of Chinese universities are largely based on the entrance score.
5. All of the above somehow widen the gap of educational quality among different universities and thus increase the educational inequality of different regions.
6. The MOE has also categorized universities as “211 or 985 schools,” distinguishing them as top tier or tier two or three universities in China. This categorization system has led to

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About 2021 Antonoff Award Honoree Pamela Jobin

The Steven R. Antonoff Award for Professional Achievement is presented annually to an IECA member who exemplifies the values of the organization through outstanding contributions to the profession and a commitment to students.



Our 2021 honoree, **Pamela Jobin** (CO), has demonstrated her dedication to students throughout her successful career. She opened her private practice as a Denver area testing consortium evaluator and later as an independent educational and therapeutic consultant after working as an elementary school counselor, preschool/kindergarten teacher, and school administrator. Jobin has also worked as an educational testing reviewer for legal cases for the past 20 years.

Jobin has been a professional member of IECA since 2002 and has served in various leadership positions within the association. She was a member of the board of directors for two terms (2011-14, 2014-17) and the vice president for ethics

and professional practice in 2015. Jobin also served as vice chair and then chair of the Therapeutic Committee, chair of the Membership Committee, and as a member of the Board Development Committee. Jobin also fulfilled three separate terms on the Nominating Committee and served on the Summer Training Institute faculty in 2012.

Jobin earned an MEd from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and an AB in psychology from Mount Holyoke College. Over the course of her career, she has completed various graduate level courses and independent study in the individual assessment of children, educational administration, mediation, and learning issues/intervention, as well as continuing education about mental health issues through IECA and NATSAP conference sessions. She also holds credentials as a Certified Educational Planner (CEP) and served previously on the board of the Sewall Child Development Center.

In her spare time, Jobin enjoys outdoor sports, bridge, her book club, travel, and yak ranching. 

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a deeply rooted tradition in Chinese people to view every university through a lens of “rank.”


Given all this, it is very natural that people could evaluate a domestic student’s “academic strength” by which university s/he gets into. And people firmly believe that there must be some criteria, i.e. rankings, to classify the schools and definite standards, i.e. a test score, for admission to each school.

You may ask, “Steve, I’ve heard of and understand all the above. But that’s in China. When it comes to US college applications, is there any chance that the Chinese families have a different perspective?” Yes, they might. However, even though some of them could be convinced by the philosophy of “finding fit” and that “the rankings are just one of the many factors to build a school list,” everyone must face the same challenge when s/he graduates: to find a job. So, let’s continue the list.

7. A majority of big companies in China have the so-called “target school list” when recruiting new employees. A good number of them (mostly large-cap state-run companies), set strict standards of schools where their future employees graduate. For example, a leading investment bank requires that a prospective employee graduate from a *US News* top 10 college.

As you can see, everybody is, more or less, results-oriented. When considering all the above facts in China, it may become easier to understand why Chinese families are so crazy about rankings.

I don’t like rankings at all; however, in most cases, they are the direct criteria for parents, especially given the fact that most parents lack firsthand knowledge and don’t search college websites due to a language barrier. Since 2012, I have cooperated with an international program in a high school² to run its college counseling office. Therefore, this comes from my experiences as a counselor both in private practice and as a school-based counselor. This unique perspective helps me understand this issue from both sides of the wall.

No matter how we feel, rankings are here to stay. We have tried to educate families about the importance of “finding fit” and we may also learn how to better help them refer to rankings wisely. I hope this article provides a new perspective on working with Chinese families. If you’ve also suffered with rankings as I do or are considering working with Chinese students, feel free to reach out to me by email. I am more than happy to share my experience and hear yours. 

Notes

1. Though “college” is more frequently used in the US for any undergraduate school, “university” is the only word used in China within the same context.
2. “High school” refers to a secondary school offering classes for students from Grade 10 to 12. The program I cooperated with offers English-taught classes and all graduates apply for overseas colleges, mostly in the US.



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Virtual Interviewing: The New Normal

By Rona Frederick, PhD, IECA Associate (DC) and Theodra Washington, CEP, IECA (MD)

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced school admissions teams across the nation to think about and develop new and creative ways to get to know students in this socially distanced and virtual world. Standard approaches such as conducting in-person playdates, shadow days, and face-to-face interviews in many cases are not currently feasible due to safety concerns and social distancing guidelines.

As a result, there is an increasing need for independent educational consultants (IECs) to inform and educate clients about best practices as they relate to virtual interviewing in order to maximize the impact and effectiveness of the overall virtual interviewing and application process.

Below we have included some tips for both parents and students to consider while forging their way through the application process.

Parent Tips for Virtually Interviewing

- **Your attention and focus on the computer screen will be extremely important.** Make sure you are present; remove all distractions (phone, clock, etc.). Your goal is full engagement!

- **If a virtual conversation is not something you are comfortable with, start practicing in the mirror or in a mock Zoom session with a family member or friend.** This will create a mindfulness around facial expression and body language.
- **Be mindful of lighting, camera placement, and appearance.** The idea is to present yourself as professionally as possible. Ensure that the light is on your face and not brightly shining behind you, as this creates a blinding glare. This video offers tips for looking your best on video calls: link.iecaonline.com/video-calls
- **Your background tells a story.** What story do you want it to tell? Pay attention to the background behind you. Are there discreet ways to use the background to enhance who you are? Or, do you want to present a simple, uncluttered look? Some virtual collaboration applications allow for virtual backgrounds.
- **Make sure your conversation is collaborative (give and take).** Come prepared with questions. Help them make the connections for why you and your family are a great fit.
- **Always send a thank-you note!**



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Preparation for the Child's Virtual Interview

Every school has a different process, especially during COVID-19 where these are newly developed. **Make sure you have clarity on the process.**

- **Will there be an internal assessment at the same time of the interview or is the assessment a separate process?** What materials do you need to have available? Planning ahead creates less stress for both you and your child. Schools are happy to answer your questions.
- **Have your child learn about the school through its website, optional activities offered by the school, and scheduled playdates with current students.** The more they can connect with the school, the more they will have to say during the interview. Take time to help your child develop questions to ask during the interview and ways to share information about themselves.
- **Try to schedule your child's interview at a time when your child is at his or her best!** Provide space in your home with limited distractions (no cell phones, television, games, etc.). Make sure your child is set up about five minutes before the interview starts so that he or she is ready to engage. Practice having your child stare into the camera. Also find out if the parent is expected to be present or if this is only for the child. For younger children, parents may be expected to hang around for technical support—but do ask the question! Remember, this is your child's time to spend with the school.

- **Visually allow the school to get to know your child through your virtual context.** Are there pictures or awards that you can strategically place in your child's sight to trigger a memory? To illustrate, if your child has a difficult time engaging, have your child interview in their room so that they can remember to share things that they care about. 

Actions for Parents to Take

Know and understand who your child is as a learner. Be honest about your child and the school's capacity to best serve him or her.

Parents are an excellent resource in helping schools to understand who their children are. Parents, we need you to help to build a bridge to understanding your child. Use the interview as a valuable opportunity to share information that is not in your application. This is also a time to inform the school of how distance learning has impacted your family and child.



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COVID-19 Relief Grants: One Year Later

In 2020, the IECA Foundation granted \$20,000 to nine organizations that had immediate funding needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The generosity of our loyal donors has provided basic needs to programs that serve the educational and therapeutic needs of children across the country. One year later, we followed up with these organizations to see how they are faring.

To support students during the pandemic, beginning in March 2020, Evanston Scholars switched to an all-virtual model. We offered all course and credit advising, preparation and persistence workshops, financial aid counseling, and career advising and coaching online. To maintain connections with our Scholars, we expanded and intensified our outreach through “Virtual Office Hours,” with an emphasis on social engagement, support for e-learning, and access to career networks. Our counselors and mentors keep close to Scholars through emails, text messages, and both phone and video calls. And, we increased our emergency funds to help students navigate loss of income and extra expenses, especially when it threatened their college persistence.



—**Kay Israelite**, Director of Development, Evanston Scholars

We would like to thank the IECA Foundation for your ongoing support. You and your team embraced the challenges of COVID-19 and thought of a new and innovative approach to connect with the non-profits you support. With your help, we were able to launch virtual programming, provide needed essentials, implement our 2020 Camp in the Bag, and ultimately, welcome the kids back for in-person programming. We are grateful for your support and dedication.



—**Lauren Herterich**, Executive Director, Kids On Point

Multiple new studies point to the pandemic negatively impacting mental health—and as a result the academic performance—of many students. In response, this year we have placed an even greater focus on mental health alongside our typical programming, helping girls to manage stress, build resilience techniques, identify emotions and needs, and develop similar tools to thrive in the challenging current environment. Given these difficulties, we’re especially proud to report that our entire Class of 2020 enrolled in college last fall, and that the Class of 2021 are now being accepted to selective colleges and are on track to matriculate as well.



—**Amy Ludwig**, Executive Director, MOSTe

As we continue to adapt to this “new normal,” we have kept our circle intact and provided safe and meaningful ways to engage. On-your-own mentor-mentee activities, such as glassblowing at McFadden Art Glass Studio, pasta-making classes with Schola Cooking School, Painting with a Twist take-home portrait kits, and tickets to the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, have strengthened these relationships. We have also increased our outreach to include Thanksgiving gift bags, books from Amazon, three rounds of grocery gift cards for families, celebratory baskets for graduates, fitness trackers, and holiday gift packages.



As a part of these overall efforts, we thank you again for the generous COVID relief grant for student laptops. We are immensely grateful to the IECA Foundation for your support throughout these unprecedented times. Now more than ever, we must continue to keep our community connected.

—**LaShae Felder**, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Sisters Circle

Regional Groups

IECA provides the opportunity for members to network with colleagues living in their area! IECA Regional Groups offer collegiality, communication, and personal interaction among IECA members based in the same geographic location.

To join an existing group, visit the Member Network: network.iecaonline.com/communities/regionalgroups

To form a new group in your area, contact Trish Fratarcangelo, manager of member outreach and engagement: Trish@IECAonline.com

New Groups Forming!

Indiana

Contact: Amy McVeigh (smartcollegeselection@gmail.com)

Mountain West (WY/UT/ID/MT)

Contact: Jackie Woolley (summitcollegecounseling@gmail.com) and Barbara Klein (CounselorBarbaraKlein@gmail.com)

Southeast K-12 Schools: Day, Boarding, LD-Focused (MD, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL and TN)

Contact: Jorie Stryker (jorie@schoolsearchmadesimple.com) and Katie Garrett (Katie@garretteducationalconsulting.com)



Convening of IECA's Regional Group Leaders

In February, IECA Regional Group leaders from 37 different communities across the globe convened online (in two meetings to accommodate time zones). Led by Maite Hailey, VP for membership, the group leaders explored program ideas and how to work more collaboratively. Look for these meetings to continue on a semiannual schedule in the future.

Schools, colleges, and programs that are interested in meeting with IECA members, virtually or in person, are encouraged to reach out to our Regional Groups. Find the full list of groups at: link.iecaonline.com/regional

In the News

Hamilton Gregg (China) was quoted in "Is This the End of the Romance Between Chinese Students and American Colleges?" in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on March 11.

Jill Madenberg (NY) was quoted in "What's a Good ACT Score?" in the *US News & World Report* on April 1.

Lee Bierer (NC) was featured on a one-hour story about the Varsity Blues scandal on the local NPR affiliate WFAE on March 18.

Christine Chapman (MA) was quoted in "The pandemic has upended college admissions with more surprises and more wait lists" in the *Boston Globe* on April 8.

Brooke Daly (NC) was interviewed on WRALTV for the segment "Legitimate college consultants step out of shadow of scandal to offer help for families" on March 21.

IECA CEO **Mark Sklarow** was quoted in the "2021 To-Do List for International College Applications" in the *US News & World Report* on January 28.

Katherine Cohen (NY) was interviewed for "How to Apply (and Get In) to College During a Pandemic," published by Katie Couric Media on March 24.

Nagla Orlando (CA) was quoted in "College Board Announces Changes to SAT" on KSBY News on January 21.

Judi Robinovitz (FL) was interviewed on WPTV Channel 5 for a segment on the evolving college admissions process on March 3.

Barbara Connolly's (MI) article, "7 Tips for Acing the College Interview," was published by MediaNews Group on January 17. 



Introductions

Please Welcome IECA's New Professional Members



Cristina Bain (Vietnam) has been an IEC for seven years and was an associate member. She has run an educational consulting company in Hanoi, Vietnam for the past four years.

Bain earned an MS in sociology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison and a BS in sociology and public policy from Hobart & William Smith Colleges. She is a member of NACAC.

Cristina Bain, MS
CB Consulting
Hanoi, HN 100000, Vietnam
84902186487
cb@crstinabainconsulting.com
www.cristinabain.com
Specialty: C+I



Shawn Coats (AZ) has been an IEC for four years and was an associate member. Previously, she worked as a high school assistant principal.

Coats earned a master's in educational leadership from Grand Canyon University and a BA in political science from the University of San Diego. She is a member of the AZ College Access Network and the AZ School Counselors Association.

Shawn Coats, MEd
Class 101 Mesa Gilbert
Mesa, AZ 85215
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scoats@class101.com
www.class101.com/mesagilbert
Specialty: C



Mindy Goodman (MD) has been an IEC for seven years and was an associate member. Prior to becoming an IEC, she worked in tax and accounting.

Goodman earned a BA from the Elliot School of International Affairs at GWU. She is a member of NATSAP, SBSA, NAMI, Learning Disability Association, and ATTACH. She attended the 2014 IECA Summer Training Institute.

Mindy Goodman
New Chapters Consulting & Coaching, LLC
Reisterstown, MD 21136
443-506-1662
newchaptersconsulting@gmail.com
www.newchaptersconsulting.com
Specialty: S, T



Betsy Greaney (MD) has been an IEC for five years. She loves using 1:1 interactions and current relevant data to help students understand deeper college preferences,

build confidence, and provide internal motivation to stretch beyond original expectations.

Greaney earned a BS in business administration from the University of Richmond. She attended the 2016 IECA Summer Training Institute and is a volunteer with Matchlighters Scholarship.

Betsy Greaney
College Placement Consulting, LLC
Easton, MD 21601
410-822-4500
info@teamcpc.com
www.collegeplacementconsulting.com
Specialty: C



Laurie Hereford (AL) has been an IEC for seven years. Previously, she worked as a substance abuse counselor at UAB, in human resources for a national insurance company, and as an

in-house school counselor.

Hereford earned an MEd (focus on human development counseling) from Vanderbilt University and a bachelor of social work from the University of Alabama. She is a member of NACAC.

Laurie Hereford, MEd
College InSight
Birmingham, AL 35213
205-222-0866
laurie.collegeinsight@gmail.com
Specialty: C



Elaine King (CA) has been an IEC for six years and was an associate member. Previously, she worked as a teacher.

King earned an MEd and teaching credentials from

UCLA and a BA in psychology from NYU. She holds a College Counseling Certificate from UCSD Extension and attended the 2016 IECA Summer Training Institute. King volunteers for UCLA Alumni Scholarships and Boy Scouts of America.

Elaine King, MEd
On2College
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Specialty: C



Cathy Lueers (PA) has been an IEC for four years and was an associate member. Previously, she was career services director at a private college.

Lueers earned an MA in marketing and is a member of NACAC and a Certified Advisor to College-Bound Student-Athletes. She partners with a local bank to offer college funding programs and with local media to sponsor Shark Tank-style competitions.

*Cathy Lueers, MA
My 4-Year Plan
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www.my4yearplan.com
Specialty: C*



Chenhui (Wayne) Luo (China) has been an IEC for 11 years and is a founding partner of Shang NancyFriends International Education Group.

Luo earned a master of laws from Temple University as well as bachelor and master of laws degrees from Northwest University of Politics and Law in Xi'an, China. Luo has partnered with several boarding schools to hold summer and writing classes in China.

*Chenhui (Wayne) Luo, ML
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Specialty: S*



Gary Matloff (FL) has been an IEC for seven years. He is also a licensed psychologist and an adjunct professor at Florida International University.

Matloff earned a PhD from the University of Florida, a CAGS degree from Northeastern University, an MA from Fairleigh Dickinson University, and a BS from FSU. Matloff is a member of NASP.

Matloff was twice honored as School Psychologist of the Year.

*Gary Matloff, PhD
Psyched4kids
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Specialty: C*



Kristen Miller (OR) has been an IEC for six years. Prior to becoming an IEC, she was an account manager for an advertising agency and a yoga instructor.

Miller earned a BS from the University of Oregon in marketing and finance and a Certificate in College Counseling from UC Irvine-Extension. She is a member of NACAC.

Miller volunteers as a mentor through ASPIRE.

*Kristen Miller
College Bound & Ready, LLC
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www.collegeboundandready.com
Specialty: C*



Sydney Montgomery (MD) has been an IEC for nine years and was an associate member. Previously, she was an associate at Markham Law Firm.

Montgomery earned a JD from Harvard Law School, an AB from Princeton University, and an IEC Certificate from UC Irvine Extension. She attended the 2020 IECA Summer Training Institute and is a member of NACAC, PCACAC, and NAPLA.

Montgomery sits on the advisory board for the Institute for Anti-Racist Education and is a co-founder of College Equity First.

*Sydney Montgomery, JD
S. Montgomery Admissions Consulting
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www.smontgomeryconsulting.com
Specialty: C, G*



Lindsey Myers (CO) has been an IEC for six years and was an associate member. Previously, she worked as director and team lead, research and grants for CFC Collective.

Myers earned a master's in public administration and a bachelor's in business marketing from University of CO, a Career Development Facilitator Certificate from CO Mountain College, and a College Counseling Certificate from UCLA Extension.

Myers is a member of NACAC, NCDA, RMACAC (Regional), and College Consultants of Colorado. She attended the 2019 IECA Summer Training Institute.

*Lindsey Myers, MPA
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Specialty: C*



Mara Patti (NY) has been an IEC for 14 years. Previously, she served as the college coordinator and guidance counselor at Bergen County Academies.

Patti earned an MEd from Hunter College, a BA from NYU, and a College Counseling Certificate from UCLA Extension. She is a member of NACAC, ASCA, and NYSACAC and has volunteered with American Cancer Society's Babes Against Cancer and the W20 Foundation.

Mara Patti, MEd
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https://one2onecollegeconsulting.com
Specialty: C



David Rath (FL) has been an IEC for two years. He is also associate head of school and dean of enrollment management at an independent school.

Rath earned an MA in literature from ODU, a BA in drama from Kenyon College, and an EdD in educational leadership from GWU. He is a member of Rotary International, SAIS, FCIS, and NAIS.

David Rath, EdD
Smart School Placement, LLC
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Specialty: C, S



Malerie Simon (NY) has been an IEC for 16 years. She worked as a high school counselor for 33 years before retiring in June 2020.

Simon earned an MEd from Loyola University Chicago and a BA from SUNY Albany. She is a member of WPRCA and a local board member of GLSEN, which works to ensure students are valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Malerie Simon, MEd
Yorktown Heights, NY 10598
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Specialty: C



Colleen Smith (FL) has been an IEC for six years and was an associate member. Previously, she worked as director of counseling at the Fay School and in admissions at several

independent schools.

Smith graduated from Lake Forest College with a degree in child psychology and early childhood development. She attended the 2015 IECA Summer Training Institute.

Smith and her husband founded Porchlight Foundation, which focuses on building housing for the homeless.

Colleen Smith
August & Ivy
Tampa, FL 33626
813-777-4969
csmith@augustandivy.org
www.augustandivy.org
Specialty: C



Eric Stutman (MA) has been an IEC for five years. Previously, he worked in computer hardware design.

Stutman earned an MS in biomedical engineering from BU and a BS in electrical engineering from UVA. He is also a certified Project Management Professional (PMP). He attended the 2016 IECA Summer Training Institute.

Stutman has created a proprietary "Academic Value" college ranking system.

Eric Stutman, MS
Top Choice College Consulting
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Specialty: C



Lauren Tropp (CT) has been an IEC for 12 years and was an associate member. Previously, she worked as a research consultant for a media marketing company.

Tropp earned an AB from Harvard College and attended the 2016 IECA Summer Training Institute.

Tropp is a founding member of the C3 College Consultant Consortium, a group of IECs who share resources and expertise to better serve the needs of clients.

Lauren Tropp
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Specialty: C

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Dhruti Vasavada (CA) has been an IEC for seven years and was an associate member. She began her career in transportation and went on to co-found Paradigm Consulting, a software startup. Vasavada became a teacher and worked to help prepare students for private high school placement tests before opening her own IEC practice.

Vasavada holds a bachelor's degree from LD College of Engineering, India, a master's degree from the University of Texas, Austin, and an IEC Certificate from UC Irvine Extension. She is a member of NACAC.

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Specialty: C



Nancy Wigley (CA) has been an IEC for 12 years. She worked as a speech and language therapist, a Capitol Hill staffer, a pediatric audiologist, and an actress and model before being a stay-at-home mom. She began her career as an IEC as her sons were heading to college themselves.

Wigley earned an MA from John F. Kennedy University, an MS from the University of Denver, and a BS from the University of New Hampshire. She holds a Certificate in College Counseling from UCLA Extension. Wigley is a member of NACAC, WACAC, and PNACAC.

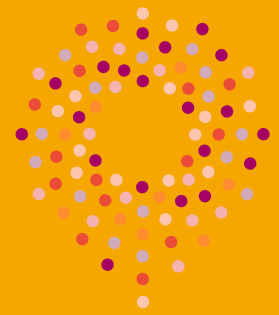
Nancy Wigley, MA
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Specialty: C

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Boulder Creek Academy offers teacher-led individualized learning through fully accredited elective and core class curriculum.

Therapeutic Treatment

Our approach to treatment helps students develop a well-rounded sense of self and create and sustain healthy relationships while addressing their individual clinical needs.

Student Profile

A typical Boulder Creek Academy student is 13 to 18 years of age who is bright, capable, neurodiverse, exhibiting school avoidance/refusal, and has difficulty sustaining relationships.

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At Boulder Creek Academy, animals are a unique part of an educational and therapeutic strategy that helps our students develop important social and emotional skills as they care for and bond with the animals.

Extracurricular Adventures

Students are given opportunities to engage in fun, challenging adventures such as kayaking and rock climbing to help build self-esteem, discover new strengths and enjoy the company of friends and family.

Our Campus

Boulder Creek Academy is situated on 119 acres at the base of the beautiful Cabinet Mountains. Our campus provides a serene setting for studying, socializing and engaging in hobbies.

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Please contact us to learn more about how Boulder Creek Academy's therapeutic boarding school can help your child. We welcome the opportunity to talk with you about your child and explain how we can help.



“ Sending our son to a therapeutic boarding school was not an easy decision to make, but the staff at Boulder Creek Academy were caring and nurturing and their communication was excellent. The teachers answered our emails the same day and the nurse was great as well. They were compassionate, caring, respectful and the best role models for these young teens. **Boulder Creek Academy was the best choice we could have made.** ”

Here's How You Can Reach Us

Monday through Friday | 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (PST)
877-348-0848 or 208-267-7522

After Hours and Weekends | 208-946-0853

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