



IECA⁺ INSIGHTS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATION

Spring 2025

IECA Returns to Capitol Hill for Our Third Annual Advocacy Day

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President's Letter

Reflections on My First Year as Board President

It's been a year since I accepted the nomination for president of the IECA Board of Directors. Over the past 12 months, I've engaged in conversations with members, attended multiple committee meetings, and, most of all, learned. There isn't a handbook for this role (though I'm working on that) detailing the steps to handle a particular

situation or what your focus should be in any given month. As outlined in the bylaws, the powers and responsibilities of the president appear to be cut and dry. However, there are times when it feels like drinking out of a firehose. In those moments, I call upon the knowledgeable, talented, and experienced members of the Board of Directors.



Belinda J. Wilkerson

I am fortunate to serve alongside board members who are deeply committed to the mission, beliefs, and values of IECA. Beyond attending to board business, each member of the board is also either leading or participating in committees, driving initiatives that strengthen our association. The next time you see a board member, please thank them for the work they do.

I am fortunate to serve alongside board members who are deeply committed to the mission, beliefs, and values of IECA.

As I mentioned, learning is a major aspect of serving in this role. I guess it's fitting that one of my top five Clifton Strengths is Learner. Gallup defines a Learner as someone for whom "The process, more

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The Executive Committee of the IECA Board of Directors met at IECA headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia on March 12 (not pictured: Julia Gooding).

In Focus

IECA's 2024 Highlights



1,961

Participants in Major Events (Annual Conference, Business Forum, Symposia, Summer Training Institute, Tours)



369

New Members



84

Webinar Recordings added to Website Resource Library



New Regional Groups

Boston Day Schools, Gulf South, Middle East, NYC Day School Consultants



New Affinity Groups

Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders (AANHPI), Former School-Based Counselors, Hourly IECs, Medium-Sized IEC Practices, Online Learning, Solopreneur, Surviving the College Search with Your Own Child

Featured IECA Upcoming Events

Summer Training Institute

July 21–25 | Virtual Event

This five-day training program is designed for individuals in the early stages of their careers as independent educational consultants (IECs) and for those considering entering the profession. Open to both IECA members and non-members, the program features a mix of large-group sessions and small-group discussions covering essential topics such as business management, effective student and family engagement, ethics, and the wide range of educational options available to students. Participants will also have the opportunity to take deep dives into specialty areas and connect with peers and faculty, including informal meetups with those in their region. All sessions are recorded and available to registrants through August 31, 2025.



Registration is now open! For more information and to apply, visit our website: link.IECAonline.com/STI

Here's what past attendees have to say:

"My knowledge has exponentially increased, and I am so much more confident to be guiding students and families through the many facets of college admissions."

"The whole program was well worth the time and money!"

"I learned so much from each one of these presenters and their presentations. The presenters spoke in ways I could grasp and understand the content; I could envision myself utilizing the information."

Annual Town Hall August • Virtual Event



Join us live on Zoom this summer for the virtual IECA Town Hall. You'll hear from President Belinda Wilkerson and several IECA officers on the state of the association, how we have come through the 2024–2025 year, and what's ahead for the coming months. Look for the date and the Zoom link in 5 Minute News and on the Member Network calendar: network.IECAonline.com

IECA Events Calendar

For the most up-to-date calendar of upcoming events, visit the IECA Member Network: network.IECAonline.com



Member News

Complimentary Subscription to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*—Exclusively for Professional Members

IECA is thrilled to announce a new partnership with *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the leading source for news, insights, and analysis impacting higher education. This collaboration underscores our commitment to providing valuable resources that empower our members to stay informed and excel in their work. For more details, see page M2 in the Member-to-Member section.



Revamped Mentor Match Program

We've launched a new Mentor Match program platform that makes it easier than ever for mentors and mentees to connect, communicate, and track their progress—all in

one place! Supporting meaningful relationships and professional growth just got a whole lot simpler. For more details, see page M2 in the Member-to-Member section.



than the content or the result, is especially exciting for you. You are energized by the steady and deliberate journey from ignorance to competence. The thrill of the first few facts, the early efforts to recite or practice what you have learned, the growing confidence of a skill mastered—this is the process that entices you.” Being president, for me, is certainly a journey toward competence.

For example, when I sit in on committee chairs’ meetings facilitated by current Vice President of Committees Sherri Maxman, I’m in awe of the work being done across IECA and the ideas for continuous improvement. Every committee is doing transformative work and has earned the highest accolades from me.

Here are a few of my key learning engagements from the past year:

Facilitating Board Meetings. While I’m experienced in facilitating board meetings—for the Rhode Island School Counselor Association, the Cumberland County Public Library System, and Friends of the Cumberland County Library—each organization has its own culture. We are fortunate to have Sue DePra as our parliamentarian to keep us on track, and thanks to our past president, we have streamlined the reporting aspect of board meetings. I’m growing with IECA in this area.

The Board of Directors has many strong ideas for the future—helping members understand the pathway to leadership, continuing to improve educational experiences for our members, remaining steadfast advocates for our students, exploring opportunities for certification, and remaining the gold standard in the profession.

European Global Symposium—Scotland. February welcomed IECA’s third European Global Symposium—and my first. Learning firsthand about the relationships our Global Committee has developed with college admission personnel and European education associations underscored the importance of international opportunities for IECA students and families. The tours introduced me to seven schools: Queen Margaret University, the University of Stirling, the University of Edinburgh, the University of St. Andrews, the University of Glasgow, the University of Glasgow Veterinary School, and the University of Strathclyde, our host for the symposium. A highlight was meeting a second-year student at the University of Strathclyde from Raleigh, North Carolina, who shared many positive aspects about her experiences in Glasgow.

Advocacy Day. In March, the Government Relations Committee conducted our third annual Advocacy Day. Talk about a boots on the ground lesson in advocacy. Traveling between the offices of the House and Senate to talk with staffers is an experience that everyone needs

to have at least once in their career. (See page 7 for more information about Advocacy Day.)

American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) CEO Symposium. This two-day event in April will focus on helping membership organizations of all sizes improve in meaningful ways. I’m writing this before the event takes place, so I’ll have more to share in the next issue of *Insights*.

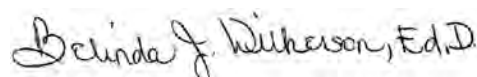
Those are the visible items that have impacted my presidency this year. Some of the bigger impacts are the items unseen by most members, such as:

- Building new relationships through conversations (in person and virtual) with a range of dedicated volunteers.
- Listening to and validating the committee chair who’s concerned about providing resources for their members.
- Cheering on the working group hoping to improve the professional development experience for all members.
- Engaging daily in difficult conversations about ethics and/or the Member Network.
- Participating in ongoing conversations and brainstorming sessions to elevate the profession.
- Learning to operate above the noise of political differences.
- And so much more!

In my second year, we will develop our strategic plan to guide IECA for the next two to three years. We will need your help, so when a survey comes your way, kindly complete it. The Board of Directors has many strong ideas for the future—helping members understand the pathway to leadership, continuing to improve educational experiences for our members, remaining steadfast advocates for our students, exploring opportunities for certification, and remaining the gold standard in the profession.

On one of the walls in my home is a plaque which reads, “Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.” My heart is calm.

I can’t wait to see many of you in Detroit as we gather to learn, network, and grow as an organization. I won’t get to talk with all of you personally, but for those keeping track, my left eye has twitched several times, and I’m still standing.



Belinda J. Wilkerson, EdD
IECA President



IECA Returns to Capitol Hill for Our Third Annual Advocacy Day

By Jess Chermak, MA, LPC, CEP, IECA Professional (CO), Member of the Government Relations Committee

It is an interesting time to work in education. Teen mental health concerns abound, and the political climate in the United States is causing significant unrest, concern, and confusion. What better time to gather a group of independent educational consultants (IECs) to venture to our nation's capital to meet with senators and representatives about important legislation affecting students and families?

Let's begin with some good news: In mid-December, a bill that IECA championed during our 2023 and 2024 Advocacy Days was approved and signed into law! The Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act (SICAA) was enacted to enhance oversight and ensure the safety of youth in residential programs. Professional Member Lucy Pritzker summed this legislation up beautifully: SICAA mandates the creation of a Federal Work Group on Youth Residential Programs and requires a study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to identify the nature, prevalence, and severity of child abuse, neglect, and deaths in residential programs. The collected data will be used to enhance the implementation of best practices in these programs. As part of IECA's government relations advocacy work,

Professional Member Shannon Bergeron secured a meeting for a small group of informed IEC experts with a National Academies team member spearheading this effort, with the hope that IECA will have a seat at the table when the time comes to help inform the study.

As with previous DC Advocacy Days, members of our Government Relations Committee (GRC) and a select group of additional IECs, chosen for their expertise in the industry and representation of key constituencies, spent an entire day running between the House and Senate buildings, meeting with policy advisors and legislative staffers, assistants, aides, and correspondents. Our goal was to ensure they are informed about and interested in supporting two primary pieces of legislation that should be reintroduced in this new Congress, both of which have historically garnered broad bicameral and bipartisan support:

Understanding the True Cost of College Act. This bill would require schools to utilize a standardized financial aid offer letter and remove the word "award" from the

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document (because \$60,000 in loans isn't really an *award*). This would enable students to more easily compare college costs and financial aid and with a more informed understanding of the aid being offered. As it stands, over 30 percent of colleges actually list *loans* as *grants* in their letters, adding to the confusion.

College Transparency Act. In the same vein of keeping students informed about the enormous investment decision they are making when choosing to attend a college, the College Transparency Act would ensure greater transparency regarding student outcomes at postsecondary institutions while securely protecting the privacy of individual students. The modernization of the reporting system is critical as the costs of college continue to rise.



In total, the 17 IECA members who participated in Advocacy Day met with over 50 congressional offices. Additionally, a handful of GRC members also met with staff from the office of Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI), the new chairman of the House Committee on Education & Workforce, as well as staff from Sen. Bernie Sanders' (D-VT) Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP). These meetings are important to our cause because the chairs define the agendas for the committees, and getting to know these staffers will help us push for potential hearings on topics like financial aid transparency and possibly markup one or both bills we championed on the Hill.



Overall, the offices we met with were supportive of these bills. Some assured our members that they intend to cosponsor the bills when they are introduced, while others expressed concerns about how/when they may be reintroduced. What I can say is that the offices we revisited this

year remembered our members, our organization, and our interest and expertise. Building and nurturing these relationships will continually position IECA as a leading organization in the education space. There will always be more work to be done in the realm of government relations, and advocacy will continue to play a critical role in our ever-growing and changing industry.



As we gathered together at the end of a long day advocating on Capitol Hill to share notes, the bad news broke that the Department of Education was about to begin a major reduction in force, with nearly 50 percent of its workforce to be laid off that evening. As this is a fluid situation, we'll continue to closely monitor how these layoffs might impact our students and families and will do our best to keep membership informed. 

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What It's Like Growing up in a Small, Rural Area as a Student-Athlete and How IECs Can Help

Lindsey Myers, MPA, CEP, IECA Professional (CO)

Deep in the Mountains

Growing up in the small ski resort town of Winter Park, Colorado, I was surrounded by athletes and outdoor enthusiasts. Like others in our community, I was always outside hiking, biking, skiing, and simply staying active. When I entered middle school, I began to play volleyball and found a passion for the sport.

Volleyball was a prominent sport at my high school, and I aspired to earn a spot on the varsity team. After making the freshman and C-teams my first two years, I dedicated extra time to honing my skills in order to make the varsity team my junior year. Although it is common for students at rural high schools to participate in three sports to stay active year-round, I chose to focus exclusively on volleyball. However, to improve my skills, I needed to play at a higher level, which meant joining a club team.

The nearest club volleyball program was two hours away in Denver, and quite expensive. I pleaded with

my parents to allow me to try out for a club program; they relented, and I made the team. My sophomore year was filled with long drives (two hours one way) over mountain passes—leaving school early, doing homework and eating dinner in the car—to attend two-hour practices three to four times a week. Junior year came around and my hard work paid off as I earned a starting spot on the varsity team.

After playing club volleyball my sophomore year, I realized I wanted to continue in college. However, the recruiting process was completely foreign to me. My high school coach knew very little about the process, so I relied on my club coach for guidance. Recruiting required significant effort—creating a highlight video, mailing DVDs to dozens of coaches, contacting them directly, attending camps, and visiting many colleges to meet with the coaches in person. Through my hard work and dedication, I secured a spot on a Division II roster with a partial scholarship.

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Lindsey Myers, Myers Educational Consulting, LLC, can be reached at lm Myers@myerseducationalconsulting.com.

I share my story to illustrate the unique challenges rural athletes face. My experience highlights the critical role of parental support and financial resources in accessing club sports, which now seem essential for college athletics. For independent educational consultants (IECs), this underscores the need to explore alternative pathways and address financial barriers for rural student-athletes.

Mountains of Barriers

Athletes in rural areas are commonly limited by the geography of their location. They often must drive over a hundred miles for high school competitions, spending hours on buses and missing a significant amount of school. The geographic distance also reduces their exposure to high-level competition. In urban and suburban areas, the competition is more intense, and the talent pool is larger. Rural athletes who are “big fish in a little pond” quickly realize when they start to play for a travel team or attend camps/showcases that they are outmatched and often less skilled than their urban counterparts. When I started playing club volleyball in Denver, I was shocked at the level of competition, a common realization for rural athletes who transition to elite programs.

Rural student-athletes also have limited access to different types of sports. Most rural high schools are small with minuscule budgets and limited coaching pools. As a result, you will find many athletes in small towns playing sports they do not enjoy just so they can stay active throughout the year. If the athletes are not three-sport athletes, they might stay active by doing yard or ranch work or engaging in non-

traditional sports such as skiing, rodeo, waterskiing, rowing, surfing, or mountain biking. Being a student-athlete in a rural area requires a lot of creativity, giving them skills applicable to the rest of their lives.

In many rural areas, access to talented and experienced high school coaches is extremely rare. Many coaches are parents, passionate former athletes who have not competed in their sport since high school, teachers supplementing their income, and/or community members eager to work with local youth with little experience in the sport. Because of this, coaches who understand the college recruiting process are few and far between, leaving athletes to navigate the process independently, often with limited success.

Athletes in rural areas are commonly limited by the geography of their location. They often must drive over a hundred miles for high school competitions, spending hours on buses and missing a significant amount of school.

Another barrier for rural student-athletes who want to compete at the college level is the lack of exposure to collegiate coaches. Growing up, the nearest college was at least two hours away from my hometown, and college coaches rarely travel long distances to observe so few athletes



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in one trip. Coaches try to get the best bang for their buck and prefer to travel to “hot bed” recruiting locations/schools. Recruiting budgets are typically slim, and it is too expensive to travel to a rural area to only see one athlete.

For rural student-athletes, these challenges make it imperative for them to find creative ways to stand out in the college recruiting process.

Reaching the Peak: Tips for IECs Supporting Rural Student-Athletes

While urban and suburban areas often dominate collegiate sports rosters, the untapped potential of rural student-athletes is undeniable. Although the recruiting process (see “Athletic Recruiting: What Every IEC Should Know” in the Spring 2023 *Insights*: link.IECAonline.com/athletic-recruiting) is similar for student-athletes in rural areas, IECs can play a critical role in helping students in these regions overcome their unique challenges. Here are my tips for supporting elite rural student-athletes:

If possible, and if it is accessible and financially reasonable, encourage student-athletes to compete with a travel team. Ideally, they should join a local club or travel team that participates in regional and national competitions. For individual sports, help student-athletes find regional and national circuits where they can compete. Travel club teams provide opportunities for student-athletes to gain exposure, as many collegiate coaches attend these regional and national competitions. Encourage student-athletes to continue their sport throughout the entire year, if possible, even if it is just playing pickup games at a local recreation center.

Encourage athletes to attend showcases and camps hosted by colleges. If travel teams are unavailable, attending showcases or camps at colleges may be one of the only ways to be seen by college coaches. Throughout my high school career, I would attend at least three volleyball camps each summer at colleges of interest. The exposure and interactions I gained from these experiences allowed me to understand my athletic abilities compared to other athletes and aided me in the recruiting process significantly.

Help your student-athletes create and maintain recruiting videos, social media, and recruiting profiles. In the age of digital media and electronic connections, rural student-athletes can use this medium to get in front of coaches more often. Encourage students to consistently record their performances and share them with coaches more frequently than their counterparts in urban regions. I typically recommend that student-athletes not only record competitions also create an introductory video showcasing who they are as an individual and student, take clips demonstrating the repetition of their skills and training, create a highlight reel, and include a full-length game (dependent on the sport) so the coaches can learn more about and evaluate them virtually. Many rural high school coaches do not record competitions, so student-athletes in these regions must get creative when compiling video by having family or friends film their performances (make sure the athlete is not relying on the school's athletic department to do this).

Have student-athletes reach out to coaches first and be pleasantly persistent to build a strong relationship with them. Since student-athletes in rural areas likely have limited in-person contact with collegiate

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coaches, it is important for them to take the lead in communications. Most athletes, regardless of location, are not initially sought out by coaches—and in rural communities, student-athletes must be especially proactive. On average, coaches receive inquiries from more than 100 athletes per roster spot, so for rural athletes to be noticed, persistence is key. Athletes should reach out via all modes of communication (email, phone calls, social media, request their coach to reach out on their behalf, etc.) to ensure they are seen.

Make sure students are expanding their search and casting a wide net. Many rural student-athletes do not understand where their abilities match up to the level of play at the collegiate level. Encourage them to look at a variety of types of schools and levels and be open-minded about going to a smaller or lesser-known college. Many of the student-athletes I work with in rural areas create a college list twice as long as my non-athlete students. One thing I constantly discuss with my student-athletes is that they will likely have to sacrifice the large Division I college experience because their abilities fit best with DII, DIII, NAIA, or Junior College programs.

Athletes in rural communities will need to find ways to stand out in the recruiting process. In some cases, athletes who can maintain great grades, compete in multiple sports (if travel teams are not an option), actively engage in their local community, and showcase leadership skills are able to set themselves apart from their competition. Coaches like to recruit well-rounded student-athletes, so when students can do things to stand out, coaches are more likely to engage and pursue them.

Make sure students are expanding their search and casting a wide net. Many rural student-athletes do not understand where their abilities match up to the level of play at the collegiate level.

Encourage student-athletes to share personal stories in their college applications. I encourage my student-athletes to write an essay explaining their unique experience and to provide context when the admissions officers are reading their résumé. The resilience and time management skills these students learn are also qualities they should articulate in their applications.

Enjoy the View

Ultimately, rural student-athletes are resilient, creative, and outstanding athletes who possess incredible potential and deserve the same opportunity to continue their passion at the collegiate level. I am so thankful for my experiences growing up in such a small, tight-knit community, and believe that my dedication and commitment to pursue volleyball at the collegiate level has impacted my personal and professional life in amazing ways. By understanding and addressing the unique challenges of rural student-athletes, IECs can play a pivotal role in helping these athletes achieve their collegiate dreams. 



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Looking Beyond the US: Why the UK Is Becoming the Go-to Destination for Students

By Maggie Parke, PhD, IECA Associate (UK)

The rising cost of higher education in the United States, coupled with uncertainties under the current administration, has led many students to consider new options after high school. European countries, and the United Kingdom in particular, are quickly becoming top destinations for students seeking stability, opportunity, diversity, and security. With world-renowned universities and unique, affordable educational experiences, UK institutions offer plenty of reasons for students to consider pursuing an academic life overseas.

Interest in studying in the UK has surged, especially among US students, with searches on study choice websites up 36 percent in the past year and up an additional 45 percent since the US election in November 2024.^[1] Online searches for terms such as “universities in the UK” and “study abroad in the UK” have increased by 50 to 100 percent since then. Applications to the UK have more than doubled in less

than 10 years. And while overall applications to UK higher education institutions have declined, they have *increased* from the US.

As an independent educational consultant (IEC), you are likely seeing this growing interest in your students wishing to study in the UK. It is at an all-time high in my experience as a UK specialist IEC. By building your knowledge and experience and collaborating with specialists as needed, you can provide your students with the expert guidance they need to maximize these opportunities.

Why Students Love the UK

Top-Tier Education and Prestige

Students want to attend institutions with global prestige, and the UK is home to some of the best

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Maggie Parke, ParkeLife, can be reached at MaggieLParke@gmail.com.

^[1] ThePieNews.com/us-interest-in-study-abroad-spikes-post-election

universities in the world. These universities offer rigorous academic programs with built-in opportunities for study abroad, internships, and industry experience. UK degrees are widely recognized in the US and worldwide, making them a solid choice for any US student looking to stand out.

Focused and Efficient Degree Programs

In Wales, Northern Ireland, and England, undergraduate programs typically last three years, saving students time and money. Master's programs generally take just one year, so students advance quickly and can enter the workforce sooner without sacrificing academic quality. In Scotland, undergraduate degrees are four years, offering breadth and depth of study while allowing for more flexibility in their degree structure.

Unlike US universities, where students take a wide range of courses, UK students specialize in their chosen major from the start. This structure appeals to those who know their career path and do not want to spend extra time and money on unnecessary courses.

However, this approach may not suit everyone. Some students benefit from the flexibility of a liberal arts education, as I did—I started pre-med and left as an English major! We're seeing many students complete their undergraduate studies in the US and then come to the UK for graduate school. Others start their education in the US at a university or community college, finding their focus, and then transfer to a UK institution to complete their degree.

Excellent Student Support

UK universities provide extensive support services for students with learning differences, health issues, and accessibility needs. Disclosing support needs does not impact admissions decisions, and sharing requirements can help the university prepare to support the student individually.

There are also welcome programs for international students that include airport pickup, meet and greets, sessions on how to get a job and open a bank account, and notes on travel to make a smooth transition to studying and living in the UK.

Cost Considerations and Post-Study Work

Degrees in the UK typically range from \$20,000 to \$50,000 per year and are shorter than equivalent US programs. Many UK universities offer GPA-based scholarships, and students are eligible for FAFSA funding. UK healthcare is free for full-time students, and they can work part-time, too. Additionally, the UK's Graduate Route visa allows students to stay up to two years after graduation to gain work experience.

Why IECs Love the UK

The UK application process is straightforward and transparent. This means that when you enter their five choices on the UCAS application (because, yes, you're limited to five), you should already know that they'd likely be accepted to those institutions. That's the best bit; minimal mystery is possible.



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The deadlines match those in the US, for the most part, making it easy to manage both sets of applications simultaneously. However, international students can also apply throughout the spring for consideration in still-open courses, meaning flexibility for seniors who need more (late) options.

Degrees in the UK typically range from \$20,000 to \$50,000 per year and are shorter than equivalent US programs.

The university representatives are transparent, helpful, and not competitive. They're a lovely network that is usually happy to help connect you to someone who can be of assistance.

Partnering with UK Specialists: Elevating Your Business

You don't have to know it all. Collaborating with a UK-focused IEC can elevate your service and add to your company's value. Like working with specialists for arts or sports, you can manage your students' US applications, while the UK specialist oversees the UK admissions process. This brings expert knowledge to your practice, from the UCAS application system to entry requirements, statements, reference coaching, and deadlines. Many specialists will work comprehensively or take on the specific elements the IEC or student needs.

Collaborating with a UK specialist also allows access to their networks.

They've built strong relationships with UK universities, and these connections can benefit your students through access to advice and resources, giving them the edge they need to get into top-tier universities. Also, as many UK universities face funding challenges, working with a specialist can help you navigate this changing landscape. By collaborating with UK-focused IECs, you can position yourself as a go-to consultant for globally minded students in this growing market.

Be Ready to Take on the World

The UK offers students an affordable, world-class education, diverse global perspectives, and excellent professional opportunities. International options may provide a safe haven for some students and subjects, an expedited, focused program for those driven to excel, and an affordable alternative. By collaborating with UK-focused IECs, you can help your students confidently navigate this path, ensuring they choose the right programs and universities and are fully prepared for the challenges ahead. This partnership benefits your students and enhances your services, positioning you as an expert in this growing and increasingly popular field. 🇬🇧

Resources

British Council Training. Free certification course. UK education overview and training for advisors: [BritishCouncil.org/education/education-agents/training-agents](https://britishcouncil.org/education/education-agents/training-agents)

UCAS has many videos, training courses, and a database for course offerings: [UCAS.com](https://ucas.com)

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SAIL is appropriate for students who would benefit from social assistance, transitional support, self-advocacy skills, alternative housing, and who have a primary diagnosis of ASD, anxiety, depression, or self-report a demonstrated need for these support services. The SAIL team includes a Speech Language Pathologist and a Wellness Coordinator, along with Community Directors with specialized training in ASD and students' social, behavioral, and organizational needs.

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Guiding Students in Creating a Stellar Engineering Maker Portfolio

By Vita Cohen, MA, MAT, CEP, IECA Professional (IL) and Jyoti Jain, MBA, IECA Professional (CA)

Having your students submit an Engineering Maker Portfolio is optional, but it is a powerful way to help them differentiate themselves in the increasingly competitive admissions landscape. If they decide to include the portfolio in their application, they should use this opportunity to narrate their engineering journey. This means offering admissions committees a clear and articulate view of what they create, how they approach their projects, and their passion for engineering. Help them create a well-crafted portfolio that highlights their intellectual curiosity, creative problem-solving abilities, technical expertise, and collaboration skills.

Here are some considerations for creating an exceptional Engineering Maker Portfolio.

Tailoring the Portfolio to the Audience

Understanding who will be reviewing the student's portfolio is a crucial first step. Will it be an admissions officer, or will it be faculty or staff within the university's College of Engineering?

If the portfolio will be reviewed by admissions staff—who typically have minimal technical background—students should include relevant technical details but also explain their projects in simple, layperson's terms. Advise them to avoid excessive jargon to ensure their work is accessible to a broader audience. For this group, the emphasis should be on experience, passion, and intellectual growth rather than purely technical aspects. Don't hesitate to highlight initial mistakes or false starts; doing so can underscore the student's resilience and focus.

On the other hand, if expert reviewers, such as MIT's Engineering Advisory Board, will evaluate the portfolio, students should provide detailed technical descriptions. Have them highlight the complexities and technical aspects of their projects to engage these expert reviewers effectively.

By tailoring the portfolio to general and technical audiences, students can ensure that their work is compelling and informative to all reviewers.

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Vita Cohen, Cohen College Consulting, Ltd., can be reached at Vita@CohenCollegeConsulting.com.



Jyoti Jain, Jain College Consulting, can be reached at Jyoti@JainCollegeConsulting.com.

Showcasing Selective Projects

Rather than including every project they have ever worked on, advise your students to focus on a few standout projects. Have them select two or three that cover diverse technical skills and challenges. Choose projects that best showcase their problem-solving abilities, design thinking process, technical skills, and organizational abilities.

Students should highlight how their skills have evolved over time and demonstrate this growth. Recent projects that address more complex challenges and reflect advancements in their technical expertise should be included.

Rather than including every project they have ever worked on, advise your students to focus on a few standout projects.

For collaborative projects, have students clearly define their role and contributions. They should emphasize the soft skills they have developed, such as teamwork and communication, since engineering often relies on effective collaboration. For example, if the student is part of a robotics team, as is common, have them distinguish the overall team objective from their individual contributions. They can talk about the team's overall design and building process while discussing their specific role in the project.

Strategically selecting and presenting projects with this emphasis will effectively showcase students' technical growth, problem-solving capabilities, and often-overlooked collaborative skills.

Showing Rather Than Telling

Encourage your students to make their portfolio more engaging by visually demonstrating their work. Documenting their work throughout the project makes it easier for them to demonstrate the different stages of the process, from conception to the final outcome. Students should include images and visuals of each project at various stages to enhance the portfolio:

- **Initial Concepts:** Sketches or early design drafts
- **Development Stage:** Images of CAD models or prototypes in progress
- **Final Outcome:** Photos or videos of the completed project

Accompanying visuals with brief, insightful text adds context and enhances clarity. Students should address:

- **Project Choice:** Why did they choose this project? What was their motivation?
- **Challenges and Solutions:** What problems did they encounter, and how did they address them?
- **Impact:** What was the overall outcome or impact of the project?

If a student is submitting a research paper abstract or sharing a publication link, advise them to consider creating a video summary. This approach is often more engaging than uploading research papers, and it provides a dynamic way to showcase their findings.





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By visually documenting and contextualizing their projects, students offer admissions committees a clearer view of their design thinking, problem-solving skills, and overall learning experience and intellectual growth.

Choosing the Right Platform

Help your students select the most suitable platform to showcase their projects. They can build a digital portfolio website from scratch or use templates from platforms such as WordPress or Squarespace. Alternatively, they can create videos and PDFs featuring clips, images, and descriptions of their projects and upload them to platforms such as SlideRoom. For example, computer science projects can be showcased on GitHub, where students can manage and share their code effectively.

Optimizing the Reviewer's Experience

Ensure your students are providing a smooth experience for portfolio reviewers by optimizing their content. Students should resize and compress images to fit their chosen template and reduce file size. Tools such as TinyJPG can help compress images without sacrificing quality, preventing long loading times for reviewers and enhancing the overall user experience.

We believe that by following these guidelines, you'll be helping your students create a standout Engineering Maker Portfolio that leaves a lasting impression on their audience, whether layperson or expert. 

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Highland Horizons: Exploring Scotland's Educational Charms at the IECA European Regional Symposium

By Patricia O'Keefe, MBA, CEP, IECA Professional (CA)

Thanks to our volunteers from the Global Committee and the EU Regional Committee, February marked the successful launch of the third annual IECA European Regional Symposium, a dynamic gathering that brought together independent educational consultants (IECs), university representatives, and key stakeholders from across the United Kingdom and the United States. Hosted by the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, the symposium offered a rich blend of academic exploration, professional development, and cultural immersion.

Exploring Scotland's Academic Landscape

The symposium kicked off with a series of comprehensive university tours, giving participants an in-depth look at some of Scotland's most renowned higher educational institutions. Attendees visited the University of Glasgow, University of Edinburgh, University of St. Andrews, University of Stirling, University

of Dundee, the Glasgow School of Art, Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. These tours not only highlighted each institution's unique offerings but also revealed hidden gems, like the vibrant city of Dundee.

A Grand Welcome

The event officially commenced with a cocktail reception at the majestic Glasgow City Chambers, where Counselor Soriya Siddique and Lord Dean Andrew McFarlane warmly welcomed the attendees. Patricia O'Keefe introduced the important role that IECs play internationally, while Leigh Allen II closed the reception with how IECA is committed to strengthening global relations (with a standing ovation no less!). The historic venue set a perfect tone for the days ahead, underscoring Glasgow's commitment to education and community.

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Patricia O'Keefe, Global Elite Scholars, can be reached at Patricia@GlobalEliteScholars.com.

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Diverse and Insightful Sessions

The symposium featured two general sessions and nine breakout sessions, covering a wide array of topics designed to enhance the expertise of IECs. From a primer on navigating Oxbridge applications to strategies for securing academic support for students with learning differences, the sessions catered to both seasoned IECs and newcomers alike. Presentations were delivered by university representatives, experienced IECs, and collaborative panels, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on each subject.



One of the standout discussions addressed the significant differences between IECs and agents. UK universities and the British Council increasingly recognize the objectivity IECs bring to families, valuing their commitment to helping students find the right institutional fit rather than focusing on placement quotas. This growing awareness strengthens partnerships and promotes more transparent counseling practices.



Several sessions highlighted innovative programs and resources now available at UK institutions, empowering IECs to better advocate for students requiring specialized services.

A Strong Showing at the University Fair

The symposium culminated in a vibrant university fair featuring representatives from 56 universities. The fair provided IECs with invaluable networking opportunities and up-to-date information on programs, admissions practices, and student resources. The presence



of IECA leadership underscored the association's commitment to fostering strong global partnerships.

Looking Ahead

The third annual IECA European Regional Symposium not only deepened cross-continental connections but also reaffirmed the shared commitment to student-centered counseling practices. As IECs continue to navigate the complexities of global education, events like these play a crucial role in broadening perspectives, sharing best practices, and ultimately, better serving students and families.



With each passing year, the symposium grows in impact and reach, reflecting the ever-evolving landscape of international education and the vital role IECs play within it. If you have not yet done so, we highly recommend that you apply for the International ("I") designation so that you, too, can be recognized for your expertise in international admissions. 

Become an IECA Professional Member!

Are you a current Associate member, ready to work toward becoming a Professional member, demonstrating your professional mastery and years of experience? Visit link.IECAonline.com/A2P for our tips on how to make this transition. You'll enjoy many additional benefits, including a listing in our online public IEC directory, a subscription to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, access to the Business Growth Institute, and much more!

Contact IECA Membership Manager Caitlin Myers (Caitlin@IECAonline.com) with any questions—we are here to help!



Meet Maeve, a civic engagement advocate who created a space for student discussions over pizza, and Maeve didn't stop there. She's also an Eco Leader, a member of the Student Council, National Honor Society, and Debate & Public Speaking champion – all of which she credits for giving her skills and confidence.

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Why I Belong

Rediscovering My Team with IECA

By Joe Slater, IECA Associate (CA)

For most of my life, I thrived as part of a team. As a college baseball player and coach and later as an athletics administrator at UC Berkeley, my days were filled with collaboration, camaraderie, and the shared pursuit of common goals. When I was offered the opportunity to assist with the admissions process for Cal student-athletes, I discovered a new career path that felt meaningful and fulfilling. Admissions work was unlike anything I had done before, and I loved every moment of it.



When I decided to take the leap and become an independent educational consultant (IEC), I felt fully prepared to guide students through the admissions process. What I wasn't ready for was the business side of running my own practice—and especially the isolation of being on my own for the first time.

I had spent my career immersed in environments where teamwork was the norm. As a coach, I worked to identify and nurture individual strengths within the framework of the entire team. I became attuned to the challenges student-athletes face. Later, as an athletics administrator, I collaborated with a team of 30 within a 400-person department. These experiences gave me a strong foundation in leadership, adaptability, and collaboration—skills I assumed would transfer seamlessly to my new role as an IEC.

What I didn't anticipate was the isolation this work involved. I went from being surrounded by a large, vibrant team to sitting alone in my home office, navigating uncharted territory on my own. Worse, I entered the profession assuming that every business worked like competitive athletics—that every win meant someone else's loss and collaboration was out of the question. It never even occurred to me to reach out to other IECs or ask for help.

For months, I struggled, pouring all my energy into building my practice but finding myself stalled and unsure of how to make it grow. Then one day, I reconnected with a former classmate from the UC College Advising Certificate program. As we caught up, she mentioned she was nearly at full capacity with clients. This stopped me in my tracks. I couldn't imagine how someone in this field—someone like me—could find success so quickly. I asked how she had done it, and her answer surprised me: IECA. She explained how attending regional meetings, networking with other consultants, and building relationships through the organization had transformed her business.

I went home that day and signed up for IECA. My first step was to attend a virtual regional group meeting with IECs in my area. Logging onto the call, I was nervous—I didn't know anyone and worried I was in over my head. Instead, I found a welcoming community of experts eager to share their knowledge and expertise. These meetings quickly became a lifeline, providing practical advice on everything from business strategies to handling tough client situations. Listening to experienced IECs discuss

their challenges and successes made me feel part of something bigger than myself.

In addition to these meetings, I began reaching out to other IECA members individually. I started inviting members to virtual coffee chats, not just to network but to learn. Over countless conversations, I asked how they structured their businesses, where they found clients, and how they navigated the challenges of the profession. Each meeting gave me further insights and helped increase my confidence in my ability to succeed.

This collaboration has become one of the most rewarding aspects of my career.

Later that year, I attended my first IECA conference, and that experience changed everything. Walking into a hall filled with IECs was both inspiring and intimidating. But by the end of the conference, everything had shifted. I met three other IECs who specialized in athletics recruiting, and for the first time, I found myself surrounded by people who truly understood my world. We spent hours sharing ideas, comparing approaches, and brainstorming ways to collaborate. Over the course of the week, we created a detailed plan to work together.

This collaboration has become one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. While we each maintain our own businesses, we've built a shared platform to support other IECA members who want to learn more about working with student-athletes. Together, we started a blog, created several online courses, and developed resources specifically designed to help IECs navigate the complexities of athletic recruiting. We even partner with other members for co-counseling, ensuring that families receive the most specialized support possible.

Our group meets weekly to discuss progress, brainstorm new ideas, and refine our strategies. These meetings have not only strengthened our collaboration but also reignited the sense of camaraderie I missed so much. Being part of this team has helped me rediscover the joy of working with others toward a common goal and reminded me why I loved being part of a team in the first place.

IECA didn't just provide me with professional resources—it gave me back a sense of belonging. It showed me that this profession doesn't have to exist in isolation and that one's success doesn't have to come at the expense of others. Without IECA, I would still be sitting alone in my office, trying to figure things out on my own. Instead, I wake up every day excited to tackle new challenges, knowing I'm part of a team again. IECA turned what had been a solo journey into a collaborative adventure, and for that, I will always be grateful. 

Joe Slater, Slater Admissions Advising, can be reached at Joe@SlaterAdvising.com.

Campus Visits

Visiting and assessing college, school, and program campuses is essential for IECA members to stay informed and provide the best guidance to students. Our organized tours offer valuable opportunities to gain firsthand knowledge while helping Associate members fulfill their campus visit requirements for Professional membership.

IECA provides multiple options for members to participate in campus tours. For the latest tour details, visit link.IECAonline.com/campus-tours.



The **LD/ND Tour in Boston** included visits to Clark University, Curry College, Dean College, Emerson College, Endicott College, Lesley University, Northeastern University, Simmons University, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Wentworth Institute of Technology, Wheaton College, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.



Colleges on our **Nation's Capital College Tour** included American University, Catholic University, George Mason University, George Washington University, Howard University, University of Richmond, University of Virginia, William & Mary, and Virginia Commonwealth University.



For College, School, and Program Representatives

We encourage you to invite IECA members to participate in virtual or in-person tours of your campus! Visit the Admission Representatives page of our website at link.IECAonline.com/connect for details on how you can connect with our members.

The **Pennsylvania College Tour** featured visits to Bryn Mawr College, Bucknell University, Dickinson College, Franklin & Marshall College, Lafayette College, Lehigh University, Muhlenberg College, Pennsylvania State University, and Villanova University.



IECA's College Committee is now in the process of planning a fall tour. More information will be shared this summer.

In the News

Don McMillan (MA) was quoted in “How to Start a British Boarding School on Long Island Without Embarrassing Britain” in the *Wall Street Journal* on March 29.

Terry Mady-Grove (NY) was quoted in “Trump Threatens to Block Harvard from Enrolling International Students” in the *New York Times* on April 17.

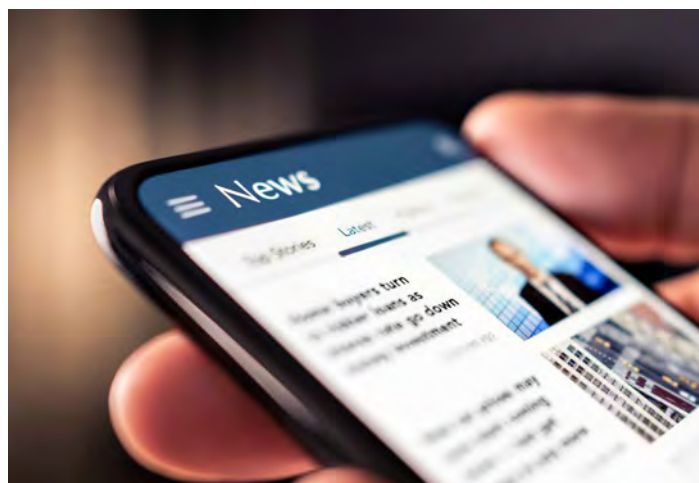
Anjanita Mahadoo (CA) was quoted in “How International Students Can Benefit from a Small-Town College” in *US News & World Report* on April 24.

Bari Norman (NY) was quoted in “Why high school seniors’ ‘rejection cake’ is going viral on TikTok” in *USA Today* on April 25.

Laurie Weingarten (PA) was quoted in “Behind on life’s milestones? Maybe not so much” on *MassMutual.com* on February 11 and “The End-of-School-Year Struggle Is Real—How to Cope” in *Parents* magazine on April 22. She was also interviewed on *NewsNation Live* on March 11 for a segment about academic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic and on April 23 for a segment about the rising cost of college.

Gerene Keesler (Associate, FL) was profiled in the *Tampa Bay Business & Wealth* article “Gerene Keesler fights disabilities by fighting for others” on February 9.

“We Need to Do Something About Student Writing,” authored by **Lisa Libes** (NY), was published on *Minding the Campus: Reforming Our Universities* on March 31.



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

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A Note from a Foundation Board Member

When I joined the IECA Foundation Board of Trustees in 2016, I knew I was adding another layer to my commitment to our profession. What I didn't know then—but has become so apparent to me now—was just how deep that layer would become for me personally. Growing up in a community where 65 percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch (myself included) and where the college-going rate hovered around 50 percent, I had no idea of the impact that access to higher education would have on the trajectory of my life. As an alumnus of the oldest college access program in the United States—College Now Greater Cleveland—I feel truly blessed to be able to pay it forward today by supporting the IECA Foundation with both my time and my contributions to its Annual Fund.



- **Nominate a colleague for the Katz Award**, which recognizes an IECA member's significant charitable volunteer efforts on behalf of a nonprofit organization.
- **Join us at the Foundation's event, "Motown in the Motor City,"** during the IECA Annual Conference in Detroit!
- **Contribute any dollar amount** to the Annual Fund or become a subscriber through our monthly giving program.

As IECA members, we are fortunate to have a philanthropic arm of the Association, which provides an opportunity for us to go beyond our traditional roles as IECs. I hope to see many of you make 2025 the year in which you add "IECA Foundation Supporter" to your list of accomplishments. I can assure you it will be one the most impactful things you do all year.

With gratitude,

Kristina Dooley, CEP
IECA Foundation Board Member & Past President, IECA

My involvement with the Foundation has become one of my proudest accomplishments since becoming an IEC.

My involvement with the Foundation has become one of my proudest accomplishments since becoming an IEC. My one regret is that I was an IECA member for several years before becoming involved with the Foundation. In fact, my knowledge of what the Foundation actually does was minimal, and I had only a superficial understanding of the impact of its grants. This is why I wanted to write this letter to all of you, my IECA colleagues and friends.

My hope is that you will consider supporting the IECA Foundation in one or more of these ways in 2025:

- **Encourage a deserving nonprofit organization to apply for a grant** that aligns with the Foundation's mission: to help underserved students and young adults map pathways to success.



Donate today!



As the philanthropic arm of IECA, the IECA Foundation's mission is to provide grants to nonprofit organizations helping underserved youth and young adults map pathways to success. Each year, this is made possible by the generous contributions of IECA members, donors, and event sponsors. Gifts of all sizes have an incredible impact on the trajectories of the students we serve through our grant recipients.



Introductions

Please Welcome IECA's New Professional Members



Tara Boland (CA), a former Associate member, brings nearly three decades of experience to her work as an IEC. Her background includes roles as a director of admission, high school

placement counselor, English teacher, and marketer. She holds an MA in education from Columbia University, an MA in English from Middlebury College, and an AB from Bowdoin College. Boland attended IECA's 2023 Summer Training Institute and will receive her certificate in independent educational consulting from UC Irvine Extension in spring 2025. She serves as a trustee for the Sterne School.

Tara Boland, MA
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Spruce-Advisors.com
Specialty: S



Nick Chapman (MA), founder of Advance Collegiate, leverages more than 20 years in student consulting to support student-athletes and neurodiverse learners. A leader with

personal experience overcoming dyslexia, Chapman uses authenticity, curiosity, empathy, and accountability to empower students and families. He holds an EdM in education leadership, organizations, and entrepreneurship from Harvard University, a master's in special education from Simmons University, and a BS from the University of New England.

Nick Chapman, EdM
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AdvanceCollegiate.org
Specialties: C, S



Amanda (Mandy) Chiarieri (IL), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for four years. She earned a BBA in marketing and a BA in Spanish from the University of Notre Dame,

holds a certificate in independent educational consulting from UC Irvine Extension, and is a certified life coach. Chiarieri began her career in advertising, but her work as a life coach and extensive volunteer involvement with local foundations led her to transition into career and college admissions counseling. She provides pro bono services through local organizations, ScholarMatch, and Matchlighters, and serves as chair of IECA's Chicago Regional Group.

Mandy Chiarieri
Right Course College Consulting
Glenview, IL 60025
773-294-2598
Amanda@RightCourseCollegeConsulting.com
RightCourseCollegeConsulting.com
Specialty: C



Michelle Duncan (FL), a former Associate member, has been a professional educational advocate and consultant for gifted and neurodiverse students for more than a decade. She holds an

MA from the University of Texas at Austin and has completed COPAA's Special Education Advocacy Training (SEAT) program, the T.W.I.G.S. Advocacy Program, and IECA's 2023 Summer Training Institute. She also holds a certificate in college counseling from UCLA Extension. A member of SACAC, she provides pro bono support to two FGLI students each year.

Michelle Duncan, MA
Reimagined Admissions
Niceville, FL 32578
850-333-2018
Michelle@ReimaginedAdmissions.com
ReimaginedAdmissions.com
Specialty: C



Chelsea Harder (CA), a former Associate member, joined Headed for College in 2017 after serving for 10 years as a director at the UCLA Anderson School of Management. In addition to her role as an

IEC, she has managed university partnerships for Trilogy Education Services, developed pre-college programs with iDTech, and currently works with CollegePlannerPro overseeing member engagement. Harder holds an MEd in postsecondary education administration and student affairs from the University of Southern California, a BA from the University of California San Diego, and a certificate in management from the UCLA Anderson School of Management.

Chelsea Harder, MEd
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Tanya Hunt (NY), a former Associate member, worked in communications, advocacy, and public relations before transitioning to college admissions counseling.

Hunt was elected to the Irvington, New York Board of Education, where she served as president for two years and trustee for one. Hunt holds a BA in telecommunications and German from Indiana University, a master of jurisprudence in health law from Loyola University Chicago School of Law, and a certificate in college counseling from UCLA Extension. An avid community volunteer, she is also a member of NYSACAC.

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Tonica Johnson (CO), a former Associate member, has more than a decade of experience in education as an IEC and a former high school English and college planning teacher. She holds an MEd from

the University of Dayton and undergraduate degrees in secondary education and communication management. A member of RMACAC and College Consultants of Colorado (CCC), she volunteers with Matchlighters, Minds Matter, and Junior Achievement and serves as a board member and head of the Scholarship Committee for CCC.

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Mausami Kakkar (CA), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for four years following a career in tech consulting. She holds an MA in English literature, undergraduate degrees in

arts and education, and a certificate in college admissions consulting from UC Berkeley Extension. A member of NACAC and WACAC, she volunteers as a college coach with ScholarMatch.

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Meghan Moorhouse (VA), a former Associate member, became an IEC after working as a college advisor for the ACCESS College Foundation, where she provided college, financial

aid, and scholarship advising to juniors and seniors, many from military-affiliated families. Moorhouse holds an MS in global and international education from Drexel University and a BA from Boston College. A member of NACAC and PCACAC, Moorhouse volunteers with the Maury High School Boosters and Scouting America.

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Adrienne Spraggins (TN) has 13 years of experience in selective college admissions, including roles as a college admissions counselor and high school college counselor.

She previously served as senior admissions counselor at Vanderbilt University, evaluating thousands of applications and leading recruitment initiatives. Most recently, she counseled students at a selective private school in Nashville. Spraggins earned an MEd in higher education administration from Vanderbilt University and a BS from the University of Delaware. She is also a member of NACAC.

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Tracy Sullivan (MA), a former Associate member, co-founded College 101 Admissions Consultants in 2021 after a career in sales and entrepreneurship. She holds a BS in marketing

from Providence College and an independent educational consultant certificate from UC Irvine Extension. She attended IECA's 2021 Summer Training Institute. She served on Providence College's National Alumni Association for 10 years in addition to other volunteer efforts, and was honored with the 2018 Greater Providence (Mal Brown) Alumni Club's William A. McDonnell Award for Volunteer of the Year for her contributions.

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Stefanie Trachtenberg (TX), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for five years following a 20+ year career as a speech-language pathologist in both public schools and

private practice, and as a clinical educator at the University of Houston. She holds a BS in communication sciences and disorders from the University of Texas at Austin, an MA from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and an independent educational consultant certificate from UC Irvine Extension. She is a member of NACAC, TACAC, and ASHA.

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continued on page 32



Josephine Vonarburg (NJ), a former Associate member, transitioned to independent educational consulting after 15 years as a learning disability specialist at the Regional Center for Students with

Learning Disabilities at Fairleigh Dickinson University. She holds an MEd from Boston University, a BS from Georgetown University, and an independent educational consultant certificate from UC Irvine Extension. Vonarburg attended IECA's 2020 Summer Training Institute. A member of NJACAC, she volunteers with the IECA College Conversations In Focus: LD/ND group and serves on IECA's LD/ND Committee.

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Jessica White (MS), a former Associate member, is passionate about education and holds degrees from the University of Southern California, Johns Hopkins University, and Vanderbilt

University. She began her career with the New Teacher Project and AmeriCorps and has since guided thousands of students nationwide. Passionate about equity and access, she supports students of all backgrounds in K-12, university, and graduate-level admissions.

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Kathleen (Kate) Woessner (CO) has spent 10 years in college admissions counseling, working both as an IEC and as a high school college counselor, following a career in

marketing in the medical device industry. She holds an MBA from Cornell University, a BA from Williams College, and a college admissions consulting certificate from UC Berkeley Extension. She is a member of NACAC, RMACAC, and College Consultants of Colorado.

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Haze Zhou (ME), a former Associate member, has nearly 20 years of experience in education in both China and the United States. She has held roles in teaching, admissions, and administrative

leadership at multiple boarding schools, including serving as director of international admissions. As an IEC, she specializes in college and boarding school admissions, guiding students from Asia and the US through the application process. Zhou also consults for multiple independent schools related to their international relationships, marketing, and enrollment. Originally from Kunming, China, she now resides in Maine.

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Follow IECA on Social Media!

Connect with IECA on LinkedIn (@IECA Independent Educational Consultants Association), Facebook (@IECA--Independent Educational Consultants Association) and Instagram (@iecaheadquarters).



Have you checked out the IECA blog lately?

Recent posts include:

- Message from the IECA President on Staffing Reductions at the Department of Education
- The ED for the IEC: Understanding the Federal Government's Role in Education

Visit link.IECAonline.com/blog to see these and other posts.

Spotlight on the New England Regional Group

By Jennifer Carberry, IECA Associate (MA)

The New England Regional Group has been busy building momentum and connection through a great mix of regular meetings, local college visits, and chances to just mingle and talk shop. We meet virtually on the first Tuesday of every month, and each meeting brings fresh perspectives, helpful updates, and a real sense of community among independent educational consultants (IECs) in our region.

In addition to our monthly meetings, we host casual networking “mingles” around the region where members can catch up, swap stories, and share ideas in a relaxed setting. These have quickly become a highlight—who doesn’t love mixing a little fun into professional development?

We’ve also made time to get out and visit local campuses together. Touring colleges and hearing directly from admissions reps helps keep us sharp and informed to better support the students and families we work with. Recent highlights include tours at UCONN, Eastern Connecticut College, and Bryant University, providing insightful presentations from college reps and the kind of on-the-ground access that brings a campus to life.

As we look ahead, we’re excited to keep the energy going—more tours, more learning, more laughter. The New England Regional Group is all about showing up for each other, growing together, and staying on top of a changing admissions landscape. Here’s to another great year!



On February 25, the IECA New England Regional Group toured UConn and Eastern Connecticut State University, gaining valuable insights and having fun along the way.

Connect with Colleagues Living in Your Area

IECA’s member-led Regional Groups are formed based on your geographic location so you can network with fellow IECA members living close to you. Some groups meet in person and others meet virtually—and some do both!

To get involved with an existing group, join their community on the Member Network: network.IECAonline.com/communities/RegionalGroups

To start a group in your area, complete the “Request New Regional Group” form on our website: link.IECAonline.com/Regional



On December 11, 2024, members of the Georgia Regional Group met up to celebrate, commiserate, and spend time getting to know one another over lunch.



Members of the Arizona Regional Group met up at a Colorado College counselor breakfast on February 28. As Kate Bittner said, “It’s always nice to connect with colleagues when we can!”



The Orange County, California Regional Group enjoyed a holiday get-together in December, graciously hosted by Patricia O’Keefe. They went on to hold virtual meetings with representatives of Roger Williams University and Belmont University in January and February, respectively.

Spotlight on the AANHPI Affinity Group

By Gina Lee, IECA Professional (CA) and Justin Wang, MA, MBA, IECA Associate (CA)

While we officially founded the Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) Affinity Group in August 2024, we first met in person as a group at the IECA 2024 Annual Conference in Connecticut. This Affinity Group is for independent educational consultants (IECs) of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander heritage or who identify as AANHPI. Our purpose is to provide a safe space for AANHPI IECs to share, encourage, and support each other. We also aim to be a resource in the future for all IECs since so many work with AANHPI students by informing and discussing issues that affect AANHPI students and families.

The group continues to gain momentum, with new members joining us at our recurring meetings held on the second Monday of each month. Our meetings have featured admissions officers presenting information on their respective schools with the AANHPI students in mind. We also have members share tips, problem-solving, or fresh perspectives, with members

volunteering to be in the “hot seat” to share their pain points with the group. We always leave feeling more understood, encouraged, and equipped with new ideas after our meetings.

Our purpose is to provide a safe space for AANHPI IECs to share, encourage, and support each other.

We are excited to grow stronger together and impact the greater IECA community while we find time to take care of ourselves and laugh, too.

We are honored and proud to co-chair this Affinity Group, which is full of amazing IECs! We invite all AANHPI-identifying IECs to sign up for our group and join our next meeting. 



Gina Lee, Gina B. Lee Consulting, can be reached at Gina@GinaBLee.com.



Justin Wang, Trifecta Education Associates LLC, can be reached at Justin@TrifectaEd.com.

Connect with Your Colleagues in an Affinity Group

IECA Affinity Groups are run by IECA members with similar interests in a specific topic. Joining an Affinity Group is a great way to meet colleagues and network around what's important to you. We currently have 35 groups—and new members and groups are always welcome!

To get involved with an existing group, join their community on the Member Network: network.IECAonline.com/communities/AffinityGroups

To start a new Affinity Group, complete the “Request New Affinity Group” form on our website: link.IECAonline.com/Affinity

Current groups include:

Asian American Native
Hawaiian Pacific Islanders
(AANHPI)
BestNotes Users
Black IECs
Cialfo Users
College Affordability
Consultants with Young
Children
Day School Consulting
Former School-Based
Counselors

Gap Year Information &
Resources
GuidedPath Users
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Student-Athletes
IECs Serving Families of Active
Christian Faith
IECs Who Give Back

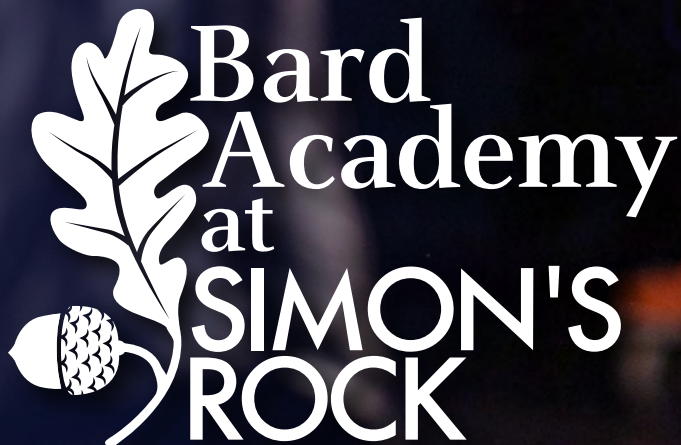
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Large IEC Business
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LGBTQIA2S+ & Allies
Medium-Sized IEC Practice
Military-Affiliated Students &
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Rural/Small Town Students
Solopreneur

Supporting Students Crossing
Borders
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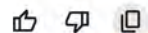
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- Emotional Connection with the Reader: **Okay**
- Maturity of Thought: **Excellent**
- Pleasurable Read with a Satisfying End: **Excellent**
- Authenticity of Voice: **Excellent**
- Narrative Cohesion: **Excellent**
- Sophisticated Writing: **Okay**

Instant evaluation

"the biggest soccer tournament in the country, the MLS Next Showcase."

You could cut this sentence out or condense it a bit. It feels a bit specific for the overall theme of community and sacrifice. Instead, maybe focus on a moment that made you realize the support of your teammates or how that journey impacted your personal growth.



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