



**Notes from a College Planning with Dr. Elizabeth Stone
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Opening Comments

- There is a college for everyone.
- Look broadly and be open-minded.
- You can get a great education at any college.
- Your goal is to find the right fit at an affordable price.
- For the most part we are very lucky in this country because we have a lot of schools and most of them are very good. Most schools haven't been around for 100+ years without being good.

Testing

Two Options

1. Take tests and submit scores.
 - a. Two tests. ACT and SAT. Like Coke and Pepsi. Very similar. Trying to get you to buy their product.
 - b. Do I need to take both? Which one is better for me? Colleges accept either one. They don't care. They believe both tests give them the information they need. Both are supposed to show if you will do well in freshman year.
 - c. You can petition through your school to get accommodations for standardized tests if you've got accommodations during regular school. But the accommodations are different.
 - i. SAT time accommodation is time and half per section.
 - ii. ACT is time and half for the whole thing. Unstructured.
 - d. How do you choose?
 - i. Take a full-length practice test of each. Not a hybrid. (Some testing companies offer a hybrid but this is like pouring the Coke and Pepsi together and trying to decide which taste you prefer.)
 - ii. Think about how you and your student feel about the structured vs. unstructured time.

- iii. Make sure whomever is helping your student with prep knows what accommodations are being offered.
 - e. Decide on one test and focus on it.
 - f. Typically, students take these tests 2 or 3 times because they do get stronger. Usually twice in junior year and one in senior year unless they've achieved the score they want. Not too far apart.
 - g. Getting a handle early on helps you know how close you are to the scores you need for the schools you want.
 - h. How much prep?
 - i. Everyone needs some prep.
 - ii. Without prep it can be a much more anxiety producing experience. It is best to know what's coming.
 - i. Colleges always take the highest score. Some even do "super scoring" which means they take the best score from each section even if those scores were earned on different test days. Schools select what is best for you.
 - j. How do you get accommodations? Register. Apply through school. Test company decides. However, if you are getting accommodations during school you should get them from the testing company.
- 2. Test optional schools.
 - a. These school say: send us your scores if you think they help you.
 - b. However, know many students won't get scholarships without sending the scores.
 - c. This choice does put pressure on students to decide if they should send or not.
- 3. Very few schools don't take test scores and we aren't talking about them because they are outliers.
- Deciding where to apply.
 - Assess where you are.
 - What is your GPA?
 - How are your scores?
 - Remember: most colleges are not seeing senior year grades.

Visiting

1. **Right now** take students to local colleges. We have plenty of representatives here. Take them to campuses to do what they want to do – go to sports competition, see a drama production, eat there, visit the library. Give them a sense of what college is. So much is free.
2. 2nd semester of sophomore year is a good time to start taking college tours here. Santa Clara is always a great tour because it includes a student panel.
3. By taking tours locally your student can start to decide: Big school vs. small school? Single gender? Residential vs commuter?
4. On the tours, you don't have to ask questions. You can just listen to others' question. Then make a list of questions you heard that you thought were important to you.
5. After local visits...look at transcript and scores and start to craft your list.
6. When you are ready to visit colleges for real, visit the resource center. Look at

- a. Where is it?
- b. Is it out in the open?
- c. Is it will staffed and resourced?
- d. There are colleges where if you need more support (especially with executive function) it is fee-based.
- e. A school doesn't have to market itself as good with support to have a good support program. Some schools simply offer support to everyone.

- Apply to no more than 10 schools.
- There are no back-up schools. A back-up schools sounds like one you don't want to go to. ONLY apply to schools you want to go to.

Essay

- Can be very stressful.
- While you want to start early you can't start too early because you aren't developed as a person and you don't have the prompt.
- The essay is hard because we don't do a lot of teaching on it. It is like telling a story to a really good friend. Many of us aren't comfortable talking about ourselves.
- It is not what you write that is really important. It is what the person infers about you from what you write. For the most part, the topic doesn't really matter. What matters is what your essay says about you.
- Purpose of the college essay to help the school extrapolate something about you.
- They are looking for mature, self-reliant, independent thinkers and problem solvers.
- Don't write about yourself in 7th grade.
- Don't write about politics and controversial topics. Reader might be too absorbed in the topic to look at what you are as a person.

Questions from the Group

- Is there any school you should not tell you are dyslexic? No never. It can help illuminate your course decisions. However, if your profile says you can succeed – don't tell them how much you struggle.
- What type of accommodations can we expect on the standardized tests?
 - You can send your 504 in advance to preview what might be given.
 - Time
 - Reader
 - Computer for essay
 - You can appeal. But start early.
- Question about applying to schools in the UK.
 - Central application
 - Test scores more important because they don't understand our curriculum
 - Canada looks at 11th and 12th
 - Each country slightly different
 - No 504 plans in other countries. Do have learning support.

At the beginning of the session, the audience was asked to share what questions they hoped would be covered. Their replies:

- What questions should we be asking our child to help them think about what they want in a college experience?
- Parent role vs. child role during the college application process especially for LD kids
- SAT vs. ACT How are they different? And which is better?
- Are there colleges that are more accommodating to LD students?
- During the college application process, is it different for LD kids? How do they identify themselves? Should they?
- Ed Psych reports: do we need them? Which parts?
- Number of schools to apply?
- Services (reasonable accommodations) in college – especially medication – how

Notes recorded by the Charles Armstrong School Alumni office for our alumni and their families.