

## Twelve Key Ways Independent Educational Consultants Support College-Bound Students

Families engage independent educational consultants because they are:

- 1. Available.** Consultants aren't tied to a school, a school district, or a school calendar. They work with students in the immediate neighborhood or across the world thanks to readily available technology. Not surprisingly, consultants do much of their most important work over the summer months getting seniors ready for the admissions process, and many work long weekend and evening hours—after team practice or between dinner and homework.
- 2. Responsive.** It's part of the business model. Consultants have to respond promptly to emails, phone calls and other forms of inquiry or they're quickly out of business (*see 12 below*). Deadlines are everything in the world of college admissions and no one is more aware of time constraints and the need for immediacy than independent educational consultants.
- 3. Knowledgeable.** Consultants spend significant time visiting college campuses and attending professional workshops, conferences, or college fairs. It's no secret that colleges have different personalities and management practices. But it's virtually impossible to get a feel for these personalities or keep up with changes in programs and facilities without visiting on a regular basis. Yes, it's expensive and time-consuming, but the best consultants devote as much as 20 percent of their time being the eyes and ears of the families they serve.
- 4. Credentialed.** Reputable IECs maintain memberships in organizations such as the Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA), the Higher Education Consultants Association, (HECA), NACAC or local NACAC affiliates—each of which sets individual membership requirements demanding years of specialized experience, education and training, and a firm commitment to continuing education.
- 5. Specialized.** One size seldom fits all, and IECs work hard to provide personal services tailored to meet the individual needs of students and their families. In fact, an increasing number of consulting practices are venturing into areas of specialization that include working with learning differences (LD), athletes, artistically talented students, or international families. There's not a computer program or algorithm in the universe that could ever hope to successfully sort out the very human personalities, interests and needs IECs routinely encounter. And it's often the personal interaction and specialized knowledge that succeed where scattergrams fail.
- 6. Unbiased.** Because they voluntarily agree to decline any and all offers of compensation from schools, programs or companies in exchange for placement or referral, IECs are able to maintain independence and offer truly unbiased opinions and recommendations. They are free to compare and contrast various educational opportunities and programs, so as to offer their families the best possible professional advice.
- 7. Local.** Most IECs work locally with students in their surrounding communities. They are familiar with individual school district policies and the administrative quirks of local high schools. They know course sequences (which vary from district to district) and how to find classes or programs that may not be available within a student's high school. Sometimes they know teachers and school counselors and can help students make course selections based on experience with a particular high school. While the Internet is fine for some kinds of advising, the face-to-face *mentoring services* offered by IECs are often the most valued by students and their families.
- 8. Ethical.** As members of the above-mentioned organizations, IECs must adhere to NACAC's Statement of Principles of Good Practice (SPGP), which governs the actions of consultants in their relationships with students and families, schools and colleges, and with colleagues.
- 9. Supportive.** IECs provide the buffer between an increasingly stressful process and families trying to sort out the shifting sands of college admissions. Changes in policies and procedures together with unpredictable outcomes inevitably produce anxiety. IECs are sensitive to their role in the process and commit to helping reduce stress for students and their families. There are no "best" colleges—only "best fit" colleges in the world

of highly-skilled and knowledgeable IECs.

10. **Connected.** IECs seek out businesses and colleagues who provide additional services needed by college-bound high schools students and their families. They often know the best tutors in the hardest subjects and can recommend test prep companies with solid track records of success.

11. **Committed.** The best consultants are committed to the idea of college access for all—regardless of background, race, or income. And most provide *pro bono* services to low-income families or they serve in volunteer programs designed to raise awareness of college and [financial aid opportunities](#). Educational consultants support their communities and provide behind-the-scenes services most of which you'll never read about in the popular press.

12. **Parent-recommended.** Anyone in the consulting business will tell you no amount of marketing ever brings in as many clients as simple word-of-mouth. Informal surveys of IECs suggest that as many as 90 percent of families seeking college consulting services are referred by other families. The best IECs are well-known in the community and respected for the services they provide. It's as simple as that.

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