



UNIVERSITY CONSULTANTS OF AMERICA

## COLLEGE ADMISSIONS CONSULTING: A NEW BENEFIT

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There's an important benefit available that can give a competitive advantage to brokers and businesses alike: college admissions consulting. Although this service has historically been provided through a cottage industry, today there are a few consulting firms able to give top-quality work on a scale large enough to help thousands of students.

Parents plan and save for college expenses, but when the time comes for their children to apply to college, they are largely helpless. The selection process is extremely competitive, and what the colleges demand in their applications changes every year. Most parents find that high school counselors are either uninformed or too busy to help their children. Few parents have expertise or experience in today's college application process, and misinformation and misdirection can destroy the hopes of even the finest students. As a result, parental anxiety about how to help their children succeed is extraordinarily high.

Yet it is possible to help families achieve their educational goals. Businesses that provide college admissions assistance as a benefit or at a discount to their executives and employees can enhance family futures. Because few businesses offer such programs, the savvy

employer can give itself a market advantage and engender loyalty among its people. Moreover, because so many international executives and students often desire an American education and the career and life opportunities available in our land of freedom, multinational companies can lure top talent with the promise of helping their children in this unique way.

### *What exactly do college consultants do?*

Colleges require not only that applicants provide grades and test scores, but also that they write multiple essays and submit to personal interviews. A high-quality college consulting company will do much more than merely suggest schools or edit papers that students write on their own. In selecting a company to provide services for executives and employees, there are several factors to consider:

### *Can they handle the work?*

The vast majority of consultants are sole proprietors or very small companies. Given that the maximum that any one consultant can service is 30 to 50 students per year, only a few companies can handle college advising on the benefit level. For the broker, this means that college consulting is a new kind of benefit not heretofore available.

*Are their people professionals?*

Many “college consultants” are actually graduate students looking to make extra money by editing papers. Checking grammar and suggesting a few word changes does not add significant value to an applicant’s work. Professional copy writers and editors assist with all aspects of the writing process, from identifying a compelling concept, to organizing the ideas, to drafting and final editing. To do this effectively, this requires more than just knowledge of grammar and style. Consultants must possess a deep understanding of the college admissions process and of the grading rubrics used by selective schools. If a consulting firm cannot deeply and clearly explain the college admissions criteria, look elsewhere; their work will likely be of limited utility to the ultimate goal of attaining an offer of admission.

*Do they offer realistic interview preparation?*

A significant differentiator for highly-selective colleges and graduate schools is the admissions interview. Many services do not provide in-depth interview preparation, and when they do, the mock interview is usually not a realistic test run. Answering questions from the same person with whom a student has been working does not simulate the dissociation, anxiety and pressure of an admissions interview. For the most realistic practice possible, a quality consulting company will teach the purposes and techniques of admissions interviews; train and polish its students; and conduct a mock

interview with a person whom the student does not know.

*Do they help develop a coherent overall strategy?*

Although the essays are written separately, a college application is read by admissions representatives in one sitting. The pieces are not evaluated separately. When the “read” is complete, admissions reps grade each student and write a brief synopsis of their impressions. As such, an application should be considered as a single work, not as an amalgamation of disparate parts. Students should know how they want to be remembered after their applications are read, because that’s when the decision to “buy” is made. Thus, they need to understand how to market and present themselves via the application. It’s more of an infomercial than a decathlon, so applicants need a coherent strategy. Good college consultants begin their work by helping students analyze and understand their relative strengths. Next, the consultant should assist in developing an overall marketing pitch – a personal thesis of sorts – and then help the applicant lay out his or her achievements and attributes in the parts of the application that “sell” the student best.

*Do they recommend schools that fit the student?*

There’s a lot of talk about college “fit,” but the information available to parents is mainly marketing by the colleges and unreliable word-of-mouth. Moreover, it’s an impossible and overwhelming task for parents to understand



“what’s out there.” They usually know about local and State universities, and about highly selective colleges like those in the Ivy League, but not about the thousands of options available. A good college consultant will help families find colleges that inspire their students, that provide a learning environment that matches the students’ learning preferences, and that have a fair cost and good return-on-investment. The “money issue” requires an understanding of financial aid, scholarships and grants; of the car-dealer pricing tactics of many universities; of the ability to negotiate with a college over price (yes, some universities do negotiate!); and of the likelihood of on-time graduation. Unfortunately, the vast majority of colleges lead their students to on-time graduation at a miserable rate, often dramatically less than 50%. Finding the right fit cannot be accomplished instantaneously, so look for a consulting company that spends several hours working with its students before making recommendations. To fit a student and a college together, one must understand the qualities of both the college and the student.

Imagine yourself in the position of a parent of a high school junior, knowing that college applications will be required sometime soon, but not knowing when the applications should be filed, what is required in the applications, what you must have the high school and testing companies send, or even what college options are available or what it will cost you. It’s not hard to understand why offering

college admissions consulting as a benefit or service is an easy sell.

Yet how should you sell it? The value of college counseling is quickly recognized when it is explained verbally. Through seminars and webinars, people instantly feel relief and renewed hope for their children. Bringing like-minded people together – for example, professional or trade associations – allows for interaction and increased “buzz.” Simply get them to hear the message; they’ll grasp it firmly.

Because education is such an important topic, drawing people to webinars and seminars is both high-yield and low cost. E-mail and digital invitations are extremely effective at directing potential clients to information sessions. Because there are not a lot of printed materials, there are not a lot of out-of-pocket costs. Some consulting companies will even provide templates for internet landing pages that can be tailored for associations, companies and brokers.

Yes, there’s a new game in town, and it’s all about helping future generations achieve greatness. Consider whether college admissions consulting is the kind of service that your executives, employees and clients might really need.

