

INTRODUCTION

From Jill Madenberg

More often than not, people contact me in a mild state of panic. “My daughter is a high school junior and we have no idea what to do about college.” “Should my son stay in his AP class and get Bs or go into a regular class and get As?” “My daughter bombed the SAT three times; should we try again or jump to the ACT?”

When students enter high school, it does not take long for them to start thinking about college. Which courses should I take? Am I getting involved in the right activities? Will I have the grades and test scores to be *Accepted* at College X? Students hear things about the college process—some accurate and some not—from their teachers, friends, counselors, and parents, and this often results in a growing sense of pressure and stress about their unknown future. Unfortunately, this anxiety among students and their parents can spoil a process that can (and should) be an exciting, eye-opening, and wonderful one.

In almost 25 years of experience as a high school guidance counselor, a college admissions staff member, and a private college counselor, I have noted the kinds of things that make the college process productive, successful, and enjoyable. While it can be a daunting and challenging process, it does not need to be too scary or overly stressful. I have worked with so many students who have blossomed in part due to their college search and application

LOVE THE JOURNEY TO COLLEGE

process. It can be a period of maturation and of self-exploration, with an honest assessment of skills and interests, development of task organization and discipline, renewed intrafamily communication, and travel to interesting cities and small college towns. I firmly believe when the journey to college is fully embraced, it can truly be loved.

The idea of writing this book actually came from the student with whom I had the most fun and meaningful college search and application experience; the one for whom all of my prior knowledge and experience crystalized into the most amazing journey—my daughter, Amanda. When she said, “Mom, we should write a book about this,” I never doubted that she had the ability, creativity, and tenacity to make this project a reality. On the pages that follow, as I give advice about the various aspects of the process, Amanda comments throughout and shares her own perspective as a student and daughter. Our intention with this joint format is to provide a useful guide both for parents and students.

We are so excited to share our tips and strategies, our attitudes and experiences, with the hope that they will help calm your nerves and help you enjoy your journey as much as we enjoyed ours.

From Amanda Madenberg

From the moment I walked into high school, I was surrounded by college-talk—fueled by teachers, coaches, friends, and peers. It can actually be pretty easy to fall into the trap: getting wrapped up in rumors, grade-sharing, and the competitive outlook that can permeate student life. It was not until I matured throughout the past few years that I was able to (almost fully) accept the occasional low test grade and recognize what I could do to manage my own stress regarding college admissions.

Of course, college-talk has been a part of my own life for as long as I can remember. Professionally, my mom is an Independent

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Educational Consultant, which means she helps students with the college process. I've always enjoyed watching my mom in action. When I was a little girl, I would sit in her office when she met with the "big kids" and helped them with essays and applications. She spends hours making lists of potential schools for each client, she talks and Skypes with them about what classes to take, or why they should ask one teacher over another for a letter of recommendation, or why they should consider a certain school again. A huge (and fun) aspect of being the daughter of a college counselor were the many college visits I took even prior to high school. Family road trips have always included stops at one or two colleges on the way. I loved to watch my mom approach college students and ask them about their experiences, come back to the car, and explain how wonderful the campus personality is.

However, it wasn't until my own college journey that I could fully appreciate my mom's approach to the application process: an emphasis on the journey—not the destination. My mom tackles her job with a smile, a breath of fresh air, and love. She has helped hundreds of families conquer an experience that they will remember for the rest of their lives, and she often becomes so deeply invested in those students that they keep in touch years later. I so greatly admire her dedication and passion to her work, and hope that one day I will love my professional field half as much as she does.

I've always loved to write. When I was in elementary school and first learned to write memoirs, I found that I loved sharing stories through words with others. Naturally, a dream I have always had is to write a book. During my senior year of high school, I was reflecting on my college process and how much I was going to miss it (weird as it sounds). So, I asked my mom if we could write a book on the process in an attempt to help other people have similar experiences. I hope you find my mom as helpful and this process as enjoyable as I did. Good luck!