



## **College Planning Strategies, Inc.**

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### **“The Six Opinions that Actually Matter While Your Child Prepares for the College Years”**

Dear Parent:

Happy New Year!

We trust that you and your family enjoyed a wonderful holiday season and that the transition back to school and work is progressing smoothly. We’ve reached the mental mid-point of the academic year, even if the chronological mid-point arrives later. It’s a good time to review how things have transpired during the 2016/2017 academic year.

Preparing for college/university studies is, in many ways, highly competitive. A simple, recognizable fact – the admission process for better institutions and programs is competitive because there will always be more applicants than available slots. As a result, the preparation and application process often can seem unpleasant.

The fact that we may not appreciate the tone of the process does not mean it will magically disappear. Rather, it means there will be no shortage of opinions, judgments, and comments – some quite valuable, some snarky and mean-spirited, some essentially worthless, and some well-intended but harmful – during the lengthy and involved preparation and application process.

Because there is no shortage of input and opinions, parents and college-bound students must determine specifically whose input and opinions matter most...and focus attention and effort exclusively on them. A family that can focus sharply on the voices that truly will help them identify and access the best higher education options for their particular situation will be much better served throughout their college planning campaign.

We see families, time and time again, succumb to this inherent danger and fall prey to a cacophony of voices offering input and opinion about the academic future of their college-bound high school student. Unfortunately, it seems this danger runs rampant throughout almost every high school in America.

This month, we're focusing on the "short list" of people/groups whose thoughts about the preparation and application process actually matter, to one degree or another. Sure, your student may have a few additional people whose opinions matter, as they should; but, there absolutely is no need to take advice from the "peanut gallery."

As always (and as will be discussed below), if you are interested in more personalized suggestions, please feel free to contact us. As college planning professionals, we are uniquely qualified to assist in your college planning campaign.

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Perhaps the most important advice for parents from the outset is to (1) use common sense and (2) ignore the "peanut gallery" mentioned above. While the outcome may be rather public, the college application process is personal. Understand always that the opinions of other parents or students will be of little value to your family and your student in the long run. Focus always on the long run - not on trying to impress the people whose opinions ultimately do not matter!

Some of the people whose opinions will matter, to one degree or another, include:

### **1) The Teachers**

Depending on the teacher, this may be a double-edged sword. The opinions of high school teachers must be considered for two reasons: first, they issue the grades comprising the grade point average and, second, they typically write letters of recommendation required as part of the application process. Excellent teachers, providing excellent and purposeful letters of recommendation, are a godsend to any college-bound student's applications. On the other hand, unprofessional teachers tend to make the process significantly more challenging than necessary.

Nevertheless, students preparing for higher education should seek out the best high school teachers, maintaining cordial, appropriate relationships in all of their classes, no matter who the teacher might be. Students who can manage this generally will be able to tell which teachers have their best interests at heart, and seek out appropriate advice from them.

### **2) The Advisors**

A number of different people will serve as advisors in some capacity during the high school years. There will be guidance counselors, academic advisors, club advisors, athletic coaches, artistic directors, and others involved in extracurricular activities. Moreover, other potential advisors arise through such organizations as service clubs, scouting troops, church groups, and other activities found outside the high school arena.

Usually, it's best to pick a few particular advisors to assist with the college admissions process. While many schools automatically will have the guidance counselor assist with the process, having a few advisors from extracurricular activities can be of great worth in offering input and support during your college planning campaign.

### **3) The Student (!)**

Sadly, the interests, goals, and overall desires of the student often are completely overshadowed by parental enthusiasm throughout the campaign. It's important to remember that your student will have the best opportunity to succeed if he or she is in a situation where he or she is excited and motivated to study.

While parental input is of utmost importance, the opinions of the student must be respected. Certainly the college planning campaign is a team effort; but, over the long-term, your student will be the one who studies and progresses toward his or her goals. Please keep this in mind.

### **4) The Mentor(s)**

While it may not be easy for students to find mentors in their areas of interest, especially if those areas do not dovetail with the professional capacities of their parents or relatives, it is our experience that those students who willingly "put their best foot forward" (and perform some volunteer work or seek out a summer internship during high school) often will be able to find supportive mentors for their academic and career goals.

Such opportunities might be listed online, in newspapers, or through school offices and clubs...but, sometimes it's as simple as calling or emailing a business, hospital, or other institutions and asking. Many young people have been able to meet and work with influential mentors in all sorts of fields just by having the gumption to ask.

### **5) The Admissions Officials**

Those with the most pull in the college/university admissions process are the admissions officers at each particular institution. Their opinion regarding an application will matter the most. Take their published and posted information – areas of emphasis, deadlines, rules, etc. – seriously. Understand that different institutions have different admissions officers and personnel with different requirements or areas of focus. And, certainly, should you ever interact with them, treat them with friendliness and respect.

### **6) The College Funding/Admissions Advisors**

Naturally, we must include ourselves and remind you about what we do and how we can assist with the process. We are wholly invested in the success of the families and students with whom we work. We are professionals focused both on helping students gain admission to the best college/university for them and also on helping families manage the financial aspects of making that a reality.

We have no interest in:

- Spreading misinformation – we know what needs to be done and when.
- Making any student feel "less than" when compared to another – we maintain confidentiality, working with each family's specific circumstances.
- Undermining the student's best efforts – we provide assistance on the pathway to achieving academic goals.

Quite simply, we are here to assist students and parents in creating the best academic and professional future possible. If we can be of any help in that regard, please do not hesitate to give us a call.

Throughout this newsletter, we diplomatically avoided describing those people who comprise the “peanut gallery.” However, with time, it becomes fairly obvious that MOST people should be included!

If a neighbor, relative, acquaintance, or other parent looks down his or her nose at a student for attending College X instead of College Y, but the student excels in a happy and successful career in his or her field of choice, then honestly...who was in the wrong?

The peanut gallery, of course!

By the same token, if someone gives application or financial information that is incorrect, whether purposefully or as an honest mistake...who pays the price?

The student and his/her family will.

Let us be clear – we always will aim to help our students find the best path to happiness and success in their higher education. Further, we hope we can encourage both parents and their children to keep their focus on the opinions of the small group of people who really matter.

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If you and your student are willing to take the steps necessary to organize yourselves in preparation for your student’s future undergraduate experience, you often will find yourselves much more successful in your endeavors than those who do not. As your students approach the application process, we have a number of services available to help them select schools for which they are ideally suited, as well as assist them in organizing and managing the entire process from application to admission letter.

As a part of our long-standing educational effort, we occasionally offer live college funding workshops for the parents of tomorrow’s college students, helping them prepare for future higher education costs. Much more often, we schedule one-on-one meetings with parents during the week.

We never charge an admission fee to the workshops, nor do we charge a fee for the one-on-one meetings, but workshop space limitations and presentation quality dictate that we must require an advance reservation.

To schedule your family’s free, no-obligation evaluation, simply:

- contact our office by phone at (317) 536-1391;
- visit our website ([www.collegeplanningstrategiestoday.com](http://www.collegeplanningstrategiestoday.com)); or,
- email us at [info@collegeplanningstrategiestoday.com](mailto:info@collegeplanningstrategiestoday.com).

Until next month,

*John M. Baird*

John M. Baird, JD  
President

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