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Grow with us

Issue 2, 2015

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Teens are feeling pressure to get on the college track sooner than ever. Academics and activities as early as freshman year can bear weight on a college application, but it's hard to know where to start when the next four years will offer so many new opportunities and experiences.



Academics should be the focus early on in the process, says Nate Crozier, director of admission for the University of Richmond in Virginia. Admission committees look at the variety and difficulty of high school coursework when evaluating applications, and make sure that students have taken the required number of classes in core subjects like English, math, science, social studies and foreign language.

College admission committees also want to know what extracurricular activities a student has been involved in, but Crozier stresses that it's more about quality than quantity.

"It's not about checking off specific sports, political involvement and volunteer work," Crozier says. "It's more important to discover where your interests lie, then take those interests to a new level. Admission committees like to see that you've taken on increased responsibility, such as leadership roles, know how to interact and collaborate with others, and that you possess the time management skills necessary to balance extracurricular involvement with academics."

Self-preparation is only one piece of the puzzle, however. Before the application process starts, students have to get to know their options – a big task considering that there are thousands of U.S. colleges and universities. The trick, Crozier says, is to organize information as it comes in.

"You want to get ahead of the wave of information," Crozier says. "Use a spreadsheet or come up with some other system to collect all the data points and transform them into information that's digestible and relatable on a personal level."

Even with a good system, the college prep process can become really time consuming during junior and senior years, Crozier says, so he suggests that families set aside time for weekly check-ins to discuss tasks that need attention and to schedule campus visits. That way, everyone is on the same page and the college search process doesn't become overwhelming.

A lot of factors play into narrowing down schools to visit and apply to, but Crozier says the most important thing is for students to recognize their own passions and strengths.

"The college search process is very much about self-discovery," Crozier says. "Students have so many postsecondary options in this country, but they have to remember that it's about finding the best fit, and that's ultimately tied to knowledge of one's self." ♡



Local or long distance?

Some teens are ready to run for the hills – or the coast – by the time high school is over, but what's right for you? Here are some things to consider before deciding how far to go.

Commuting.

Staying local could help cut down on living expenses and also help teens keep other commitments that aren't on an academic schedule, like a job or volunteer position.

Holidays.

Whether flying or driving, long travel can eat up so much time and money that it might not be worthwhile for every break.

Homesickness.

If your teen is not in a position to hop in a car or plane to get to home, a support system will need to be in place that helps when the urge for home hits.

Help your teen decide how far away he or she wants to be by visiting a variety of campuses and imagining himself or herself calling it home. Near or far, your teen will want to feel comfortable when starting his or her college adventure. ♡