“Moving the Immovable”

Strategies for Engaging Students in the College Admission Process

Kathy Hath
Guidance Counselor, Corona del Mar High School

Peter Van Buskirk
CEO, Best College Fit®
Corona del Mar High School  Demographics

▲  2015 Class size: 404 graduates

▲  % attending four-year college: 80%

△  California In-state: 45%

△  Out-of-state: 35%

△  Public (nationwide): 60%

△  Private (nationwide): 40%

▲  % attending two-year college: 19%

▲  Strong administrative support

▲  Active parent association

www.BestCollegeFit.com © 2016, BestCollegeFit ®
College Planning Challenges

- Parent expectations
- Student/Parent schedules
- Managing/controlling flow of information
- Counseling staff turnover
- Private college counselors
College Planning History

▲ College Fairs
▲ College Representative visits
▲ Naviance guidance lessons each year (9-12)
▲ UC/Cal State Workshops
▲ Counselor/Teacher letter of recommendation training
▲ College Essay & Application Help nights in the Fall
▲ NCAA College Recruiting Night
▲ United States Service Academies Night
▲ The Admission Game
Paradigm Shift

▲ Wanted to engage students to be more proactive over the summer
▲ Wanted to reduce student stress regarding the issue of the “College Essay Topic/Hook”
▲ Wanted a comprehensive presentation on the college application process, making a college list and coming up with a solid essay topic
▲ Liked PVB’s content, presentation style
▲ Decided to preview “What’s My Story?” application preparation workshop
Liked What I Saw!

▲ Small group
▲ Highly interactive
▲ Got students to think/talk about themselves
▲ Got all students engaged
▲ Asked thought-provoking questions to get students to reflect on their life experiences and who they are
▲ At the end of the workshop, randomly asked students if they felt the workshop was worthwhile
Next Steps

▲ Approval from Principal
▲ Commitment from PTA
▲ School decision to add Part 2: Rough draft essay review with one-to-one feedback
▲ Secure dates with PVB
▲ Promotional efforts
▲ Recruit faculty for essay review & reserve facilities
▲ Actual registration for first workshop in 2014
The Evolution of “What’s My Story?”

Paralysis by analysis: Soon-to-be college applicants don’t know what they don’t know!

- “Where do I start?”
- “What do I say?”
- “What do they want to see?”
- “How do I set myself apart?”
Mistakes Students Make in Applying to College

▲ Don’t see beyond their resumes
▲ Assume courses, grades and scores will speak for themselves
▲ Believe there is nothing that sets them apart
▲ Underestimate the intensity—and subjectivity—of the selection process
▲ Are not thoughtful/intentional in the presentation of their credentials
▲ Fail to prove the synergy between themselves and the colleges to which they apply
“What’s My Story?” Objectives

Teach students to:

▲ Think beyond the known elements of their life experiences—go beyond the resume to identify key messages to be delivered

▲ Be intentional—use the application to connect the dots of those experiences

▲ Find/trust their voices—and take ownership for telling their stories

▲ Give the reader a reason to say “YES!”
“What’s My Story?” Dynamics

- Small—no more than 25 per four-hour session
- Interactive—there are no spectators!
- No writing, but a lot of thinking
- Focus on developing thematically cohesive applications
“What’s My Story?” Outline

▲ Know what you are getting into: Understand the competition

▲ Know your message: What will set you apart?

▲ Connect the dots: Use the application to tell your story
Teaching Tools

▲ The Pyramid of Selectivity

▲ The Competitive Playing Field

▲ Doors of Enrollment
Create a Personal Profile
Focus on the Essay

▲ Role of the Essay
▲ Common Application
▲ Supplemental Essays
▲ Critique “Retired Essays”
Tips for Telling a Story

▲ Get started

▲ Shape the essay

▲ Make a good essay great

▲ Survive—and have fun with—the interview

▲ Secure meaningful letters of recommendation
Student Feedback: It works!  
5.0 = Strongly Agree

CdM students offered the following assessment:

▲ Workshop content met my expectations: 4.87
▲ The presentation style was effective: 4.87
▲ Learned useful tips/insights: 4.97
▲ Know better how to tell my story in my essay: 4.72
▲ Feel more confident about application process in general: 4.67
▲ Would you recommend this workshop to other students: 100%
A Sampling of Testimonials from 65 CdM participants

▲ Opened my mind to new visions of writing the essay. I learned you shouldn’t be afraid of writing your college essay—it is easier than you think!
▲ I wanted a clearer idea of what I want to write for my essay. I now realize things about myself that I hadn’t thought about in depth.
▲ It is interesting to know the stories you can tell in your essay. I now have the confidence to write an application essay and the knowledge of what to put in my essay.
▲ I learned more about who I am and how to make my application authentic.
▲ My parents strongly urged me to attend. Everyone in the class was extremely engaged providing an effective and efficient 4 hours. I now have new-found confidence in the application process.
▲ I learned I do have a story!
For more information

▲ Kathy Hath
△ khath@nmusd.us

▲ Peter Van Buskirk
△ Peter@BestCollegeFit.com
△ 717-808-5462
△ www.BestCollegeFit.com