

# Navigating the Road of College Admissions for High-Achieving Students

by Michele M. Paiva

As baby boomers are now retiring, the college students of the next several years will be replacing boomers as the new talent in corporations. Colleges that target high achieving students will be scurrying for the best of the best, because there is a strong demand on turning out alumni that will be bringing new ideas and proactive leadership to both colleges and the years after graduation.

With thousands of colleges in the United States alone, for students choosing between them, this is a complex and daunting task. For high achieving students, this is even a greater challenge.

It's not a secret that colleges and universities are looking at prospective students earlier and earlier. By 10th grade, most college-bound, high-achieving students will be aware of how their interests, values and academics relate to both prospective careers and higher learning.

High-achieving students are apt to look at higher learning institutions earlier and more in depth. They are looking at college guides; looking into scholarships and what the college has to offer. These are the students, some as young as middle school, who already know that they are education shopping, not hoping to be accepted as much as their lesser-achieving counterparts. Some organizations target this demographic specifically.

Michael Gluckstern, Publisher of *My College Guide*, the premier college guide both in print and online, for high-achieving students, that offers advice for getting into college, college admissions, surviving college and navigating the college search process offered his expertise. He states that by 11th grade many high-achieving students are looking at colleges but that more are starting to look at colleges during their sophomore year. He added that according to findings from *My College Guide*, they witness that more juniors and seniors are more likely to commit themselves to a certain limited group of schools and/or careers, but that sophomores are more open to different options.

This past year, Time magazine ran an article on how colleges nationwide are really pushing for high-achieving students, and the merit based scholarships that they are offering have risen from 10% to 25%. The article stated that even public colleges are looking to improve their rankings; and this is accomplished in part by focusing on high-achieving students.

Gluckstern feels that this is a basic reality. "Not all high-achieving students can go to Ivy League Universities, and of those students who may not be able to get into or choose those schools, they [students] will be interested in other options that include other smaller and larger schools."

He adds, "The colleges are able to achieve ranking because they have an opportunity to get the students who have great credentials but can't or choose not to go into the Ivy League schools for whatever reason." Gluckstern noted that many of the colleges that participate online or in print

publications that is sent to high-achieving sophomores certainly have a pulse on the change in trend from the once senior-only focus to the now sophomore-based focus.

An Issue: Admissions are getting easier. One drawback perhaps for colleges who are competing for high achieving students, is that as the student and perhaps parent, is surfing the net after looking at glossy catalogs or college guides online, they will be able to more easily log in to a college and fill out paperwork right then and there to get the admissions process started. Gluckstern stated that it is important for colleges, namely the admissions offices, to reach students as early as possible so that a schools information and message are more likely to be read.

Gone are the days of going back and forth from the guidance department only and waiting for college paperwork. This means that colleges must get the attention of students long before they are ready to enroll.

Fact: Many gifted students enroll in college early. In fact, it's commonplace for high achieving students to take college credit courses in high school - so these are students who are on a fast track in their education; and these are the students that colleges need to prepare earlier for attracting.

High Achieving students want to see what the colleges have to offer. Although these students will research, they can be more influenced by a college that is displaying their mission and offerings through press or advertisements, from guidance offices to college guides.

These very students will then take that information and narrow down their choices. However, before they narrow down choices, it is probable that they will contact the school. The more a school can provide a relationship with that student, and display their benefits; the more chance that they have for admitting this student into their freshman class.

Guidance activities continue to help students clarify intellectual and social/emotional experiences, establish a sense of identity and direction, and set short- and long-term goals. Students are encouraged to identify and pursue interests. By 10th grade, they become aware of how their academic subjects, values, interests, and goals relate to careers. They also begin to learn that some interests and talents develop into artistic or scientific convictions while others develop into leisure activities. "Most colleges use a combination of direct mail, email and display ads, said Gluckstern, however, the key is how early the schools begin to reach students. The recent NACAC [National Association for College Admission Counseling] conference made it clear that colleges that recruit sophomore students have better overall response rates and enrollment rates."

A recent Pew study suggested that most 10-29 year olds conduct Internet research themselves, thanks to the popularity of technology, to obtain information. In fact, My College Guide, along with many colleges and universities knew this long ago, and provide substantial online information to help students to select colleges and careers.

On *MyCollegeGuide.org*, there is even an “Admissions Guru” where students can ask questions, college searches broken down into categories such as region, cost, community and class size, as well as quick-click-and-learn scholarships that are available; and a myriad of other tools a student or parent can utilize to make informed choices.

High-achieving students certainly have a possible problematical task when trying to narrow down selections for education, however on their side, are colleges and universities vying for their attention – an equally daunting task to reach them.

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