



UTSTANDING



The top ten ways advisers can help students stand out for college.

LISA BLEICH

As an independent educational consultant, I have had the opportunity to work with a wide range of students from high schools across the country. As I get to know these students and brainstorm with them on topics for their personal statements for their college applications, I always ask them to describe a person who has had a significant influence on their lives and explain why. Of course, the most common answer is a parent or other family member, but a close second is a teacher or an adviser who has taught them a key lesson in life, pushed them to be more than they thought possible, or saw something in them that nobody else had. The interactions that teachers, club advisers, coaches, guidance counselors, and school administrators have with students can have remarkable, lasting impact on them and help shape their life philosophy and sense of self. This influence also helps students prepare for college because those life experiences, insights, and confidence help make them stronger applicants.

Below are the top 10 themes that emerged.

1 Let students take the lead. Colleges look for meaningful leadership in activities and the more opportunities that you provide for students to take the lead, the better they can develop their leadership style. Mary described her positive experience with student government:

The only limit placed on us is ourselves. The teachers are there to help, but ultimately we set the agenda, develop a plan for fundraising, and work together to make it happen. This year we raised over \$6,000, a record for the school and number two in the state, because we were able to come up with interesting ideas. We held a car wash, a parent fund raiser, a dance-a-thon, and several schoolwide events that brought us together as a community.

This untethered opportunity to imagine and lead provided my student with a strong sense of self and accomplishment. She lauded the teachers' ability to step back and let the students lead the club.

2 Model good leadership through mentorship and strong communication. Students look to you as school leaders as examples of how they want to lead. Hannah talked about her experience with her history teacher and track coach in her college essay.

He always used to tell us in class not to cut corners. I didn't really understand this until I started running track. In this context, he repeated that if we cut corners we

only hurt ourselves. I took this to heart and started running the full length of the course. I started studying harder in all of my classes and because of his constant communication of this concept in the classroom and on the track field, I understood exactly what he meant. This idea became my mantra and I carried it out in all aspects of my life.

3 Encourage balanced schedules based on student interests and talents. Students all have strengths and weaknesses and as advisers it is crucial to help them understand what they are and develop schedules that accentuate their strengths. For example if a student is particularly strong in math and science, you can encourage them to take honors or AP classes in those subjects and not feel the need to overload themselves in other areas. The key is to help them find the right balance because each student has a different threshold for work and rigor.

4 Identify opportunities for scholarships or contests.

There are numerous local and national contests in various disciplines, such as the Intel Science Talent Search www.intel.com/about/corporateresponsibility/education/sts/index.htm, the Scholastic Alliance for Young Artists and Writers www.artandwriting.org/writing, or the National Council for Teachers of English www.ncte.org/awards/student/aa. Many states also have Governor Schools for various disciplines that students can apply to during their junior year. Create a list of contests or scholarships in your subject area and encourage students to apply for those contests early and often so they get used to putting themselves out there. It is also great if the guidance office can serve as a central repository for all of the contests. These can be highlighted on the school's website by subject area. Students are more apt to apply for a contest if a teacher or guidance counselor makes the suggestion.

NAVIGATING COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Your students might choose to hire a consultant to advise them on the college application process.

Independent educational consultants (IECs) are hired directly by families to find the best educational match for their child. IECs help identify a student's strengths, weaknesses, desires, and fears, and look for colleges throughout the country that will allow a student to thrive, according to Mark Sklarow, executive director Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA).

Independent educational consultants also understand the unique needs of student leaders as they apply to college. Campuses vary widely in opportunities for freshmen. Some provide students with immediate opportunities to employ the leadership skills learned in student council, Honor Society, and other leadership roles. Other colleges do not. It is important for aspiring leaders to understand these campus cultures prior to making a decision.

Student leaders have an additional challenge of how to demonstrate to an admission officer the range of their accomplishments and leadership abilities in a way that does not come off as inflated and boastful. An IEC can also help with that process, Sklarow said.

Most IECs can be hired hourly or through an inclusive package of services; fees vary but the range is from \$1,500 to \$15,000. To find an IECA member, go to www.IECAonline.com or check with your school counselor about independent consultants.



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5 Develop opportunities for independent studies. Some of my students' most enriching academic experiences have come from doing independent studies through a senior project, a science research program, or interdisciplinary research project. One student had the opportunity to do a science research project that spanned over the course of his high school years. He learned how to conduct scientific research, developed a computational database, arranged a science internship in a lab in Greece, and became an Intel semi-finalist. Another student is developing a historical archive of his high school's theater program going back to the 1800s. This project came into fruition through the support of his history teacher and his guidance counselor. These types of opportunities promote intellectual curiosity, which helps students in the college application process. Independent studies work best when teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors support students through communication and flexibility in scheduling.

6 Urge students to share their talents with the community. Students often ask me what type of community service they should get involved in. I encourage them to share their talents with the community and do something that reflects their interests and passions. The tennis coach for one of my students provided an opportunity for his team to teach tennis to kids with special needs and help out in the Special Olympics. A theater troupe reached out to the community by performing for underprivileged communities for free. One of the jazz bands plays annually at the Susan B. Komen walk for cancer. Those students benefitted greatly from these experiences and saw how they could make a difference by sharing their talent with the greater community.

7 Think beyond the classroom. Integrate real-world experiences into the classroom by organizing field trips; developing partnerships with the community or local colleges; and inviting guest speakers, such as scientists, writers, psychologists, and the like to expose students to different career options. Last year a couple of the science teachers organized a field research trip to South Africa for students to do environmental field research. Not only did the students get first hand scientific research, but they also benefitted from experiencing a different culture. The AP Government teacher arranged for students to have an internship with a local

congressman for the last month of class after the AP exam was completed. Those types of experiences benefit students by linking what they learn in class to the real world.

8 Push kids to engage in things beyond high school. Colleges like to see that students are engaged not only in their high school community, but the community at large. If students are talented in music, encourage them to audition for a regional, state, or All-State chorus, band, or orchestra. Athletes can try out for All-County or All-State teams. Top students in Model UN or Youth and Government can attend regional and state conferences. This gives them access to a diverse student body and gives them a taste of what it will be like in college.

9 Suggest meaningful summer experiences that align with their interests. Summer is a great opportunity to fill in gaps or dive deeper into areas of interest. I have worked with students who have used the summer to beef up their community service, participate in athletic recruiting camps for their sport, attend Girls or Boys State, explore engineering, do an internship at a newspaper, or work in a yogurt store. All of those experiences add to the richness of a candidate. If your school uses Naviance, encourage the kids to look at the enrichment programs feature that lets students search summer opportunities by interest. Many precollege programs also offer financial aid to those students who have a financial need.

10 Say Yes. When a student approaches you with an idea to do something novel, find ways to be supportive. Last year, one of my clients felt strongly about providing food to the local food bank by creating Food Bank Friday, where students could drop off canned food each week. When she first approached the principal at her school, the principal categorically refused, citing numerous reasons why this could not work. This did not deter my student. She forged ahead and found a solution to all of the principal's objections until she got the program approved. It ultimately became an integral part of the school and she was able to provide food to her local food bank. ■

Lisa Bleich, president of College Bound Mentor LLC, is an independent educational consultant, entrepreneur, and public speaker.