

IECA⁺ INSIGHTS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATION

Winter 2025

Behind the Scenes of Applying to the Country's Top Art Programs

INSIDE



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Making the case for a
liberal arts degree



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3251 Blenheim Boulevard
Suite 510
Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-591-4850
Fax: 703-591-4860
www.IECAonline.com
email: info@IECAonline.com

President
Belinda J. Wilkerson

Chief Executive Officer
Leigh R. Allen II

Deputy Executive Director
Sue S. DePra

Director of Communications
Sarah S. Brachman

**Editor and Communications
Associate**
Cyndi Bohlin

Design and Layout
Sarah S. Cox

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Serenity. Courage. Wisdom.

In my first *Insights* article as president of IECA, I wrote about acquiring a slightly different New Year tradition of focusing on three words to guide me in the upcoming year. For 2024, *Why*, *And*, and *But* were my chosen words. You can read my thoughts about choosing those words in the Summer 2024 issue at bit.ly/WhyAndBut. I have my three words for 2025, and I'll share my thoughts on how they relate to IECA.

The past year brought many firsts to IECA. My first few months as president of IECA (yikes!). The first time we did not have a November conference (kind of scary). The first time in 30 years we had to hire a new CEO (Welcome, Leigh!) and say goodbye to our longtime CEO (Thank you, Mark!). It was the first time many of us had to learn a new association management system (AMS). And, thanks to our Membership Committee, it's the first time many new members are getting acquainted with all that IECA has to offer, which brings me to my three words.

For 2025, my words of intent are *Serenity*, *Courage*, and *Wisdom*. Many of you may recognize these words as the mainstay of the Serenity Prayer. I did a deep dive into the origin of the prayer and, since there is no one story, I'm leaving that alone for now.

Serenity. With all the firsts in 2024, it can sometimes get a little overwhelming, with many unanswered questions. Will IECA be okay financially if we have one conference a year? Will new professional development offerings engage our membership? (Thank you, Education & Training Committee, for the Business Growth Institute.) Would we have a Global Symposium in February? (Yes, in Scotland!) Would the Hiring Committee and the Board of Directors make the right choice for a new CEO for IECA? (We sure did!) The list of all the decisions required of the board and of our members can go on and on. There were moments when I could not turn off my brain for fretting about these concerns and many more. My usual way of coping is to devour a pint or two of Ben & Jerry's Chunky Monkey ice cream, or to eat the king-size pack of the red (not licorice, ugh!) Twizzlers in one sitting.

My wonderful trainer strongly encouraged me to find another way to deal with my anxieties. I thought about when I first became an IEC after relocating from Rhode Island to North Carolina, and how much the Serenity Prayer sustained me. As IECA moves forward with multiple initiatives to continue the standard of excellence we expect of ourselves, serenity will be one of my guiding principles as I accept the things I cannot change.

My hope is that serenity, courage, and wisdom will be our guides through our next chapter, in particular for all of our members, family, and friends affected by the fires in Southern California.

Courage. There are moments when I feel like the Cowardly Lion on his way to see the Wizard of Oz for some courage, only to realize I have had it all along. As my first term on the board was coming to an end, I remember Steve Antonoff (the G.O.A.T. of IECs) asking me if I wanted to continue serving on the board (yes) and if I would ever consider being president (nope, nada, no way). There was not a bone in my body that was courageous enough to take on that responsibility. Imposter syndrome is real, folks! This time, however, when asked by Kristina Dooley, the courage was there.

When I attend some of the New Member Welcome meetings, I am in awe of the folks taking a leap of faith and finding the courage to switch gears to become IECs. When you don't have a business background, it can be a little scary starting out. I remember attending Chamber of Commerce meetings, reluctantly going to networking events, and participating in business seminars at my local community college. Initially, I left each activity with more questions than I had. How do I find clients? How do I know how large my caseload should be? When do I find time to visit colleges,



Belinda J. Wilkerson

and how do I pay for those trips? I didn't know what I didn't know! I imagine many new members are feeling the same way as they jump into the world of independent educational consulting with both feet. As we continue into 2025, IECA will have the courage to make the hard decisions, take on new initiatives, advocate for important education issues, and find ways to increase awareness about our profession. I'm counting on courage to keep us moving forward and serenity to maintain our sanity. As Maya Angelou said, "Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can't practice any other virtue consistently."

Wisdom. What to change? What remains the same? What to tweak? How do we know this is the right decision? Is this something for which we advocate? We have always had to answer these questions and many others. This is where our **collective** wisdom will carry us through 2025 and beyond. I am a firm believer in the collaborative powers of our members, our staff, our Board of Directors, and our CEO. The wisdom of collaboration and not competition gave us the opportunity to have our third Global Symposium. The partnership between the IECA staff (kudos Rachel King!), the IECA European Regional Symposium Committee, and the University of Strathclyde brought this event to fruition. Hopefully, as you're reading this, I'm either on my way to Glasgow or heading back home.

My hope is that serenity, courage, and wisdom will be our guides through our next chapter, in particular for all of our members, family, and friends affected by the fires in Southern California.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Belinda J. Wilkerson, Ed.D.".

Belinda J. Wilkerson, EdD
IECA President

Join Us for IECA's 2025 Annual Conference

May 5–7 • Detroit, Michigan



Don't miss our 2025 Annual Conference, the world's largest gathering of the independent educational consulting community!

Conference highlights include:

- 11 pre- and post-conference tours, featuring 18 colleges, five schools, and two therapeutic programs
- Four pre-conference workshops
- 80+ educational sessions exploring adolescent issues, admission trends, and other topics impacting the IEC profession
- Keynotes by leading experts in the educational field
- A College & Postsecondary Fair focused exclusively on colleges, gap programs, LD postsecondary options, and related service companies
- A K-12 School Exchange bringing together LD/ND and traditional schools as well as online programs
- A Therapeutic Information Swap featuring networking opportunities between therapeutic schools and programs and IECs
- A fun Motown-inspired Networking Reception for all conference participants
- The presentation of our annual IECA Member Awards
- And much more!

ACE Speakers

These renowned thought leaders will conduct dynamic, energetic presentations on Adolescence, Consulting, and Education (ACE).

Freeing the Anxious Generation: Collective Action to Restore Healthy Childhood

Presented by **Zach Rausch**, associate research scientist at NYU Stern School of Business, lead researcher to social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, and a researcher for the Center for Humane Technology.

The Joy Game: Using the Science of Happiness to Turn Stress and Exhaustion into the Daily Practice of Joy

Presented by **Amy Blankson**, chief evangelist for the Digital Wellness Institute, the bestselling author of *The Future of Happiness*, and a graduate of both Harvard and the Yale School of Management.

College Special Session Speaker

This talk will precede our College Showcase on Wednesday, May 7.

Finding the College That's Right for You

Presented by **Jeff Selingo**, who has written about higher education for more than two and a half decades and is a *New York Times* bestselling author of three books, including *Who Gets In and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions*. This keynote offers a sneak peek into his next book, *Dream School*, which takes a fresh approach to the college search and is scheduled for release in September 2025.

Pre-Conference Workshops

These deep dives into specific subjects will occur on Monday morning:

- **Aiding the Anxious Generation: Strategies and Solutions**
- **AI Hackathon**
- **SMART Goals for Your IEC Practice**
- **Navigating Global University Admissions**

Conference registration is now open! Visit [link](https://IECAonline.com/conference-info).
IECAonline.com/conference-info for details and to register.

PROGRAM FOR ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING (PAL)

Nothing should stand between a student and a great education, even if they learn differently than others. For more than 50 years, PAL has provided learning resources for students with diagnosed learning differences.

PAL gives students the 1-on-1 support they need to excel. In addition to required courses for majors, PAL students take individual or small just-for-PAL classes that place an extra focus on skills like reading comprehension, organization, and time management. Every PAL student gets access to apps and other resources to make learning simpler.

curry.edu/PAL

SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN LEARNING (SAIL)

New for Fall 2024, we are proud to offer the SAIL program designed for academically capable students who live with social or emotional challenges that may otherwise prevent them from reaching their full potential in a traditional college environment.

SAIL is appropriate for students who would benefit from social assistance, transitional support, self-advocacy skills, alternative housing, and who have a primary diagnosis of ASD, anxiety, depression, or self-report a demonstrated need for these support services. The SAIL team includes a Speech Language Pathologist and a Wellness Coordinator, along with Community Directors with specialized training in ASD and students' social, behavioral, and organizational needs.

curry.edu/SAIL

Meet Graham, Curry College's new support dog, who lives and works with President Gonzalez on campus.



For more information contact Curry Admission at (617) 333-2210 or adm@curry.edu.

Curry is located in Milton, Massachusetts, just seven miles from downtown Boston.

Q&A with IECA's New CEO, Leigh R. Allen II

Leigh R. Allen II began his term as IECA's chief executive officer in December 2024. He came to the association with 20 years of experience in the nonprofit/association space, specifically in the legal sector. Prior to arriving at IECA, Allen was chief operating officer for the Council on Legal Education Opportunity, Inc. He previously served as director of mentoring, marketing, and development (Public Service Division/Fund for Justice Education) for the American Bar Association. Allen holds an MS in information technology from the University of Maryland, an MBA from Johns Hopkins University, an MS in organizational leadership from Nyack College, and a BA in political science from Morehouse College.



Welcome to IECA, and thanks for participating in this Q&A. Could you start by telling us where you grew up and what your family was like?

A native Washingtonian, I was raised by two supportive parents first in the heart of the city itself, then later in the Maryland suburbs, where I completed my elementary through high school matriculation. I grew up in a tight-knit, loving household where genuine and perpetual support for one another was never in short supply. I feel very blessed and grateful to have learned many invaluable lessons, in addition to making many cherished memories, with both immediate and extended family.

Tell us about your professional journey. What inspired you to pursue a career in nonprofits/associations?

After finishing college, I started my professional life in the field of retail management. After doing that for a few years, I successfully made the transition to the private sector in the federal contracting arena as a manager and director prior to, ultimately, establishing a long, yet, thankfully, still rewarding, career in the nonprofit/association realm.

Further, with my extensive background in the higher education space and with both nonprofits and associations, the more and more I learned about IECA while progressing through the in-depth interview process, the better the fit I perceived it to be.

With respect to inspiration, in full disclosure, I never actually pursued a career in this particular area. Initially, I accepted a temporary position at one of the world's largest associations, then, after becoming intimately familiar with, as well as passionate about, the mission, vision, and impact of the sub-entity I worked for, found the work to be very fulfilling and equally critical to society's overall, prolonged betterment. Thus, once I became immersed in the space, I never looked back!

What would people be surprised to know about you?

Perhaps that, while an undergrad student in Atlanta, I was a member of a band with several friends who played at various venues and events throughout the city. Although it was never going to be a full-time endeavor, we always had a good time entertaining whoever ended up coming to see us perform.

What do you like to do outside of work?

I enjoy spending time with family and friends, traveling, reading, watching various news programs and sporting events, listening to different genres of music, participating in activities hosted by select social and civic organizations I'm a member of, and building/fixing things around the house.

What educator, in your experience, has had the most profound impact on you?

Although, over the years, I have had the privilege of learning from many outstanding, accomplished individuals in various levels of academia, I would have to say that it is my dear mother, who spent nearly 40 years of her life as an educator and advocate in both the public school system and in church as a Sunday school teacher, who has had the most profound impact on me and my approach/reverence for the value of education and what it can do to improve a person's overall prospects in life. The way she selflessly implored me, and countless others, to always "politely put your best foot forward" in a very heartfelt and encouraging manner, has consistently served me well no matter what setting(s) I find myself in.

What inspired you to take on the CEO role at IECA?

Having previously had the challenging opportunity to serve as an organization's interim CEO, I had my sights set on being able to, one day, be installed as the full-time head of an established business entity, such as IECA. Further, with my extensive background in the higher education space and with both nonprofits and associations, the more and more I learned about IECA while progressing through the in-depth interview process, the better the fit I perceived it to be. Especially as it pertained to its mission, which is all about making an impact for members, the profession, and the clientele they serve.

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Advocacy Day

March 11 • Washington, DC



In March, a group of IECA members, led by IECA's Government Relations Committee and Advocacy Day Chair Jeana Kawamura, and with the support of our legislative counsel, will meet with legislators on Capitol Hill for our association's third annual advocacy event. We will share more information about the advocacy efforts later this spring.

Summer Training Institute

July 21–25 • Online

Whether you are just beginning to think about joining the independent educational consulting profession or have been in business for a year or two and seeing clients on a limited basis, the IECA Summer Training Institute will set you up for success. Learn about managing and promoting a business, working effectively with students and families, building a knowledge of the wide range of options available to students, and establishing a professional, competent, and ethical practice—all while building connections with our expert faculty and fellow attendees. Registration will open in February. link.IECAonline.com/STI



Feedback from Virtual STI Participants

"The whole program was well worth the time and money!"

"The generosity of the knowledge shared and the resources provided were way beyond expectations!"

"My knowledge has exponentially increased, and I am so much more confident to be guiding students and families through the many facets of college admissions."


New CEO, from page 7

What are some key goals during your early days at IECA?

For clarity, I have been with the organization for only a few weeks at the time of this writing. During this period, I've spent my days, largely: listening and learning (with staff, board members, IECA members, and other stakeholders); working on establishing and building relationships (via email and social media correspondence and participating in numerous face-to-face and virtual meetings); beginning to assess and analyze a plethora of information (program files, financial data, membership correspondence, communications materials, etc.); and, every now and then, taking a moment to reflect and breathe, while reminding myself that this, hopefully, enduring journey has only just begun. I imagine that these activities are what I will continue, primarily, being engaged in, at least in the short term.

Lastly, that I will strive to ensure that, not only at this conference, but at all future IECA events and programs, we build upon the impressive legacy established over the course of three decades by my esteemed predecessor, CEO Emeritus Mark Sklarow, and the highly dedicated, skilled staff team in place.

Do you have a message for those who will be attending the IECA 2025 Annual Conference?

In brief, that I am excited to meet and talk with so many participants in this engaging, interactive setting, which I have been told by team members the IECA Annual Conference consistently provides! Further, to ensure that participants know their continued individual, as well as collective, presence at such gatherings is what will continue to set IECA apart from other associations. Lastly, that I will strive to ensure that, not only at this conference, but at all future IECA events and programs, we build upon the impressive legacy established over the course of three decades by my esteemed predecessor, CEO Emeritus Mark Sklarow, and the highly dedicated, skilled staff team in place. 



Behind the Scenes of Applying to the Country's Top Art Programs

By Julie Raynor Gross, EdM, MBA, IECA Professional (NY)

An undergraduate art program is often the beginning of the long and rewarding journey of becoming an artist. Selecting the right program for any prospective undergraduate student can be challenging, given the vast array of offerings in our country. The top art programs in America are extremely selective and nuanced in what they provide students, both in terms of education and in atmosphere and connections. Let's take a look at the various factors your clients should consider when selecting an undergraduate art program. Based on discussions with current students, alumni, and faculty, we will then explore the singular personalities of a variety of arts programs, what each has to offer its students, and how that translates into life as a working artist. Finally, we will discuss the admissions factors of arts programs.

Before Applying

Before creating a list of schools to apply to or drafting essays or even securing references, prospective students looking to enter an undergraduate art program should attempt to understand themselves as artists. Help them consider their values and priorities. Encourage them to reflect on their artistic desires as well as their life interests and hobbies and how those coalesce to create a singular artistic purpose or intent. Honing in on artistic values, future expectations, and

personal requirements for creativity is the first step to beginning the process of applying to an undergraduate art program.

Art School or Art Major?

One of the most important decisions to be made in the process of choosing the right art program is whether to attend an art school or a university with an art major. Consider the student's current experience with art and future expectations. Artistic practice is what sustains a working artist. It is the repeated and daily exercise of being an artist and of making art, also known as the "creative process." Art school provides a rigorous atmosphere that supports self-exploration, helps to develop a critical eye, teaches technique, and emphasizes the development of an artistic practice.

A bachelor of fine arts (BFA) or a major in studio art at a traditional university immerses its students in a wide variety of experiences and subjects more than an art school does. Receiving a degree from a university allows students to pursue art alongside other disciplines, offering the option of a minor or double major outside the arts. Sometimes this is a more useful setting for those still deliberating about their future as

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Julie Raynor Gross,
Collegiate Gateway, can
be reached at [Julie@
CollegiateGateway.com](mailto:Julie@CollegiateGateway.com).

an artist or those who are just beginning their exploratory journey. Having an array of inputs from areas outside of art can even help spark creativity.

Yet another option is combination programs. These exciting and unique programs allow students to graduate with two degrees: one in art and one in another subject. In combination programs, students can experience the best of both worlds. For example, the unparalleled art program at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) combines with the exceptional liberal arts environment of Brown University to provide both an art school degree and a university degree. Similarly, the School of Museum of Fine Arts teams with Tufts University to create a rigorous and prestigious dual degree program. Like a traditional university art program, a combination degree program can set students up for more career options upon graduation.

Behind the Scenes of the Country's Top Art Programs

Each of the top art programs in the country offer an outstanding education and prepare their students to enter the art world (or a master of fine arts (MFA) program) after graduation. As with the best art, the decision of which school to attend might even come down to an intuitive sense of which offers the best environment for the student. Therefore, learning the nuances of what each program has to offer is the only way to gain a better and more personal understanding of which is the best fit.

The New York Art School Experience

Students have many programs to choose from in New York City, but only a handful are considered some of the top in the country. The School of Visual Arts (SVA) was founded as a cartoon and illustration school and has emerged over the years as a leading art program in America, offering 11 different disciplines for students to choose from and situating students in the heart of NYC's art scene. New York University's BFA program is well-respected and widely considered "the city's school" because of its integration into Lower Manhattan and the deep connections it provides students as they prepare for life as working artists. Pratt Institute offers a quieter, collegiate campus in Brooklyn for arts students who want to be near the art scene, but not in the center of it. The Cooper Union is one of the oldest private colleges in New York City. It offers half-tuition scholarships to all students and is renowned for its art and architecture program. Parsons' art program is at the forefront of fashion studies and has produced high-caliber artists such as Jasper Johns and Ai Weiwei. An important consideration for a prospective NYC art student is whether their personal creativity will thrive in the competitive and fast-paced atmosphere of New York City.

The Country's Top Art Schools (Outside of NYC)

While New York offers a dynamic environment and extensive networking opportunities, art schools outside of the city are equally compelling and can go further than some universities in helping students who are serious about becoming artists reach their goals by focusing on technique and artistic practice.

Rhode Island School of Design, located in Providence (just down the street from Brown University), is widely considered the top art school in the country. Prospective students should expect a rigorous curriculum focused on the sole development of creativity, a strong artistic voice, and the habitual practice required of working artists. The School of the Art

Institute of Chicago (SAIC), with its 158-year legacy, is also considered one of the top art programs in the country. In addition to interdisciplinary freedom, SAIC boasts state-of-the-art facilities and a museum on campus.

Several other top art schools to consider include Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Georgia; Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore; Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) in Boston; and California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Los Angeles. Of these, CalArts is widely known as the most experimental art school, where theory and concept as well as experimental and multidisciplinary artmaking are a heavy focus.

Understanding the Ivies

Each Ivy League university has its own distinct offerings. For example, Brown University is known for its Open Curriculum, and its art department offers a dual degree with RISD, combining a BFA with an AB (bachelor of arts) or an ScB (bachelor of science), which we touch on more later in this article. Columbia has the strictest curriculum requirements, with its Core Curriculum, and its campus is in the heart of New York City. Cornell offers a BFA, whereas the other Ivies offer BAs or ABs, which can be less studio-intensive. Harvard has a unique Department of Art, Film, and Visual Studies, combining practice with critical theory. Dartmouth explicitly encourages interdisciplinary exploration for its arts students and has a unique cross-disciplinary program in which the engineering sciences major can be combined with studio arts. Princeton has a standout musical theater program and Yale's art program (considered by many to be the top university art program in the country) is known especially for sculpture, painting, and photography.

As with the best art, the decision of which school to attend might even come down to an intuitive sense of which offers the best environment for the student.

Exceptional University Art Programs Outside of the Ivies

Let's now look at highly ranked university art programs outside of the Ivies. Artsy—an online art marketplace and leading voice in the contemporary art world—notes that UCLA "offers Ivy League quality at state prices." Carnegie Mellon's art program in Pittsburgh is known for bridging studio art practice with cutting-edge research in the sciences. Stanford's undergraduate art program focuses more heavily on theory, unlike UCLA, which is known for its emphasis on studio practice. However, rigorous studio practice and art theory complement each other at Virginia Commonwealth University's art program. The program also provides students with opportunities to gain experience in creative careers while in school through partnerships with, for example, its Center for the Creative Economy.

Unique Combination Art Programs

Combination art programs are formed either when two top universities or art schools join forces and allow students to partake in the exceptional studies offered by each school, or when a top university allows its students to combine disparate degrees into a dual degree.


Some examples of top combination art programs in the US include: RISD and Brown's collaborative program; the five-year, interdisciplinary bachelor's plus master's dual degree in the arts offered by The New School and Parsons; University of Michigan's joint degree in liberal arts and engineering that allows students studying the arts and humanities to explore technical studies as well; Carnegie Mellon's interdisciplinary BFA/BXA degree, which allows studio art students to undertake hybrid ways of making art in the sciences, humanities, computer science, or engineering; and finally, the combination program at Tufts and The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, which spans five years of study.

Demystifying Admissions

A variety of admissions factors go into a successful application. The top arts programs generally require a GPA that ranges from 3.4–4.0 (notably, CalArts does not require a GPA because they focus more on the student's artistic potential). SAT/ACT testing is optional for many art schools but required for most university art programs; and several universities, such as Brown, Cornell, Dartmouth, and Yale, recently reinstated standardized testing requirements.

Extracurricular activities and employment or internships present significant opportunities for students to communicate themselves as artists. Connecting the values of their personal essay and artistic statement with the type of work or internship they've chosen (for example, if their art is about their own LGBTQ+ experience and they work part-time at an LGBTQ+ nonprofit) demonstrates to the admissions office that this student lives their artistic practice holistically.

The portfolio can be one of the most important aspects of an application—though not all art programs (particularly university art programs) necessarily require one, so be sure to confirm. Often, prospective art students erroneously think that perfect artistic technique will find them entry into a top art program, but what most of these high-ranking art programs are looking for is their perspective. What are the prospective artists trying to say with their art?

Essays are another significant part of the application, equally as consequential as the portfolio. Essays provide a unique opportunity to give the admissions officers and faculty an idea of the person behind the numbers and, in this case, the art. It's important that the personal essay reflects the student's core values and personality in a way that aligns with their portfolio. There should be a sense of cohesion and a flow from one to the other. This holds true of the artistic statement, if required, as well. Those reviewing the application should think: it makes sense that this person created this art. Many schools offer free portfolio reviews, as well as webinars about essay writing or digital guides to their applications. Be sure your applicants take advantage of all the school's available admissions resources. 

As independent educational consultants, you can play a major role in helping your applicants choose the school that best fits their individual artistic dreams and future priorities, and then helping them present themselves—both artistically and personally—in the most authentic and powerful way possible. Ultimately, no matter which of these top art programs a student is accepted to, they will look forward to a rigorous and excellent education that sets them on the path of becoming an impactful artist with a unique voice.



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CIP



Making the Case for a Liberal Arts Degree

By Alan J. Sheptin, MBA, CEP, IECA Professional (NY)

When parents and students come to my office for their first few college planning sessions, we discuss current coursework content, what the student is reading in their English class (and hopefully reading for fun as well), and a roadmap for classes for junior and senior years.

As we get closer to the actual college selection process, we have more pointed conversations about courses of study. In recent years, a disproportionate number of my students have expressed an interest in three areas: engineering, computer science, and business, even if their predilection is not in any of those. If a student is interested in the liberal arts, the academic interest invariably tends to be in economics or psychology. Even if a student's favorite academic class is a world language or social studies, a "practical" major is de rigeur. This is when the parent vociferously chimes in, and the student becomes passive.

I get variations of this same litany from parents: "I'm going to be paying over \$250,000 for an education and we [yes, we!] want a return on our investment." While I understand this concern, I don't want parents to view a

four-year university to be an employment agency (even though some schools I've visited seem that way).

As a parent, I understand their anxiety. I recently visited a well-respected liberal arts college. My tour guide was a graduating senior. When I asked the student about post-graduation plans, the response was a bit disconcerting: "I plan to move to another city and maybe work in a bookstore or coffee shop." It's not something a parent wants to hear from a senior.

In our accomplishment- and goal-oriented society, it seems as though majoring in something other than a "practical" major foretells doom. Parents envision a life where a student becomes a barista or works in a bookstore in another city following graduation.

I wanted to understand the need for and applicability of liberal arts through lenses other than career services. I spoke with an attorney-turned-admissions-officer and a seasoned HR professional to get their viewpoints. Both were advocates for a liberal arts-based education.

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Alan Sheptin, Sheptin Tutoring Group, LLC, can be reached at Alan@Sheptin.com.

The Academic's Perspective

Ben Baum is the vice president of enrollment at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland. His academic background, majoring in history and European studies at Amherst College, led him to graduate school and law school. Baum practiced law for several years but found his passion in admissions, initially at Tufts University.

Baum feels that having a non-liberal arts education in a skill-based world is common, but flawed, thinking. If you look at the CEOs of the largest companies in the U.S., you do not see a consistent story in their trajectory. However, you do see people who are liberal arts educated. The study of "big ideas" helps makes great leaders. Their ability to communicate, write, and think across disciplines is the key to their success.

To Baum, the question that needs addressing is, "How do you bring those liberal arts skills to the 'real world'?" His responses were illuminating. They are what students—and parents—need to think about as they go through the college search process and should ask admission officers (and career service professionals) as they go on college tours.

For example, computer science encourages students to learn coding, a vital skill. However, artificial intelligence will replace coders over time. To that end, what skills will be important in this field? Although the narrow technical skills are important, they will become obsolete very quickly. Computer languages change very rapidly these days.

Having top-notch writing and communication skills and understanding the nature of language will render any computer science major permanently marketable.

If you look at the CEOs of the largest companies in the US, you do not see a consistent story in their trajectory. However, you do see people who are liberal arts educated. The study of "big ideas" helps makes great leaders. Their ability to communicate, write, and think across disciplines is the key to their success.

Employers will require job candidates to speak fluently about many different subjects and understand the interconnectedness among different areas of a company. How a prospective employee can interact and communicate effectively with professionals in other disciplines across an organization is applicable to any job. The liberal arts set a student up for that vital skill set. Skills, not facts, are unique to a liberal arts setting.

The HR Professional's Perspective

Mallory Anhouse is a principal at Knickerbocker Talent, an HR consultancy specializing in advertising, media, startup, and entertainment industries. Her background includes extensive work in talent acquisition and in running college recruiting programs. She

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believes that a liberal arts education allows a student to pursue many different opportunities and does not pigeonhole the student.

To Anhouse, the liberal arts ensure that students know how to think, write, and speak critically. It helps students with “connecting the dots,” enabling them to understand a concept and take it further.



She feels that a business school-based education is too narrow-minded. Specializing at such a young age is not the way to go. Anhouse cites companies like EY and Deloitte, which are no longer recruiting at undergraduate business schools. These companies have found that many business school students have not been able to master the arts of critical thinking and writing, something intrinsic to a liberal arts education.


What was marketable 20 years ago is probably not a marketable skill today. The big question is ensuring longevity in the workplace.

Students who can think critically, regardless of college major, will be at an advantage. Technical skills can be taught and acquired.

My Perspective

At the goading of my parents, I did pursue a “practical” major: mathematics. I made sure that I had courses that complemented my degree, such as economics, statistics, and operations research. My ability to think quantitatively and my basic coding skills helped me land a well-paying job several months before graduating.

However, I indulged my penchant for the liberal arts by minoring in French. While I never discussed Proust in the office or had to conjugate in the past imperfect, I did work for a French company for several years. I was invited to France to attend a conference and had to present in French. Because my college had an open curriculum, I did not take as many liberal arts courses, something I now regret. I think that the intellectual framework of those courses, as well as the amount of critical writing that would have been required, would have forced me to think more broadly as I entered the real world. It is something I urge my students to consider as I combat the short-term practicality of certain courses of study.

As an endnote, I know of someone who majored in religious studies at Harvard. He did not become a rabbi or a priest. He acquired a PhD in physics and is presently a computational physicist at a Tier 1 research university. So, if your student’s parents are concerned about the applicability of a liberal arts degree, you can always present this as a counterargument. 



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The Rise of AI in College Applications and Practical Strategies for IECs

By Ajay Natarajan, President & CEO of Athena AI

For independent educational consultants (IECs), artificial intelligence (AI) and platforms like ChatGPT dangle an irresistible promise: dramatically reducing the hours spent reviewing and brainstorming student essays. Whether you are looking to grow your firm's capacity or simply catch your breath during the October rush, AI seems to hold the key to transforming the countless hours spent on essay review. Yet integrating AI into the essay process raises both ethical and practical concerns.

The issue is not as simple as labeling AI good or bad. Many educators have formed strong opinions about AI without fully understanding what's happening under the hood. This article goes beyond the surface-level debate: we examine how AI is currently being used in college applications, explore its underlying mechanics, reveal critical weaknesses that often go undiscussed,

and ultimately provide a practical framework for leveraging AI ethically in your practice.

Examining the Landscape of AI Usage in College Applications

As with many new technologies, students are leading the charge. In the 2023–24 application cycle, one in three applicants used AI in some way for their college application essays.

Across the admissions aisle, universities are still catching up. Only 20 percent of the top 100 universities have established clear AI policies for college applications. However, those that have done so share a consistent message: **use AI like a trusted adult**. Just as you can guide students through brainstorming and offer feedback

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Ajay Natarajan can be reached at Ajay@AthenaCo.ai.

Rise of AI, from page 17

without writing their essays, AI can serve a similar role. A consensus is emerging: AI assistance is not considered cheating—when used appropriately.

But this raises a crucial question: Can an artificial system truly provide meaningful guidance on something as personal as a college essay? To answer this, we need to look beyond the hype and understand what AI actually is—and is not.

What's Going on Under the Hood of AI

While ChatGPT is not the only AI platform, its widespread recognition makes it an ideal case study for understanding how AI systems work. Used by nearly a quarter of Americans each month, it is, at its core, a sophisticated chatbot—you ask a question, it responds with an answer. The important part is how it arrives at an answer.

AI is simply a program that uses a “majority rules” approach to answer questions.

ChatGPT was built in three steps:

1. It began as a blank program.
2. It was exposed to everything on the internet, including:
 - Social media forums
 - Newspaper articles

3. ChatGPT assumes everything it saw online was true and answers questions via “majority rules.”

As such, a great mental model to have when thinking about “what AI is doing under the hood” is: every time you ask ChatGPT a question, imagine it browsing Google, collecting 1,000 answers to your question, figuring out the most common answer, and spitting it back out to you.

This is the crucial point about AI: it's not a magical oracle of admissions wisdom. Instead, it's essentially aggregating and averaging all this online advice, giving more weight to the most common perspectives.

While this “majority rules” process can work quite well for answering straightforward questions like “Why is the sky blue?” or “Tell me about IECA,” using it for college essay brainstorming or feedback raises one key concern.

AI's Hidden Weakness That No One Talks About

While some online sources are genuinely valuable—like former admissions officers’ blogs—an overwhelming majority of sources are not. College Confidential threads, Reddit posts, and Quora forums number in the hundreds of thousands with students who, having gained admission to prestigious universities, believe they know



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the secret to success. However, as any IEC knows, no student truly understands why they were admitted—hence the well-meaning but misguided advice.

This is the crucial point about AI: it is not a magical oracle of admissions wisdom. Instead, it is essentially aggregating and averaging all this online advice, giving more weight to the most common perspectives. In other words, asking ChatGPT for college essay guidance is like polling thousands of College Confidential users at once—a prospect that should give any education professional pause.


Your Path Forward as an IEC

Students will likely be led astray by ChatGPT because they don't know what makes a great college application essay. But you have the experience to parse good information from bad. And so, as an IEC, you are in the perfect position to leverage AI behind the scenes to help your student receive faster, high-quality feedback on their essays.

Broadly speaking, there are three ways to “get more” out of AI models like ChatGPT. The first two involve retraining ChatGPT itself—these methods are **extremely effective** because they involve fundamentally reteaching ChatGPT to focus only on data you specify. At Athena, we used both of these techniques to force ChatGPT to only learn from our collection of thousands of successful essays and proprietary knowledge from former admissions officers and IECs. However, these first two techniques require an AI background to implement and thus, may not be readily available to you.

The third technique is easily accessible to anyone reading this article—it is called “prompt engineering.” While less effective than retraining, it can still be a great way to get more out of ChatGPT than you do currently. Prompt engineering involves figuring out the specific words, phrases, and tone of writing to use when interacting with ChatGPT. Here are my five best prompt engineering tips:

1. **Give ChatGPT context.** Explain that you are helping a student with their essay—the model tends to respond well when it understands that it is performing a “morally good” task.
2. **Enter in context about your student.** The more ChatGPT knows about your student, the more personalized its responses will be.
3. **Start “new conversations” every now and then.** Long conversations with ChatGPT tend to degrade its performance.
4. **Keep each instruction you give to ChatGPT as concise as possible.** The more verbose you are, the worse its performance.
5. **Run the same essay through multiple times.** You may receive different insights each time that can help you.

As a technology, AI poses the ability to change how IECs like yourself fundamentally help students. And I'm truly excited for what the future holds. 



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Gap Year or Therapeutic Program: How to Choose?

By Katherine Stievater, IECA Professional (MA) and Joanna Lilley, IECA Professional (MI)

Things can get messy when a student enrolls in a gap year program but actually needs a therapeutic program. The two are not synonymous. This article is intended to help independent educational consultants (IECs) understand the fundamental differences between therapeutic and gap year programs, and when it is appropriate to consider each based on a student's specific situation.

According to the American College Health Association's Spring 2024 report ¹, the most common mental health struggles for young adults include ADHD, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorders, insomnia, obsessive-compulsive related disorders, and autism spectrum. Treatment for substance use disorders (SUDs) also brings students to therapeutic programs. Students

with milder mental health issues can usually fit into the approach of structured gap year programs, as long as the student is fully transparent about their condition and treatment plan. On the other hand, a student who truly needs ongoing therapy may not be a candidate for a traditional gap year program.

Therapeutic Programs

A "therapeutic program" can look like a lot of things, but put simply, such programs are for students who need therapy. A program becomes "therapeutic" when there is a therapist and/or clinical staff working with students. The frequency, modality, and duration of therapy vary based on the presenting issues of each student.

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Katherine Stievater, Gap Year Solutions, can be reached at Katherine@GapYearSolutions.com.



Joanna Lilley, Lilley Consulting, can be reached at Joanna@LilleyConsulting.com.

¹ https://www.acha.org/wp-content/uploads/NCHA-IIIb_SPRING_2024_UNDERGRADUATE_REFERENCE_GROUP_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.pdf

Gap Year or Therapeutic Program, from page 21

Students choose a residential treatment program (the highest level of care) and/or a transitional program (e.g., a community-integrated program offering mid-level care) to get the therapeutic support they need. Determining the level of care that a young adult could benefit from is assessed through a combination of objective and subjective factors, especially the extent to which the situation is at emergency level.

Similar to gap year programs, therapeutic programs range in duration. Residential therapeutic programs typically run between 30 and 90 days, depending on the client's clinical needs and insurance coverage. (Insurance tends to support a shorter timeline for therapeutic programs.)

With a minimum of three months, a transitional program will typically see a range in length of stay around six to nine months, with the young adult seeing a decrease in therapeutic support and an increase in independence, self-sufficiency, and autonomy at each two to three month step. The idea behind a transitional program is to see a titration of care and ultimately phase out entirely of being in a program and/or having any therapeutic support needs.

For students attending a therapeutic program after high school or during college, the end goal is to see healthier functioning so that they can attend college for the first time and/or reenter after a break. Specific goals include learning new healthy coping skills, having months of sobriety, and developing healthier responses to stress and anxiety. If the end goal is to prepare a student for college, then that's the therapeutic focus. Mental health struggles don't disappear—students develop skills to manage them more effectively.

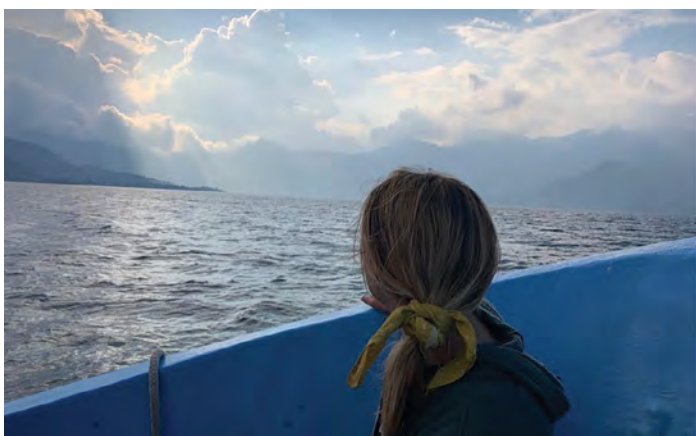


Photo courtesy Gap Year Solutions

Gap Year Programs

Gap year programs consist of structured and semi-structured experiences, usually lasting six to 12 weeks, with a peer cohort, trained program educators, and housing. These programs, based both in the United States and abroad, offer a variety of experiential educational experiences focusing on cultural immersion, language skills, volunteer work, and different types of skill-building. The majority of international gap year programs have a balance of immersion, service, and adventure.

Students participate in gap year programs for many reasons. These include improving maturity, boosting confidence, especially with

groups, developing independent decision-making, and gaining other life skills. Sometimes the goal is simply to travel, experience different cultures, learn a language, or try something new.

Students on these programs may have mental health issues such as ADHD, anxiety, depression, and OCD. Some may be on the autism spectrum. A lot of young adults have a baseline level of anxiety. Not everyone needs a therapeutic program, and if a student can manage their anxiety without therapeutic support, then exploring gap year programs makes sense.

A number of factors help determine whether a student with mental health challenges can be accommodated by a gap year program:

- **Weaning off therapy:** Beginning a few months before the program starts, can the student effectively wean off regular therapy appointments?
- **Ability to self-administer medications:** The student must be able to stay on their regular medication schedule without assistance.
- **Adaptability:** Can the student be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances? Surprises happen in these programs—all the time! Students who require a high level of routine may be challenged when away from the familiarity of their home situation.
- **Adequate communication and social skills:** For group programs, students must be able to interact effectively with others in their cohort. This can be challenging for some neurodivergent students.
- **Level of program supports:** Students with mental health challenges need responsible adults on call, some structure, and often a higher level of one-on-one mentoring. "Semi-structured" programs, which have fewer built-in supports, are typically unsuitable for these students. (Note: Accredited gap year programs are required to have a mental health professional on call 24/7.)
- **Wi-Fi availability:** When students will need to be in touch with their parents or therapist while away from home, how accessible are communication networks? Some gap year programs have stricter "no phone" policies and/or may not have adequate connectivity throughout the program.
- **Transparency:** The student must be open about their diagnosis and committed to full disclosure and candid discussion during the program application process. There are times, for example, when programs will ask to reach out to a student's therapist for additional information.

Summary

There are very few gap year programs that are truly wellness-based and/or supportive for students who need therapeutic support. In most cases, students with mental health challenges must choose between a true therapeutic program and a structured gap year program that is willing to accept the student based on their diagnosis and ability to self-manage. So how do families know which direction to take? This is where it's helpful to hire a professional to help navigate the choices and find the right resources for the student! 🌟



Innovative Programs at Boarding and Day Schools Paving the Way for 21st-Century Education

By Henry C. Mulzac III, IECA Professional (MD)

In this new era of artificial intelligence (AI), administrators and educators must keep pace with a rapidly evolving educational landscape. Many boarding and day schools have embraced innovation to equip students with the skills and mindsets needed to thrive. During my recent visits to several boarding schools last spring and this fall, I observed how these schools creatively redefine traditional approaches, offering students immersive, interdisciplinary, and forward-thinking programs.

Experiential Learning Through Real-World Applications

One trend that stood out was the emphasis on experiential learning. Schools are designing programs in which students actively engage in solving real-world problems. For example, one boarding school offers a Sustainability in Action program, where students

collaborate with local environmental organizations to design eco-friendly solutions to community challenges. This hands-on approach helps students understand ecological science while developing project management and teamwork skills.

Another day, the school I visited integrated entrepreneurship into its curriculum through a student-led incubator program. In this program, students create startups, pitch ideas to industry experts, and learn about financial literacy and business strategy. These programs bridge classroom learning with practical application, fostering innovation and resilience.

STEM and STEAM Initiatives

STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs are evolving to incorporate creativity through

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Henry C. Mulzac III, Henry Charles Consulting, can be reached at Henry@HenryCharlesConsulting.com.

Boarding and Day Schools, from page 23

STEAM (adding "arts" to STEM). One boarding school has built a Design Thinking Lab that blends art, engineering, and technology. Students work on projects such as 3D-printing prosthetics or developing mobile apps for social good. This integration nurtures creativity while addressing complex global issues.

Some schools also offer advanced robotics clubs or partnerships with tech companies, allowing students to work on cutting-edge technology projects. One school's collaboration with a nearby university enables students to participate in joint research projects, giving them a head start in STEM fields.

Innovative Athletic Programs

Athletics are increasingly becoming a platform for fostering leadership, collaboration, and resilience. Due to the rise of women's college athletics, many boarding and day schools are investing in cutting-edge athletic facilities and programs beyond traditional sports.

One school offers a sports science program in which student-athletes learn about nutrition, biomechanics, and injury prevention alongside physical training. Another school integrates sports psychology into its athletic curriculum, helping students develop perseverance and focus.

Boarding and day schools have always been at the forefront of educational innovation, designing programs that inspire curiosity, creativity, and a sense of purpose. These schools equip students with the knowledge they need for academic success and the skills to lead in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

Additionally, some schools are creating opportunities for interdisciplinary learning within athletics. A boarding school I visited pairs student-athletes with data analysts to use performance metrics for improving game strategies. These programs teach students critical thinking and decision-making skills while fostering a love of competition and teamwork.

Beyond elite sports programs, many schools emphasize inclusivity through recreational and intramural leagues. Regardless of skill level, these offerings provide all students with opportunities to build confidence, stay active, and develop lifelong healthy habits.

Global Citizenship Programs

Another innovative approach I encountered at many boarding and day schools was incorporating global perspectives into the curriculum. One school's Global Studies Program includes exchanges with partner schools across four continents. Students study topics like international diplomacy and participate in simulations like Model United Nations, fostering a deep understanding of global issues and cultural empathy.

Additionally, almost all schools emphasize service learning, where students address societal challenges such as food insecurity or access


to education. By integrating service projects into academics, schools are cultivating socially responsible leaders.

Focus on Wellness and Emotional Intelligence

Recognizing the importance of mental health, schools are increasingly incorporating wellness programs into their offerings. At one boarding school, I observed a comprehensive Mindfulness Curriculum where students learn stress management techniques, meditation, and emotional intelligence. Another school has built a Wellness Center staffed with counselors and life coaches to support students' well-being.

By integrating these programs, schools acknowledge that a successful education isn't just academic but also emotional and social. This approach prepares students to navigate the pressures of modern life with confidence and poise.

Boarding and day schools have always been at the forefront of educational innovation, designing programs that inspire curiosity, creativity, and a sense of purpose. These schools equip students with the knowledge they need for academic success and the skills to lead in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

As independent educational consultants, we guide families toward schools to find their child's ideal education setting. Understanding these innovative programs enables us to provide thoughtful recommendations that empower students to fuel their passions. 

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Navigating Greek Life on Campus

By Renée Lanzilli Serrano, MEd, IECA Professional (MA) and Mary Kacmarcik Baker, EdD, IECA Associate (CA)

Some of your students may be curious about Greek life on their prospective campuses. Here is a quick glimpse to assist your students and parents should they desire more information.

What Is Greek Life?

'Greek life' refers to sororities and fraternities on college campuses, named with Greek letters that symbolize their values. These organizations foster friendship, leadership, and community service, creating lifelong connections and a shared commitment that extends well beyond college.

Greek Life Options on Campus

Sororities are single-sex women's social organizations found on over 600 college campuses. The National Panhellenic Conference is the trade association for 26 international/national organizations. For more information, visit NPCWomen.org or TheSororityLife.com.

Fraternities are men's social organizations found on over 800 college campuses. The North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) represents 58 international/national organizations. For more information, see NICFraternity.org.

Divine 9 is the nickname of the nine historically Black Greek-letter organizations found on over 100 college campuses nationwide. The National Panhellenic Council promotes the well-being of its affiliates, five fraternities, and four sororities. For more information, visit NPHCHQ.com.

Some campuses have **cultural-based fraternities and sororities**. Refer to the National Association for Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) at NALFO.org for the umbrella coalition for the 17 Latino fraternities and sororities; the National Asian Pacific Islander/Desi American Panhellenic Association (NAPA) at NAPAHQ.org for the 18 NAPA fraternities and sororities; or the National Multicultural Greek



Renée Lanzilli Serrano, College Quest Advising, can be reached at CollegeQuestAdvising@gmail.com.



Mary Kacmarcik Baker, College Quest Advising, can be reached at Mary@CollegeQuestAdvising.com.

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Greek Life, from page 25

Council, the umbrella council for 12 fraternities and sororities, at NationalMGC.org.

The **Professional Fraternity Association** is an association of 27 national collegiate fraternities and sororities which are discipline-specific while students are pursuing graduate school (law, medicine, etc.) or undergraduate (business, engineering, education, etc.). For more information, see ProfessionalFraternity.org.

Association of College Honor Societies: ACHS is an association of 65 national collegiate and post-graduate honor societies. For more information, visit ACHSHonor.org.

What to Look For and How to Evaluate Greek Options

Whether large or small, culturally based, academic or general, new or long-established—each fraternity and sorority offers unique benefits. Selecting one is a personal choice, like choosing friends. Students should find the group where they feel most at home and supported.

Potential Benefits

Philanthropy: Community service is a priority for Greek organizations. Thousands of hours have been spent volunteering and millions of dollars have been raised for various community organizations.

Alumni Networking/Mentorship: Greek alumni provide career guidance, advisory board support, career networking, and internship opportunities for members.

Leadership: These organizations are self-governed, so opportunities for executive board and committee chair positions are encouraged internally and through campus Greek Councils.

Academic Expectations and Support: A minimum GPA is needed to be a member. Study hours, time management, study partners, and upper-class members assist with advice and connection to campus resources.

Scholarships Available: Most national organizations have nonprofit foundations that provide opportunities for financial assistance for college expenses.

Potential Drawbacks

Financial Obligations: The financial commitment to join a Greek organization can be seen as an investment in your future, and membership costs vary widely. Expenses depend on factors like housing arrangements (some have houses, dorm floors, or meet in classrooms) and campus traditions. Dues typically cover activities and programs. There is often a one-time fee for national membership, which includes formal items like a lapel pin. Additional costs may arise from optional events, fundraising, or special gear, but overall expenses are similar to those of other campus social and leadership organizations.

Time Commitment: Expectations include being involved on campus, meetings, community service, scholarship, and social events on and off campus.

Notes on Hazing: All fraternities and sororities have strong policies prohibiting any type of hazing. Hazing refers to any activity that is a condition upon recruitment, admission, affiliation, or continued participation in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers someone, regardless of consent or a person's willingness to participate. Most states (46) have some type of hazing law in the books. Ask for the college police report to learn about campus hazing incidents and ask each group for their expectations.




Recruitment Process

Students entering college and considering Greek life should seek out their campus's Greek life or Campus Activities Office to learn more about recruitment registration. Recruitment (previously known as "Rush") happens in various ways and timeframes, depending on each college campus. Some campuses have a more structured process called Primary or Formal Recruitment. Many campuses have Informal Recruitment, which may occur year-round; it all depends on the campus.

Conclusion

Campus involvement offers students a range of opportunities, with Greek life as one option among many. Students should be encouraged to explore resources available through the student life, campus activities, or Greek life offices to find what suits them best.

Research consistently shows a strong link between campus engagement and higher graduation rates. Studies indicate that active participation in extracurricular activities, student organizations, and community service significantly boosts students' chances of completing their degrees. This success is often attributed to a greater sense of belonging, enhanced academic performance, and a supportive social network on campus. 



Why I Belong

Creativity in All Things

By Linda Jang, IECA Associate (CA)

Standing on the 18th floor of an open-framed high-rise building, wearing a hard hat and surveying the open floor plan, I could never have imagined that this path would one day lead me to become an independent educational consultant (IEC).



My career began as an interior architect, where I spent over 12 years designing collaborative and holistic interior office spaces for corporate clients. These projects challenged my creativity as I worked to design environments that energized and inspired productivity. I continued working until I was nine months pregnant with my first daughter.

Raising my two daughters became my next career, and I applied my professional expertise to community projects. Drawing on my experience working with executives and professionals from Apple, Merrill Lynch, and Wells Fargo Bank, I successfully raised thousands of dollars to support an art docent program. This program brought fine art and art history lessons to the small public school district my daughters attended in Monterey, California, enriching their educational offerings. When approached to become the art director of the school district program, I jumped at the chance and accepted. There, I discovered my creativity helped students find their imaginative side, foster cognitive development, and, most importantly, nurture their self-worth and creative expression.

I thought I had found my dream job, but everything shifted when I became friends with my daughter's IEC, JoAnn. I was captivated by the college application process, and while giving my daughters the freedom to work independently, I quietly absorbed everything I could. After they left the nest, and with JoAnn's encouragement—now as my mentor—I began pursuing the UCLA College Counselor Certificate Program. Balancing family and my teaching responsibilities, I took three years to complete the program, never giving up on becoming an IEC. While still teaching, I started working with a few students under JoAnn's guidance. Then COVID changed everything.

While still teaching remotely, I was invited into a discussion group formed by one of my UCLA teachers with a diverse community of members from all over the world. This welcoming group, which met three times weekly, is where I learned about IECA. Several people in the group were members and encouraged me to join.

Being cooped up at home with only a computer, I found the IECA resources and community to be a significant connection with the outside world. I eagerly looked forward to College Conversations, where Marilyn O'Toole and Joanne LaSpina warmly welcomed me to join in learning critical information about colleges and their updates on changes occurring during the pandemic. Their insightful questions to admission officers had me create pages of notes, which allowed me to


become better equipped as an IEC and helped me navigate my students through challenging times. Monthly Associate & Student Members Virtual Roundtables popped up on my screen to join, and participating gave me confidence that I understood the “world of college counseling.” The first IECA conference I attended was virtual. It was terrific; there were so many choices of sessions that were incredibly engaging and further broadened my understanding of the profession.

Now, I take advantage of everything IECA has to offer.

IECA's seamless transition to a virtual environment gave me the essential knowledge to grow as an IEC and fostered meaningful professional relationships and friendships. This support proved critical in launching my practice. It allowed me to channel my creativity in a new direction, evolving my approach to incorporate the skills I had cultivated throughout my previous careers.

I retired from the school district and attended the San Diego IECA conference in fall 2022, which marked a pivotal moment as I began meeting people I knew from virtual sessions in person for the first time. I was struck by the kindness and support of everyone I encountered. Meeting the wonderful and warm people I had met countless times on Zoom in person was heartfelt. I was motivated when seeing individuals with diverse life experiences unite with a shared purpose—to help students navigate their high school and college application journeys.

Now, I take advantage of everything IECA has to offer. I've been on IECA college tours, gaining valuable insights and firsthand observations that I can confidently share with my students. Spending five days on a bus with over 50 fellow IECs is a truly unique and enriching experience, full of idea-sharing and meaningful conversations that deepen my understanding of our shared mission. Additionally, I have become fearless in joining and participating in roundtables, affinity groups, and my regional group. These communities provide me with countless ideas, inspiring me to continually learn, grow, and refine my practice. Last year, I joined the Outreach Committee, further deepening my connection to the IECA community. I thoroughly enjoy collaborating with fellow members to promote the value of IECA and share why it is an essential organization to join.

Reflecting on my work with this year's senior class, I am honored and proud to guide my students through this pivotal time in their lives. Using my creativity to help them uncover their interests and connect them with their futures is incredibly rewarding. IECA has been instrumental in fueling my continued improvement in my practice and shaping the care and commitment I bring to each student. For this, I am truly grateful! 

Linda Jang, Next Step 4U, can be reached at Ljangnextstep@gmail.com.



IECA Foundation Grant Success Story

Educational Enrichment Foundation (EEF) Backpacks for IMPACT Event in Tucson, Arizona

This program equips school backpacks and supplies to Tucson Unified district K-12 students who reside in marginalized/poor communities and who are without financial means. By providing students with backpacks and supplies, we are decreasing one barrier to success. Arriving equipped for the school day helps students feel confident in their ability to function in the classroom. Thanks to the IECA Foundation, 385 students received supply-filled backpacks to start the school year!



You can read more about EEF and our other recent grant recipients on our website: IECAfoundation.org/grant-winners



Let's Get Down to Motown!

Join the IECA Foundation on **Monday, May 5, 7:30–10:00 p.m.** for an unforgettable evening celebrating the vibrant sounds of Motown in the heart of the Motor City. Enjoy classic hits, connect with colleagues, and dance the night away—all while supporting our mission to provide grants to nonprofit organizations that help underserved youth and young adults map pathways to success. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit: IECAfoundation.org/upcoming-event-information

Introducing the Foundation's New Program Director



We are excited to welcome **Rachel Herman** as the new program director of the IECA Foundation, having joined us in November 2024. Rachel brings a wealth of experience from her extensive career in the nonprofit sector, where she has held various roles in fundraising, donor relations, corporate community engagement consulting, and events management.

Rachel is deeply passionate about our mission to empower underserved youth across the country and is eager to connect with the IECA community. She resides in Hudson, Ohio, just outside of Cleveland, with her husband and three children. Rachel can be reached at RHerman@IECAfoundation.org. Please join us in welcoming Rachel to the team!

Donate today!



As the philanthropic arm of IECA, the IECA Foundation's mission is to provide grants to nonprofit organizations helping underserved youth and young adults map pathways to success. Each year, this is made possible by the generous contributions of IECA members, donors, and event sponsors. Gifts of all sizes have an incredible impact on the trajectories of the students we serve through our grant recipients.

Campus Visits

Visiting and evaluating college, school, and program campuses is an important way for IECA members to stay knowledgeable. These organized tours also help Associate members reach their campus visits requirements in order to qualify for Professional membership status. We offer several options for IECA members to participate on campus tours.



Thank you to Chapel Haven Schleifer Center for hosting IECA member consultants during the Connecticut Shore Tour in November 2024! The tour also included visits to Franklin Academy, Grove School, Oxford Academy, and Vista Life Innovations.

Upcoming IECA Pre- and Post-Conference Tours May 5 and 7–9 • Detroit, Michigan

We are pleased to offer campus tours for IECA members before and after our 2025 Annual Conference in Detroit, Michigan.

Our **pre-conference college tours** include Wayne State University and College for Creative Studies.

Our **post-conference college tours** include an LD/ND-focused tour of Western Michigan colleges; a tour including Bowling Green State University, Oberlin College, College of Wooster, Hiram College, and Case Western Reserve University; a tour of the University of Michigan, Albion College, University of Notre Dame, and St. Mary's College; and a tour featuring the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Grand Valley State University, and Hope College.

Our **K-12 school tours** include Cranbrook Schools, Interlochen Center for the Arts, the Leelanau School, Western Reserve Academy, and Andrew Osborne Academy.

Our **therapeutic program tours** include Skywood Recovery and Pasadena Villa.

For information on all campus tours, visit: link.IECAonline.com/campus-tours

Spring College Tour: The Nation's Capital

March 17–21 • Washington, DC/Virginia

Sold Out! This five-day tour includes colleges in Washington, DC and Virginia, including American University, Catholic University, George Mason University, George Washington University, Howard University, University of Richmond, University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, and William & Mary.



Spring College Tour: Pursue Your Happiness in Pennsylvania

March 24–28 • Pennsylvania

Sold Out! This five-day tour of Pennsylvania colleges includes Bryn Mawr College, Bucknell University, Dickinson College, Franklin & Marshall College, Lafayette College, Lehigh University, Muhlenberg College, Pennsylvania State University, and Villanova University.



Spring LD/ND Tour: The Hub of Learning in Boston

March 24–27 • Boston, Massachusetts

This four-day tour of LD/ND college programs in the Boston area includes Clark University, Curry College, Dean College, Endicott College, Emerson College, Lesley University, Northeastern University, Simmons University, UMass Lowell, Wentworth Institute of Technology, Wheaton College, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.





Introductions

Please Welcome IECA's New Professional Members



Steve Colley (AR), a former Associate member, is a graduate of the US Naval Academy, Harvard University (MPP), and UCLA's Certificate in College Counseling program. A former Marine

Corps officer and Capitol Hill Professional Staff Member, Colley specializes in service academy admissions, ROTC scholarships, and veteran transitions to higher education. Colley co-chairs IECA's Military-Affiliated Students and IECs Affinity Group and serves as a Naval Academy admissions liaison and interviewer. Additionally, he directs the Mijo Program, a nonprofit initiative supporting high-achieving first-generation Hispanic students, and is the SACAC Government Relations Chair for Arkansas.

Steve Colley, MPP
Waypoint College Consulting
Little Rock, AR 72205
SteveColley@WaypointCollege.com
WaypointCollege.com
Specialty: C



Dina (Dinky) Hammam (OK), a former Associate member, transitioned to independent educational consulting from a career in banking and finance. Born in Lebanon, she has lived across several

countries, fueled by her love for exploration and travel. She holds an undergraduate degree from Tufts University and a master's in nonprofit management from Oklahoma City University. Hammam volunteers for the Oklahoma community and offers pro bono support to Matchlighters and Ukraine Global Scholars. She is a member of NACAC.

Dina (Dinky) Hammam
Upwards with Dinky
Oklahoma City, OK 73112
917-544-2019
Dina@UpwardsWithDinky.com
UpwardsWithDinky.com
Specialty: C



Denise Karp (CT), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for four years. Karp earned her undergraduate degree from Union College and her MEd from UNC-Chapel Hill before

beginning a career as a school psychologist. Her work with families and students, higher education, and administration led her to pursue college admissions counseling. Karp attended IECA's 2021 Summer Training Institute. She volunteers as an essay reader for Stop the Hate and with CollegeVine.

Denise Karp, MEd
Big Fish on Campus
Avon, CT 06001
860-387-3979
DKarp@BigFishOnCampus.com
BigFishOnCampus.com
Specialty: C



Beth Kraemer (IL), a former Associate member, brings her training as a journalist, litigator, and legal writing instructor into her work as an IEC. She earned a BSJ from the Medill School

of Journalism at Northwestern University, a master's in labor and human resources from The Ohio State University, and a JD from the UCLA School of Law. She and her team support students throughout the country.

Beth Kraemer, JD
In College Consulting
Bannockburn, IL 60015
847-408-1769
Beth@Incollegeconsulting.com
www.incollegeconsulting.com
Specialty: C



Kelli McCarthy (TX), a former Associate member, brings a blend of technical expertise and educational guidance, having earned her BS in computer science engineering before excelling in

technology sector roles. In 2008, driven by her passion for research and creative problem-solving, she transitioned into educational mentorship and consulting. After serving as a K-12 school counselor, she founded her IEC practice in 2022, empowering students to identify and achieve their educational goals. Kelli is a member of TACAC, NACAC, and serves on the IECA Outreach Committee.

Kelli McCarthy
Now to Next Academic Advising
Leander, TX 78641
512-751-0791
Kelli@NowToNextAdvising.com
NowToNextAdvising.com
Specialty: C



Diane Steiger (OH) has been an IEC for three years, following a career as a high school math teacher, college math instructor, coach, and test prep tutor. She holds an MEd from Ohio State

University, a BA from DePaul University, and an Independent Educational Consultant Certificate from UC Irvine Extension. A member of OACAC, she volunteers with the Matchlighters and ScholarMatch programs.

Diane Steiger, MEd
Matrix College Consulting
Dublin, OH 43017
614-499-2585
Diane@MatrixCollegeConsulting.com
MatrixCollegeConsulting.com
Specialty: C



Angela Walmsley (FL), a former Associate member, has more than 25 years of experience at the K-12 and university levels as a teacher, professor, and higher education administrator. She holds a BS from the University of Illinois, where she also became certified to teach middle school and high school mathematics and science. Walmsley also earned an MEd and diploma in statistics from Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland and a PhD in curriculum and instruction from Saint Louis University.

Angela Walmsley, PhD
Interactive College Prep
Cooper City, FL 33328
314-255-5456
DrAngela@IC-Prep.com
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In the News

Dave Morris (WA) was quoted in the *USA Today* article "Post-grad football lures players with a second shot at glory. They rarely get it" on December 13, 2024.

Dana Haddad (NY) was quoted in the December 3, 2024 *New York Times* article "Earn \$800,000? You Might Get Financial Aid at an Elite NYC School."


The Black Family's Guide to College Admissions, 2nd edition, written by **Shereem Herndon-Brown** (MD), was featured in the *Forbes* article "Some of the Best Higher Education Books of 2024" on December 1, 2024.

Ibrahim Firat (TX) was interviewed on the *Fox News Rundown* podcast on December 23, 2024 on the topic "Business Rundown: Rising College Acceptance Rates Could Knock Down Costs."

Laurie Kopp Weingarten (NJ) was quoted in the October 29, 2024 *Forbes* article "Should You Commit to a College Before the FAFSA Opens?" She was also quoted in "Major financial aid expansion at Penn targets middle-income families, excludes home values" in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* on November 19, 2024; quoted in the December 11, 2024 *New York Post* article "Road to a Top College: Classes That Stand Out in High School," which also quoted **Robert Kohen** (Associate, NY); and interviewed on *NewsNation Live* on December 16, 2024 for a segment about college admissions.

Hanna Stotland (IL) was profiled in the *College Fix* article "This former university administrator now helps students accused of sexual assault start a new life" on November 14, 2024.

Josh Stephens (Associate, CA) was quoted in "Has Princeton lost its appetite for feeder schools?" in the December 2, 2024 edition of the *Daily Princeton*.

Pierre Huguet (Associate, MA) was quoted in "Do 6 Things After Admission to Grad School" in *US News & World Report* on December 12, 2024. 

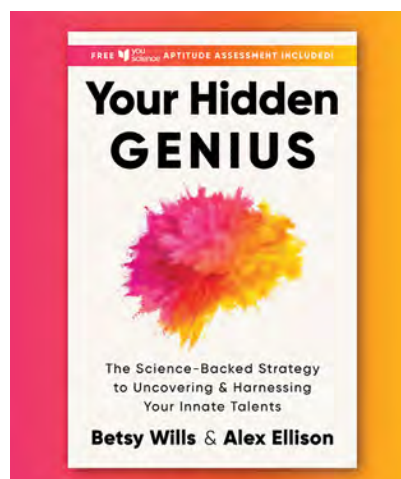


IECA members: send us your media appearances to share in a future issue of *Insights* and on the IECA website. Email details to Insights@IECAonline.com.

Initiatives



▲ **Kristina Geiger Dooley** (OH) and her team at Estrela Consulting presented a daylong professional development workshop in October 2024 to 50 school superintendents, curriculum directors, principals, and school counselors from nearly 30 different school districts in northeast Ohio. The event, titled "College Admissions: Unlocked," focused on what administrators need to know about the college admissions landscape in 2025. It was so well-received that they've already been asked to present again next fall!



◀ **Your Hidden Genius: The Science-Backed Strategy to Uncovering and Harnessing Your Innate Talents**, written by **Alex Ellison** (CA) and YouScience co-founder Betsy Wills, was published in January 2025.

Mary Harkins (PA) and **Mark Cruver** (GA) of Academic Directions Plus offered a first-of-its-kind College

Planning Summit on November 19-21, 2024, featuring many guest speakers and IECA members: **Lisa Hillhouse** (GA), **Dave Morris** (WA), **Geri Perkal** (SC), **Heidi Potrykus** (WI), **Hanna Stotland** (NV), **Tina Tranfaglia** (IL), **Shannon Wagar** (GA), **Deborah Gutman** (RI), **Jennie Kent** (CT), **David Thomas** (NY), **Jeff Levy** (CA), and **Brian Eufinger** (GA). 

Regional Groups

Spotlight on the Bay Area Regional Group

By Shveta Bagade, IECA Associate (CA), Mark Bechthold, IECA Professional (CA), and Tina Pratt, IECA Professional (CA)

The Bay Area Regional Group (BARGE) set about to present a dynamic lineup of activities to inform, inspire, and connect our members. We invited members to suggest topics, present ideas, and help organize events, and boy, did they deliver! In the last few months of 2024, we had Sammy Perez of Cal Poly, Humboldt present updates on its campus; Jamie Hoffman of Sacramento State presented on its accredited Recreation, Parks, and Tourism program; Anna Walther of Roger Williams University gave an outstanding overview of the college; and Erin Sauers from the University of Michigan spoke from their Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. We also attended events hosted by Polygence and Binghamton University, providing good food and even better information to share with our students.

As we roll into 2025, the excitement keeps building. In January, Leadership Initiatives will join us to share how they are placing high school students in impressive internships. February will feature John Durante, podcast host and author, sharing wisdom on navigating college admissions. Plus, a visit to CSU Monterey Bay is in the works to explore their new Taylor Science and Engineering Building (and maybe their cafeteria).

BARGE leadership is incredibly grateful to our members for their enthusiasm and for recruiting such stellar speakers. With in-person meetings and social events on the horizon, we're gearing up for another year of growth, connection, and maybe even a little fun!



Members of the Central Texas Regional Group enjoying lunch together in October 2024.



Members of the Philadelphia Regional Group enjoyed lunch with Joe Zumbo, Assistant Director of Admissions at Dean College, in October 2024.

Connect with Colleagues in a Regional Group

Connect with fellow IECA members living close to you! Some Regional Groups meet in person and others meet virtually—and some do both. We currently have more than 40 Regional Groups and new members (and groups) are always welcome.

To get involved with an existing group, join their community on the Member Network: network.IECAonline.com/communities/RegionalGroups

To start a group in your area, complete the "Request New Regional Group" form on our website: link.IECAonline.com/regional

For Schools, Colleges, and Program Representatives

If you are interested in meeting with IECA members, either virtually or in person, we encourage you to reach out to our Regional Groups. You can find the full list of groups on our website: link.IECAonline.com/regional



In October 2024, members of the Broward/Palm Beach, Florida Regional Group toured Florida International University together. The next month, they convened again, this time for a tour of Barry University.

Spotlight on the College Affordability Affinity Group

By Liz Agather, MS, IECA Professional (NC), Peggy Jennings, EdD, MEd, CEP, IECA Professional (MA), and Donna Sakabu, IECA Professional (TX)

Are you a newer independent educational consultant or a seasoned IEC who wants to deepen your understanding of college affordability and financial aid? If so, we'd love for you to learn more about the College Affordability Affinity Group (CAAG) and consider becoming involved.


Liz Agather, Peggy Jennings, and Donna Sakabu founded the CAAG in 2023 to give all IECA members, especially those newer to the profession, a safe place to discuss trends and topics pertaining to college affordability. Liz and Donna served on the Subcommittee for College Affordability (SOCA) for several years; Peggy still serves with SOCA. Together, we aim to provide well-vetted resources and presenters, and a congenial setting for IECA members to become better informed about college affordability, in addition to IECA's SOCA webinars and conference breakout sessions.

Similar to other IECA monthly roundtables, our meetings are not recorded. We begin each meeting focused on a specific topic, with either a presentation by a speaker with affordability/financial aid expertise or a guided discussion from one of the CAAG coordinators. Afterward, we open the floor for questions and share current financial aid resources. We are grateful for the support of SOCA members who attend our meetings, offering their expertise by answering questions and

sometimes presenting to the group. Feedback from CAAG attendees has been positive.

Together, we aim to provide well-vetted resources and presenters, and a congenial setting for IECA members to become better informed about college affordability, in addition to IECA's SOCA webinars and conference breakout sessions.

Since first launching in August 2023, some of the featured meeting topics have included: *Anticipating Hidden Costs; Helping Parents Budget for College; Deciphering Financial Aid Award Letters; Student Loans; How to Pay for College; Updates & Trends in Financial Aid; Private Scholarships: Realities vs. Hope*; and, of course, *The New FAFSA*.

CAAG meets on the fourth Thursday of each month (except November and December) at 11:00 a.m. ET. Look for announcements via the Member Network with each meeting's agenda. All IECA members are welcome! 

Connect with Your Colleagues in an Affinity Group

IECA Affinity Groups are run by IECA members with similar interests in a specific topic. We currently have 35 groups—and new members and groups are always welcome!

To join an existing group on the Member Network, go to: network.IECAonline.com/communities/AffinityGroups

To create a new Affinity Group, complete the "Request New Affinity Group" form on our website: [link.IECAonline.com/Affinity](https://www.IECAonline.com/Affinity)



Liz Agather, Agather College Consulting, can be reached at Path4U2College@gmail.com.



Peggy Jennings, Jennings College Consulting, can be reached at Peggy@DrJ4College.com.



Donna Sakabu, Insightful College Planning, LLC, can be reached at Donna@InsightfulCollegePlanning.com.

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You could cut this sentence out or condense it a bit. It feels a bit specific for the overall theme of community and sacrifice. Instead, maybe focus on a moment that made you realize the support of your teammates or how that journey impacted your personal growth.



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February 13

Achieving Harmony: How Families Use Non-Traditional Education to Support Mental Health and Passion Pursuits

March 13

Navigating the College Admissions Madness

April 10

The Little Things: How Partnerships with Online Schools Can Enhance Support for Homeschooling Families

May 8

Future-Proofing Education: Preparing Students for a World We Can't Predict

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IECA⁺

INSIGHTS

Member-to-Member

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Winter 2025

Digging Deeper Than Interests to Uncover Hidden Talents



New Member Benefits

We continue to roll out new benefits to help your IEC practice succeed, including discounts on business management tools, publications, software, travel, and more. See below for our newest offerings. For the most up-to-date information on discounts, visit: link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts

Achieve by Simply Succeed

Achieve simplifies the college admissions process through automated workflows, integrations, and crowdsourced resources. It creates a one-stop shop for IECs to run their practices, manage students efficiently, and grow their practices. IECA members receive 25% off the monthly fee and 35% off an annual subscription. For more information and to get started, visit the Software Tools section of the Discount for IECA Members webpage: link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts

Best First Year: College Success Coaching Program for Students, Parents, and Supporters (Virtual)

Best First Year is a one-of-a-kind college readiness and success program designed for parents and students, hosted by *New York Times* bestselling author and college life expert, Harlan Cohen. Cohen will be there to support your families as they navigate the journey from high school through the first year of college. Give your clients access to expert advice and guidance that will reduce stress and increase success. A one-year membership retails for \$297 but IECA members receive this special discounted rate: \$100 per membership (minimum purchase: 10 memberships); \$130 per membership (minimum purchase: 5 memberships). For more information and to sign up, visit the Client Services section of the Discount for IECA Members webpage: link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts

EduFit Test Prep

EduFit is an online test prep and academic tutoring company specializing in SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT, AP tutoring, homework assistance, LNAT, and more. EduFit offers a 10% discount to IECA members on all services. For more information and to take advantage of this offer, visit the Client Services section of the Discount for IECA Members webpage: link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts

Insurance Plans

IECA is partnering with Vault Health Plan to offer exclusive access to major medical, dental, and vision insurance plans for

our members. These comprehensive options provide valuable coverage to support you and your family's health needs. Enrollment is now open—don't miss this opportunity to take advantage of these member-exclusive benefits. To learn more and get started, visit the Insurance section of our Discounts for Members webpage: link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts



Member Deals

We're excited to share our new partnership with Member Deals! Enjoy exclusive savings on theme parks, hotels, concerts, movie tickets, and more. To start exploring these discounts, visit the Discount for IECA members webpage: link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts

Mentor Match

Coming in early 2025, our new Mentor Match Program platform will make it easier than ever for mentors and mentees to connect, communicate, and track their progress—all in one place. Supporting meaningful relationships and professional growth just got a whole lot simpler. For more details and to sign up as a mentor or mentee, visit link.IECAonline.com/mentoring.

Digging Deeper Than Interests to Uncover Hidden Talents

By Alex Ellison, MPA, IECA Professional (CA)

The Oyster Problem

I was that overconfident kid who never doubted my abilities, but I never knew what those abilities actually were. I see many young people like this in my counseling practice: they excel in many subjects, do well on tests, and haven't yet had those big flops that humble us. They have been told the world is their oyster. What a terrible thing to tell someone. An invitation to do it all is a sentence to do nothing at all, and it's a sure way to cause them to worry endlessly about what they could or should be doing.

I remember being about 11 or 12 years old and going to work with my dad, a wine and liquor salesman. One of his customers, a kind, older restaurateur, told my dad, once I was out of earshot, "Mark my words; she'll do big things." As though he'd just met the oracle, my dad relayed this message to me proudly, and it has been a curse ever since. Still, at 36 years old, I wonder: *Is this big enough?*

Even strangers with whom we have no connection or history can make deep impressions, sometimes deeper than our own families, because we trust they have no hidden agenda or bias. But of course, nobody is capable of looking at someone and gleaning their innate talents—not even that stranger on the plane who seems so keen on giving you career advice. And no human is free from bias; we can't even do an unbiased assessment of ourselves. Bad things happen when we make big life decisions based on self-assessments alone; we trap ourselves in a loop of what we have always thought ourselves to be rather than what we could become.

For example, young women—more so than men—tend to self-assess themselves as bad at math and science, thus steering them away from related professions. In contrast, objective aptitude assessments often reveal the opposite, granting permission to explore careers that initially seemed out of reach.

Unfortunately, too many people live their whole lives blind to their aptitudes. School performance will rarely reveal our aptitudes; I've assessed many clients who report poor grades in math but possess a predilection for numerical reasoning; or they struggled in school until they discovered their propensity for spatial reasoning, which craves attention through activities like construction, design, and engineering. Even after school, we remain ignorant of our talents because we tend to believe those things that come easily to us come easily to everyone else, and so are nothing particularly special. The only way

to unearth these qualities is through non-biased aptitude assessments, which can assay our raw material and reveal our innate talents.



The Conversation Starter

As independent educational consultants (IECs), we're used to pulling teeth like Orin Scrivello, played by Steve Martin, the terrifying dentist in *Little Shop of Horrors*. We prod and pull, trying to extract even the tiniest bit of material from the stoic student. When I find myself in this situation, I defer to the student's assessment results to jump-start the conversation. In fact, I don't allow a student to book an initial meeting with me until they've completed their YouScience assessment—my tool of choice. Then, I share my screen and show them the pinwheel that represents their results on the six driving aptitudes that are tested.

"It looks like you scored as a Diagnostic Problem Solver," I'll say as I explain the aptitude that shows comfort with connecting information under pressure and making decisions with limited facts. "Can you tell me about a time you guessed right, even before all the facts were made available? Maybe you immediately guess the bad guy in a movie before everyone else, or you're the first one to solve the puzzles in an escape room."

It might get them talking. Maybe I'm lucky to get a shrug. So I continue like an eager-to-impress fortune teller: "Ah, I see here you're a 3D Visualizer. I'm guessing you played with Lego as a kid, you're a pro at putting IKEA furniture together, and you're restless if you're not building, making, or tinkering."

continued on page M4




Alex Ellison, Throughline Guidance, can be reached at Alex@ThroughlineGuidance.com.

In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that IECA shares news of the passing of the following members.

Longtime IECA member **Michael (Mike) Musiker** passed away peacefully in Southampton, New York on October 15, 2024. Originally from Boston, Mike received his BA and MA from Northeastern University, was a school counselor and teacher at the Manhasset Public Schools for 25 years, and was a pioneer in the independent educational consulting profession. Mike, and his wife Judy, owned Camp Kewanee in the Catskill Mountains and founded Musiker Student Tours and Summer Discovery in 1966, a student travel and education organization that still thrives today under the Summer Discovery name.

Mike was a valued Professional member of IECA from 1981 to 2012, when he retired and became an IECA Emeritus member. Members always sought Mike out at conferences for his wisdom, warm smile, and boundless enthusiasm. He helped countless colleagues grapple with challenging cases and mentored new members as they learned the ropes. Judy usually attended events with him and together they kept up with colleagues and friends from all over the world.

Jennifer (Jen) Ely Nemecek, a valued IECA member from Ann Arbor, Michigan, passed away peacefully on October 22, 2024 after a courageous battle with cancer. Originally from Derby, Connecticut, Jen earned her undergraduate degree at Gettysburg College and her MA in liberal studies from Georgetown University. It was there she discovered her passion for guiding students through their academic and personal journeys. She went on to work at Brandeis University and the University of Notre Dame. An adventurous traveler, Jen's family took trips to 67 countries across Europe, Africa, and beyond before settling in Michigan. She continued her work in education at the University of Michigan and Ann Arbor Public Schools before founding her IEC practice, Newport Premedical Consulting. As an IEC, she focused on advising students pursuing careers in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary sciences. Jen was known for her dedication to education and her contributions to the IECA community. A loyal member of the IECA Medical School Group, she generously shared her insight, expertise, and sense of humor with all. She will be greatly missed. 

Hidden Talents, from page M3

I continue: "You're also Sequential. So you probably hate it when a teacher tells you to show your work because, for you, the steps organize themselves seamlessly in your head. And even if your room is messy, you know where everything is."

This last one will get them nodding enthusiastically and begging me to explain this to their mom.

I then continue on to Numerical Reasoning, an aptitude for applied number analysis; Idea Generation, an aptitude that indicates the rate at which we gush forth ideas; and Visual Comparison Speed, an aptitude for visual acuity.

Working With the Cynic


"That exercise was so easy, I don't think it says anything unique about me," says Eric when I pull up his results. His face says he thinks these exercises are a complete waste of time.

"Not so," I respond. "I wanted to throw my computer out the window during that one. Not everyone finds that task as easy as you do." I explain his aptitudes on a continuum, pointing out his aptitude opposites and how they can serve as a counterweight in partnerships and teams. A Concentrated Focuser may be the perfect partner given his rapid rate of idea generation, and an Abstract Thinker could provide new perspective given his spatial tendencies.

We indeed take for granted what comes easy to us, assuming it's the least interesting tool in the toolbox, while the opposite is true. But it's also the case that we can spend all our time sharpening the duller tool, all the while neglecting to use our best ones. I've just given Eric permission to

hone the talents he was overlooking and do more activities that give him the feeling of rowing a boat on a glassy lake.

Going Deeper Than Reported Interests

Nobody knows their interests with absolute clarity at 17. Your interests are only as vast as your exposure, and for most teens, it is a narrow field. While they may feel quite sure of their interest in medicine because of their encyclopedic knowledge of medical dramas, the truth is, their reported interests are often ill-informed or severely limited. To make recommendations to a student according to the interests they report to us in our counseling sessions is akin to a doctor rushing a patient off to the operating room because they reported stomach pain. We need to search harder, look deeper, and assess more objectively. When we reveal talents our clients never knew they had, we consequently reveal new interests they never knew they had; when we invite students to get curious about their talents and explore new possibilities, we're opening new doors and igniting new passions. 

As an IECA member, you can purchase YouScience licenses at a discounted rate. Visit link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts for details.

For more information about other career/interest inventories to use in your practice, see "A Survey of Career/Interest Inventories Useful for IECs" in the fall 2024 issue of *Insights*: link.IECAonline.com/Insights

IECA's New Recording Policies

By Julia Gooding, EdM, IECA Professional (ME), Vice President for Ethics & Standards of Practice

The landscape of our professional development has changed dramatically since the pandemic, transforming how we access and share information. Every Monday morning, I am amazed to read through the 5 Minute News email to see how many educational opportunities are offered to IECA membership every week!

IECA members collectively participate in thousands of hours of professional development annually through affinity groups, regional group meetings, symposia, conferences, roundtable discussions, and much more. These sessions represent a cornerstone of our membership, offering invaluable insights from industry experts on evolving educational landscapes, admission trends, and best practices in independent educational consulting.

In response to the increasing ease of digital recording and sharing and based on feedback and suggestions, IECA's Ethics Committee developed comprehensive recording policies, which the Board of Directors approved this past fall. These policies aim to protect both member value and accessibility while maintaining the integrity of professional development offerings.

The new guidelines focus on four essential areas:

1. **Preserving Member Value:** Clear recording and sharing guidelines ensure educational content remains a membership benefit while protecting the valuable spontaneity of live interactions. Many members find great value in the candid discussions that occur during IECA programming, discussions that flourish when everyone can speak freely without concern about being recorded.
2. **Supporting Accessibility:** Members with specific accessibility needs can request recording accommodations, as IECA remains committed to expanding access for all members.
3. **Protecting Speakers:** Presenters can confidently share expertise, knowing their content will only be distributed as agreed upon beforehand.

4. **Managing AI Tools:** The policies proactively address emerging technologies like AI recording bots, requiring advance approval for their use.

Members can find the complete recording policies on the IECA website at any time at link.IECAonline.com/recording-policies. The policies, which are included below, have been added to the *Principles of Good Practice* (section VI, see new section D), available at link.IECAonline.com/POGP. Moving forward, renewing and new members will sign off on these policies as part of their IECA membership. Additionally, member and non-member participants in IECA events (conferences, symposia, tours) will now need to agree to the recording policies as part of their registration.



Recording Policies for IECA Virtual and In-Person Meetings, Webinars, Roundtables, Conferences, and Symposia

- **Officially Recorded Events and Sessions:** When IECA officially records virtual events, all participants are notified automatically upon entering the virtual event. Since notification has already been made, participants may use their own recording tools (e.g., digital note-takers and transcribers) for their private use only. Sharing the content or recordings with anyone not registered for the event is not permitted.
- **Non-Recorded Sessions and Events (Virtual and In-Person):** To foster open participation, many IECA events and meetings are not recorded. Participants are not permitted to record these gatherings (with any audio, video, note-takers, transcribers, or AI bots/software). If a participant requires a recording for accessibility purposes, they should obtain advance approval from the event organizer(s) and retain the recording for their private use only.



Julia Gooding, One Sky Education, can be reached at Julia@OneSkyInt.com.



Helping Students Build Balanced and Affordable College Lists

By Peggy Jennings, EdD, MEd, CEP, IECA Professional (PA) and Elizete Groenendaal, MBA, IECA Associate (NY)

You may have worked with a student who falls in love with a particular college. The student builds a strong application, submits it, and joyfully receives notification that they have been accepted. Happily ever after, right? But then the family calculates the net price and concludes that the college simply isn't affordable. The parents panic. The student is devastated. And "happily ever after" turns into tragedy.

We frequently find a new junior client comes to us with several colleges already in mind, and it's not unusual to discover that these colleges are unrealistic from an academic standpoint. We roll up our sleeves and help the student identify other colleges that are a better fit based on the student's transcripts, test scores, and extracurricular accomplishments.

Likewise, we can help students and families build balanced college lists that incorporate financial fit. Since school counselors rarely address financial matters in depth, independent educational consultants (IECs) provide unique value by incorporating affordability into the college selection process.

Building Your Financial Knowledge

To guide families effectively, it's crucial to understand how financial aid works. Key areas include:

- **Need-based vs. merit-based aid:** Know how each type of aid is awarded.
- **Cost of attendance (COA) and net price:** Understand what COA encompasses and how it's different from net price (COA minus free money in grants and scholarships). Be aware of what additional program costs might increase the official COA.
- **FAFSA and CSS Profile:** Recognize generally how FAFSA and CSS Profile determine a student's eligibility for need-based aid.
- **College-specific financial aid policies:** Realize that colleges use different criteria and processes for awarding aid.

Helping Families Assess Their Financial Aid Profile

As you learn about the student's academic and extracurricular qualifications, also help families understand their financial profile. This involves:

- **Using FAFSA Student Aid Index (SAI) estimators:** Recommend tools for estimating the family's expected contribution (e.g., [MEFA.org/article/student-aid-index-sai-calculator/#EFC](https://mefa.org/article/student-aid-index-sai-calculator/#EFC)).
- **Completing net price calculators (NPCs):** Direct families to try NPCs on the websites of full-need-met schools using the CSS Profile. Since colleges use this data differently, it's helpful to get estimates from several institutions (e.g., colleges' websites and [MyInTuition.org/schools](https://myintuition.org/schools)).

Encouraging Families to Set a College Budget

A common parental refrain is, "If my child is admitted to College X, we'll figure out how to pay for it." Unfortunately, this sentiment often lacks an understanding of the true costs involved. Families should have a realistic assessment of their ability to pay based on concrete numbers, not wishful thinking. A numbers-based budget should account for:

- **Estimate of four-year costs:** Include inflation and consider potential graduate school expenses.
- **Sources of funding:** For both parent and student, factor in past savings (e.g., 529 accounts, earmarked savings), current income, and future income required to repay loans. Please note that most students can only borrow a maximum of \$27,000 in federal loans in their name. The rule of thumb is that the total student debt shouldn't exceed one year of the expected career's entry-level salary.
- **Willingness to pay:** Families should align their financial plans with their values and expectations for the return on investment in a college education.

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Peggy Jennings, Jennings College Consulting, can be reached at Peggy@DrJ4College.com.



Elizete Groenendaal, UCompass College Planning, can be reached at Elizete@UCompass.net.

You Belong Here: Building Confidence in Your Educational Consulting Practice

By Randi Heathman, MA, IECA Professional (MI)

We've all been the new kid in school—instantly enveloped in an out-of-place, conspicuous feeling on Day One and spending an inordinate amount of time noticing how everyone else seems to already know each other while you're still figuring out where to sit in the cafeteria.



Even when we think we've overcome this sensation as adults, joining a new professional organization can suddenly and unexpectedly bring those childhood feelings back to the surface, no matter how much experience we bring to the table or how successful we've been in previous careers, and the sense of being the new kid all over again—or worse, of being a fraud—can strike at any time. I'll grant you, it's probably not quite the way we wish to identify and empathize with our students, but if you're in your first few months (or years) of practice as an independent educational consultant (IEC), this experience with imposter syndrome might be one you share with those clients who have just completed their first semester of college.

The good news for both our students and ourselves, of course, is that the feeling is universal and nearly everyone has been there at some point in their lives. For new IECs, I urge you to remember that every seasoned practitioner who was once a new member of this organization has felt the same sensation of newness and uncertainty as you (and sometimes we still do!)

As you get a handle on your new role within IECA, your confidence will increase one step at a time, but to help steady you on your path until then, here are some thoughts to bear in mind.

Recognizing Imposter Syndrome

Research shows that up to 70 percent of people experience imposter syndrome at some point in their careers. For newer IECs, this can be particularly challenging at the launch of your practice because you're simultaneously positioning yourself as an expert in your field and taking on a new role as an entrepreneur—a tall order for anyone!

This is why it's important to recognize the moments of self-doubt when they creep up on you and acknowledge them for what they are: feelings that may (or may not) accurately represent your current reality. We all know what we know, after all, but berating ourselves over the things we don't know will only lead to more frustration down the

line. We must first and foremost be our own advocates and allow ourselves to grow in our roles because if we don't, no one else will either.

Understanding the Roots of Imposter Syndrome

Everyone experiences imposter syndrome in their own way, which means that understanding how your particular version manifests can help you address and dismantle the cycle.

Does one of these sound like your experience?

Perfectionism: Many of us are in this role because we're people pleasers by nature. If this is you, there's a good chance you want everything to be "just right" before launching your services or presenting a college list to a client. This thought process, unfortunately, creates a cycle in your work where nothing ever feels good enough, and you may unintentionally reinforce the belief that you're not capable in your role.

Comparison Trap: Walk into a conference or hop on a Zoom call with other IECs and it's easy to fall into the

continued on page M10



Randi Heathman,
The Equestrian
College Advisor,
can be reached
at [EquestrianCollegeAdvisor@
gmail.com](mailto:EquestrianCollegeAdvisor@gmail.com).

Strategies for Building an Affordable College List

The Subcommittee on College Affordability (SOCA) created a framework to help match students' academic profiles and family budgets with college options. SOCA included this matrix in a *Financial Aid Fundamentals* flyer that IECA members can distribute to their families. Download the flyer here: link.IECAonline.com/financial-aid-flyer

While individual family preferences and situations are more nuanced, this matrix can get the conversation started.

High Academic Profile, Low Need/High Budget

- Selective colleges where families can pay the full COA. Need-aware colleges may be more likely to offer admission to full-pay students.
- Schools offering generous merit aid to families not qualifying for need-based aid.
- Colleges with lower COA.

Lower Academic Profile, Low Need/High Budget

- Less selective need-aware colleges welcoming full-pay students.
- Less selective colleges offering automatic merit aid for most applicants.

Lower Academic Profile, High Need/Low Budget

- In-state public colleges, especially non-flagship campuses with programs like Educational Opportunity Programs (if the student meets eligibility requirements).
- Community colleges or commuting options.
- Military service or ROTC programs.
- Gap years to save money.


High Academic Profile, High Need/Low Budget

- Selective colleges that prioritize serving low-income students.
- Programs like QuestBridge or Posse qualify students for participating institutions.
- Schools meeting over 90% of demonstrated need, including those offering aid without loans or work-study.
- State aid and in-state Honors Programs at lower-cost colleges.

Average Academic Profile, Average Need

- In-state public colleges.
- Non-flagship out-of-state public colleges targeting more out-of-state students.
- Regional private colleges.
- Colleges that have funding to meet specific institutional priorities.

Why Financial Fit Matters

As college costs rise and families face financial challenges, ensuring affordability is more critical than ever. IECs play a vital role in incorporating financial fit into the college selection process, helping students create balanced lists that avoid the heartbreak of unattainable options. By addressing both academic and financial considerations, IECs empower families to make informed decisions that lead to more sustainable outcomes for students. 

Additional Resources

- College Navigator: NCES.ed.gov/CollegeNavigator
- Jeff Levy and Jennie Kent's charts: BigJEducationalConsulting.com/resources
- College Data: CollegeData.com/college-search



Parent FAQs, Comments About College Costs, and How IECs Can Respond

By Karime Jankauskas, IECA Professional (NC)

IECA's Subcommittee on College Affordability (SOCA) continues to dissect common parental questions and misconceptions and suggest potential answers. We recommend you use qualifying questions to provide context for your responses.

Parent FAQ/Comment: "There's a question in the school-specific section of the Common App that asks if my child is applying for financial aid. Should we answer 'yes'?"

Qualifying Comments/Questions:

I know there are many different opinions and that it can be confusing. The answer is "maybe." Let's explore your needs a little further. Consider your family's circumstances, your Student Aid Index (SAI) estimate and the net price calculator (NPC) results for your child's colleges. Do you expect to qualify for need-based aid at any college?

Listen... Then Respond:

If you are seeking need-based financial aid, then you should answer "yes."

Here's some important information I want to share:

- Not all colleges will ask this question, and even when they don't, this information still applies.
- Your child might qualify for need-based aid at some colleges and not for others. That will depend on the total cost of attendance (COA) for each school.
- To apply for need-based aid, you'll need to submit the required forms (FAFSA and possibly the CSS Profile or other proprietary forms) by the published deadlines.
- Applying for need-based aid can impact admissions decisions, but if you need that aid, there's no point in worrying about this. What good would it do for your child to get accepted to a college your family can't afford?

- At the IECA Annual Conference last year, our financial aid panelists said they don't care if a student checks the box or not. Some panelists were unfamiliar with it because their college doesn't ask the question. Regardless, the consensus from the four colleges was that they would consider students for need-based aid only if they submitted the forms. Of course, other colleges may answer this question differently.



If you're certain your child won't qualify for need-based aid now, and you're certain that no matter what happens in the future, you won't need to apply for financial aid in the next four years, then here's some important information I want to share:

- You can answer "no" to that question.
- You do not need to submit any forms, and your child will not be considered for any need-based aid.
- ✓ Some colleges encourage all families to submit the FAFSA, because funding can be tied to the number of FAFSAs they receive. Conversely, if submitting the FAFSA/CSS Profile makes it clear that a family can afford the college, they will be very happy to see that, potentially making the applicant more attractive and yieldable.



Karime Jankauskas,
CollegeSavvy
Consulting, LLC,
can be reached at
KBJankauskas@
gmail.com.

You Belong Here, from page M7

habit of comparing yourself to more experienced professionals. You might see others with busy schedules and impressive testimonials and think, “I’ll never be that successful,” but what you don’t see are the early years when they wondered the same things you’re thinking right now. Such comparisons might make you feel inadequate or not “good enough” to compete.

Unrealistic Expectations: New IECs might set the bar too high early on, expecting to build a full client base or achieve significant income milestones within months of starting. If reality then fails to match these expectations, it’s easy to feel like a failure.

Do any of these sound like you? If so, it’s time to challenge those beliefs and replace them with more productive ones.

Reframe Your Thinking: A growth mindset can be a powerful tool against imposter syndrome. Reframe negative self-talk like “I don’t know enough to succeed” into “I’m gaining the skills I need to become successful.” Acknowledge that we all make mistakes and that mistakes are part of the journey. Each experience, whether positive or challenging, builds expertise and confidence.

Document Your Achievements: It’s easy to forget how far you’ve come when you’re laser-focused on your goals. A friend of mine keeps a “wins journal” that shifts this perspective. Positive testimonials from clients, feedback or notes from successful consultation sessions, or affirmation from colleagues all go into her journal so that on days when she feels doubtful, she can revisit these achievements as tangible proof of her capabilities. Over time, this practice helps build a more realistic and positive self-view (and it makes for really fun reading)!

Mentorship Matters: Finding mentors or supportive peers—especially in a job where many of us work solo—is essential. A mentor who has been in your shoes can offer valuable perspective and help you see the bigger picture when you’re stuck in the details. In addition, joining the IECA affinity groups that closely match your interests and background can provide you with a community who can fill the spaces in your mind that imposter syndrome might like to occupy. Remember, you may be a solo practitioner, but that doesn’t mean you’re alone!

College Affordability, from page M9

If you are unsure if you’ll qualify for need-based aid, if a job loss, disability, or death could change affordability for you in the future, or if you are thinking, “It can’t hurt to try,” then here’s some important information I want to share:

- The vast majority of colleges are need-aware. When applying for need-based aid, if you’re perceived as a family for whom the cost could be a factor or a hardship, then this could impact the admissions decision.
- If you don’t apply for need-based aid, you might miss out on aid you didn’t know you could qualify for.

Set Realistic Goals: As you start along this new path, break your larger goals into smaller, achievable steps. For example, rather than aiming to fill your client roster in six months, set a target of acquiring one new client per month and celebrate each small win as progress toward that bigger picture so you can gain confidence, experience, and momentum without feeling overwhelmed.

Celebrating the small wins (that eventually become bigger wins) and focusing on the impact you have on your clients...is a way to feel more connected to your purpose as an IEC and leaves less time for your mind to occupy itself with self-doubt.

Building Long-Term Confidence

Ultimately, overcoming imposter syndrome is about building the habits that foster long-term confidence. Celebrating the small wins (that eventually become bigger wins) and focusing on the impact you have on your clients—the value you bring into their lives and the journey you’re sharing with them—is a way to feel more connected to your purpose as an IEC and leaves less time for your mind to occupy itself with self-doubt. In addition, continuously expanding your knowledge and skills through webinars, conferences, campus visits, and other opportunities allows you to feel more confident and connects you to other professionals who can become your support network when you need them.

As you keep building your practice, remember that it’s completely normal to have doubts along the way. Every time you challenge those doubts, recognize your growth or seek support from mentors. You’re taking steps toward confidence that will stay with you so that even if imposter syndrome pops up from time to time, you can remember the very real progress you’ve made. Just like our students in their educational and personal journeys, each hurdle you clear is another sign of how far you’ve come. Eventually, what once felt like “faking it” will simply feel like doing your best work.

Welcome aboard, new members—you’ve got this! 🌟

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- Even if you don’t qualify for need-based aid, some colleges may require you to submit the FAFSA/CSS Profile at the time of application for the student to retain the right to apply for need-based aid down the road if circumstances were to change.
 - You can always submit a FAFSA in the spring to get access to the federal student loans.

The bottom line is that you must understand your family’s circumstances, your child’s profile, each college’s costs and policies. Should you answer “yes?” Maybe. 🌟

From Doubt to Offers

Guiding Clients to Top Graduate Business Programs

By Caitlin Andersen, MBA, IECA Professional (FL)

One of our many balancing acts as independent educational consultants (IECs) is encouraging clients to reach for the stars while keeping their feet on the ground.

The truth is, many of the factors that lead to an offer from top graduate business programs can be affected with enough time and strategy. So why not encourage our clients to aim high if they are willing to do the work needed to close the gap between where they are and where they need to be?

Changeable Factors

We can help our clients identify which factors are changeable and will make a difference, such as improving their test scores, gaining leadership experience, or strategically connecting their work history to future goals.

The following student examples show how specific, changeable factors can transform an applicant's competitiveness for even the most prestigious programs.

Student A: Master's in Management Applicant

Initial Stats (when we began working together)

GPA: 3.6/4.0

GMAT (10th Edition): Unknown

Current Company/Role: College Junior

Work Experience: No internships (He did start an online business, but it did not generate much revenue.)

Notable Leadership: None

Decorations/Other Standout Factors: National Table Tennis Vice Champion, First-Generation College Student

Changeable Factors: GPA, GMAT, Current Company/Role, Work Experience, Notable Leadership

Recommendation: Over the three years we worked together, I advised Student A to improve his GPA. I helped him strategically space out difficult courses, get tutoring, and select his bachelor's thesis topic. I advised him to start a student club and pursue internships at several multinational, internationally recognizable companies. I recommended several GMAT preparatory courses and study materials.



Final Profile: He graduated with a first-class honors degree (which translated to a 3.9/4.0) and two internships at top management consulting firms. The finance student club he co-founded grew to 100 members and became nationally recognized. He worked on getting a high GMAT score for two years, but he could not achieve more than a 610 (10th Edition). That is the score he used to apply to his programs. During his application year, he asked me whether he should lower his graduate school expectations due to his low GMAT score. I responded with a kind, but firm "No."

Offers: With his hard work, the right strategy, and enough optimism, he landed offers to attend London Business School and Imperial College with a scholarship (his top two choices).

Student B: MBA Applicant

Initial Stats (when we began working together)

GPA: 2.9/4.0

GMAT (10th Edition): 650

Current Company/Role: Large Insurance Company, Analyst

Work Experience: Four years

Notable Leadership: None

Decorations/Other Standout Factors: None

Changeable Factors: GMAT, Current Company/Role, Work Experience, Notable Leadership

Recommendation: Within the first month of working with Student B, I advised her to wait until the following year to apply so we could work on her profile.



Caitlin Andersen, Auxilium Education, can be reached at info@Auxilium-edu.com.



Current Legislative Priorities

By Whitney Bruce, CEP, IECA Professional (ME), Chair of the IECA Government Relations Committee

As the dust settles following the 2024 election cycle, IECA's Government Relations Committee (GRC) is ready to engage with both new and returning legislators on critical educational policy issues. In times of political transition, our role becomes even more vital as we work to build and maintain relationships across the political spectrum, expanding IECA's voice on issues related to our profession and the students and families we serve. As we focus on current relevant legislation and look toward the future, our guiding principles for action (see box on page M16) and our non-partisan approach and focus on student welfare will position us as a trusted resource for policymakers seeking expertise on educational consulting, higher education access, and therapeutic placement.

Key Initiatives

Working with our lobbyist and under the purview of the board, the GRC is currently focused on several key pieces of federal legislation that significantly impact educational consulting and student welfare. After talking with legislative sponsors, we anticipate the reintroduction of these bills in the upcoming legislative session. As we continue to encourage new co-sponsors, we increase the chances that this legislation will progress through Congress. Beyond our primary legislative focus, the GRC is also monitoring developments in Title IX regulations, student safety, emerging state and federal policies affecting student athletes, debates surrounding academic freedom on college campuses, and proposed changes to federal financial aid programs—all of which could significantly impact our members' ability to serve students effectively.

The bipartisan **True Cost of College Act (TCCA)** represents a significant step forward in providing transparency for families navigating the college selection process. Our committee has actively engaged with legislators to support standardized financial aid offer forms and advocate for clear, comparable cost information across institutions. By sharing our clients' experiences with unclear financial aid offers, we have successfully sought co-sponsors on this legislation in both the House and Senate.

Another key focus is the **College Transparency Act (CTA)**, transformative legislation aimed at providing

better customizable data about student outcomes and college performance. The GRC has taken a leadership role in shaping this legislation through active participation in Department of Education stakeholder meetings and submission of written testimony emphasizing the importance of comprehensive college data. We've developed detailed position papers highlighting the benefits for independent educational consultants and created practical resources to help members leverage this data in their practice.



As the 118th Congress came to a close in December, we were pleased with the passage of the **Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act (SICAA)**. For the past year, our committee, led by therapeutic members Bar Clarke and Lucy Pritzker, has shared information about and voiced support for several versions of this important legislation that will, ultimately, protect vulnerable youth in residential programs. The bill was signed into law by President Biden on December 23, 2024. Our future work around this legislation will include advocating for inclusion of knowledgeable voices in the report outlined in the law.

While national politics and policies often take the spotlight, we know from past experience that the most impactful legislation may happen at the state level. By working with the IECA regional groups, we are monitoring state legislatures as well. If you see a relevant issue in your state, please bring it to our attention. At the state and federal level, when specific opportunities for member advocacy arise, we will connect with the appropriate groups and provide guidance for action.

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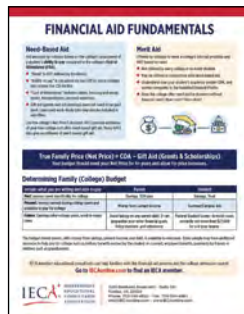


Whitney Bruce, WB College Consulting, can be reached at Whitney@WBCollegeConsulting.com.

Member Resource Spotlight

Financial Aid Fundamentals

Thanks to the Subcommittee on College Affordability, we have a newly updated *Financial Aid Fundamentals* flyer. The flyer breaks down the differences between need-based and merit aid, how families can develop their college budget, and how to build an affordable college list. It also defines financial aid terms families should know. To download the flyer or order print copies to share with current and potential clients, visit the IECA Publications for Members webpage: link.IECAonline.com/marketing



What Colleges Look For

Our *What Colleges Look For* flyer has been newly redesigned and revised with feedback from the College Committee. This flyer features the top 12 ranked factors our members say colleges and universities consider for admission. To download the flyer or order print copies to share with current and potential clients, visit the IECA Publications for Members webpage: link.IECAonline.com/marketing



Guiding Clients, from page M11

We focused on her GMAT score as a way to offset her low GPA. I recommended several preparatory courses and study materials. Additionally, I spent time finding ways she could add notable leadership experiences and connect her passion for the food industry with her professional life (which was not easy since she worked in insurance). However, during one of our discussions, she told me her company had an employee café. I recommended she propose healthier menu options to upper management. She did, and her company implemented them.

In one of our subsequent brainstorming sessions, she had an epiphany. Following our conversation, she and her mother began preparing healthy, homemade meals and selling them to families in their apartment complex. Her mother had been out of the job market for 20 years and was looking for a way to reenter it. This food initiative gave her the opportunity to build her own small business. Several of their neighbors wanted to do the same, so Student B created a basic application to facilitate the transactions.


Final Profile: Her meals app reached 200 transactions per week within the first two months. She ended with a 710 GMAT (10th Edition) and was promoted within her insurance company to a strategic role.

Offers: She landed offers with scholarships to all her universities, including her top choices: Cornell Johnson, UCLA Anderson, and NYU Stern.

Wrapping Up

Usually, we do not have all the pieces we need to accurately determine a client's competitiveness for top universities when we begin working with them. We will not know their final GPAs, GMAT/GRE scores, work promotions, awards, extracurricular achievements, and leadership activities. All of these unknown factors represent the client's potential.

In my opinion, most clients have the ability to become very attractive to top schools given enough time, strategy, and hard work. A lot happens between when we begin working with a client and when that client submits applications. Since they cannot see all the opportunities around them, if we are optimistic and informed, we can guide them to achieve results beyond what they imagined possible.


This is why I believe showing them a vision for their future is the greatest value we could ever give them. 

Government Relations, from page M12

Guiding Principles for Action

As an organization, we use three guidelines as a model for action and remaining true to our mission as a governmental relations committee within IECA. These guidelines are as follows:

- Can our membership's collective expertise illuminate the root causes underlying a particular issue?
- Can our network provide invaluable insights into the proposed solutions aimed at resolving said issue?
- And, critically, can our members offer their wealth of knowledge to guide students and families in navigating the complexities posed by these challenges?

As the Trump administration and the 119th Congress begin their terms, we will continue to advocate around these issues and look for others that impact our work. While education may not be the administration's top immediate priority, educational issues touch so many parts of our society. When those arise, IECA's Government Relations Committee will be prepared to respond and advocate for our members. 

Stats Every IEC Should Track

By Lindsay Fried Augustine, IECA Professional (GA)

Keeping detailed statistics on your students' outcomes is not just a valuable internal metric—it's a valuable marketing resource. Let's talk about what to track and how to use that data effectively to attract new clients.

- **Tailor Content to Your Audience:** Use specific data to target niche audiences. For example, if you've had significant experience and success with STEM-focused students, highlight those stats to attract more STEM-oriented families.

What to Track

- **Total Applications Submitted:** Track how many applications your students submitted.
- **Acceptance Rates:** Record the percentage of colleges that offered admission to your students.
- **Scholarship Totals:** Document the total dollar amount of scholarships earned by your students.
- **Percentage of Students Receiving Aid:** Show the proportion of your students who earned financial awards.
- **Geographic Spread:** Note where your students live and the schools they attend.
- **Colleges Chosen:** Highlight the diversity of colleges your students ultimately attend, from small liberal arts schools to major research universities.



- **Update Your Website and Materials:** Include your annual success metrics on your website, brochures, and presentations. A dedicated "Results" page can solidify your reputation as a results-driven IEC.

At the end of the day, tracking and using this data does more than boost your marketing—it also improves your services. By analyzing trends, you can identify areas for growth, refine your strategies, and ensure your students are getting the best possible outcomes. So, start tracking, sharing, and celebrating your successes—it's a win-win for your clients and your business! 📈

How to Leverage This Data

- **Highlight Numbers:** Use eye-catching stats like "Over \$1.5 million in scholarships awarded to my students this year."
- **Create Visuals:** Turn your stats into charts, infographics, or success stories to share on your website and social media.
- **Build Credibility with Testimonials:** Pair your data with testimonials from students and parents. For example, a testimonial about receiving a \$30,000 scholarship is more powerful when accompanied by your broader scholarship success stats.



Lindsay Fried Augustine, Simply Admissions, can be reached at Lindsay@SimplyAdmissions.com.

The “I” Designation: Your Ticket to the World of International Consulting

By the IECA 2025 European Regional Symposium-Glasgow, Scotland Planning Committee

Do you have students and families who want to expand their college/university lists to include international options? Do you find yourself wondering if you are qualified to advise them? Do you want to expand your menu of services to offer foreign destinations but don't know where to start acquiring the skills and knowledge to do so? What programs are available for English-speaking students? Is there a group of colleagues doing this work from whom you could learn and share concerns?

Experienced independent educational consultants (IECs) know when they are not “in their zone” of specialty and when it's time to reach out for help. There are specialists in athletics, financial aid, and artistic talents. They are not competitors but rather potential team members. It's the same for the IECA international community. Whether it's the European Regional Group, Global In Focus College Conversations, the Global Committee, or the Regional Symposium Planning Committee, we all work together sharing information about English language programs from Abu Dhabi to Zimbabwe.



Obtaining the “I” designation and joining this robust community of supportive IECA members who work internationally is a great way to start. One of the many benefits of being an IECA member is its global professional network. Our members, as well as our clientele, span the world. The families we serve are multicultural, multilingual, and have different needs. IECA is dedicated to facilitating educational access for families across continents. Attending an IECA global symposium might well be a first step toward answering the initial questions posed in the first paragraph.

Praise for the inaugural IECA regional symposium, held at the Università Bocconi in Milan, Italy in 2023 poured in from IECA members and partners alike applauding it as an indispensable professional development event. One IEC valued the regional focus of the gathering: “Being an IEC based in Europe, networking with my colleagues in this same region was priceless, and the targeted session content helped me confidently advise students and families on several destination countries in the region.”


In 2024, the volunteer committee of IECA members, IECA staff, and Saint Louis University-Madrid (SLU) representatives were proud to present a second global professional experience. Our host, SLU-Madrid, eagerly opened its doors to IECA members and valued educational institutions and partners for two days of networking, learning, and fun: “We were sponsors at the first global symposium at Bocconi, so we are thrilled to be the hosts this year. Education and service to others are pillars of our university mission, and we're happy to host an event that supports IECs learning with and from each other on our global campus.”

In Madrid, we were excited to offer IECA members direct access to global university representatives at the IECA University Fair. The event served as a platform for universities and gap year programs to showcase their unique offerings, exchange ideas, and foster collaboration. With 31 programs and 80 consultants participating, it was an exceptional opportunity to connect with a diverse audience.

Continuing what could well become an annual tradition, we are thrilled to host the third annual IECA European Regional Symposium in Glasgow, Scotland, in 2025! We are certain that the Glasgow symposium, which is sold out, with over 50 universities and 85 IECs in attendance, will prove to be a valuable professional development opportunity.

How else can you network with globally focused IECs? Consider attending the virtual Global Gathering Open Forum, moderated by Sarah Loring de Garcia and hosted by the Global Committee, on the last Wednesday of each

month. All IECA members are welcome to join to discuss whatever issues may be on their minds as they support students crossing international borders for educational purposes. Look for announcements and links in the weekly *5 Minute News* email for members.

Finally, if you haven't started working towards the “I” designation, now is the time to start. You can access the “I” designation application on the IECA website at link.IECAonline.com/I-designation. One of the perks is priority registration for future global symposia. 

Recognition of Member Milestones in 2024

IECA takes great pride in recognizing those who in our 2024 membership year reached the 10, 15, 20, 25, 30(+), 40(+)-year Professional membership milestone in the association.

40+ Years

48 Lloyd Paradiso
43 Miriam Bodin
43 Virginia Bush
42 Virginia Reynolds Vogel
41 Timothy Lee
40 Harriett Bay

Bill Kellerman
Ann Montgomery
Judy Muir
Marjorie Schaffel
Christine Scott
Emily Snyder

Cindy Turner
Betsy Woolf

10th Anniversary

Mathew Alapurath
Steve Aronowitz
Richard Baroody
Laura Barr
Lisa Barrett
Lisa Carlton
Michelle Cassel
Lisa Cheyette
Kimberly Chorosiewski
Calli Christenson
Deborah Cinquemani
Carole Cummings
Deb Davis Groves
Eva Garza-Nyer
Sandra Gilbert
Mary Harkins
Brad Hoffman
Karyn Holtzman
Luisa Inclan-Bird
Wendy Kahn
Margie Kashman
Jennie Kent
Jeongsu Kim

Carol Kinlan
Katrin Lau
Linda Lavin
Nancy Levonian
Barbara Levy
Janette Lim
Carrie Lyndrup
Kate Malczewski
Lynette Mathews
Catherine McCarthy
Sandra Moore
Kristen Naspo
Lisa Nelson
Eileen Nolan
Junius Prince
Lucy Pritzker
Abbie Rabin
Kimberly Simpson
Susan Smith
Janet Stark
Morgan Stewart
Juan-Camilo Tamayo
Lisa Thomas
Rosemary Tippet
Jane Williams

30+ Years

38 Steve Antonoff
38 Caryl Frankenberger
34 Nancy Cadwallader
32 Ben Mason
31 Imy Wax

15th Anniversary

Mandee Heller Adler
Jan Esposito
Sara Frampton
Sandy Furth
Susan Groden
Julie Gross
Scott Hall
Jane Hoffman
Todd Johnson
Kristin Kajer-Cline
Vicki Kleinman
Cyndy McDonald
Micheal McKinnon
Stephanie Meade
Patricia Nehme
Jim Overton
Lynn Presley
Ann Rossbach
Erik Shane

25th Anniversary

Jody Dobson
Steve Goodman
Claire Law

20th Anniversary

Clare Anderson
Pamela Gershman Bard
Jill Burstein
Kathie Carnahan
Andrew Erkis

Join Our Equity Challenge 2025

The DEIA Committee is happy to announce the Equity Challenge 2025!

Join your fellow IECA members in learning about important issues for the IEC community, clients, and businesses. At the beginning of each month, the committee will share a topic and provide resources for you to consider over the following weeks, culminating with a roundtable or presentation on the fourth Monday of each month at 12 p.m. (ET).

IECA has created a Member Network community for those interested in an ongoing conversation or deeper dive into the Equity Challenge topics. Visit link.iecaonline.com/equity-challenge to join the Equity Challenge 2025 community and look for our specific topics each month in 5 Minute News.

