

7 WAYS TO IMPRESS COLLEGES NOW!



*Questions
Parents Need to Ask
School Guidance Counselors*



STRATEGIC ADMISSIONS ADVICE



7 Ways to Impress Colleges NOW!

Thus far, your child's high school experience has been strange. COVID-19 interruptions have altered the way our kids learn (online), engage in extracurricular activities (if at all), and even play sports (with masks). To say that our kids haven't suffered is an understatement. Now, they have to think about returning to normalcy and applying to college. As a fellow parent with a teenager, 2020 and 2021 have not been easy.



**Shereem Herndon-Brown
Founder and President**

Things you need to know:

- **A record number of applications at elite universities, given test- optional admissions**
- **Hundreds of kids on waiting lists as colleges juggle their enrollment issues**
- **Questions about dorm life and dining and how that affects how many students to admit and allowed on campus**
- **Plummeting financial aid budgets**



While none of this is their fault, these are real issues that will affect how colleges will evaluate who gets in and how we evaluate what schools are best for kids.

If you follow me on social media (which I hope you do) you know that I love building college lists for kids. I've been doing it for almost 25 years and have visited over 500 colleges in my lifetime. I teach that there are four main factors when building a college list:

- Cost
- Location
- Possible Major
- Possible Career

Now more than ever, parents and students must know where they should apply and why, how to stand out in the college admission process, and most of all, how to impress the colleges of their dreams.

The checklist and information below are to get you and your kid started. It is intended for you to share with them so that together, you can read and discuss. If you have a **child in the class of 2022, 2023, 2024 or 2025**, you need to know where things are and where they are going. For your child to have a competitive edge in the college admissions process, you need to start now.



1 **Know themselves**

Colleges want students who are self-aware of who they are and what their goals may be. This does not mean that they have it all figured out or have a definitive career agenda, but it does mean that they recognize their strengths and interests and are eager to apply them in college. Especially because of COVID, teenagers have learned a lot about themselves and what's important to them. They can share their mature perspectives with college admission officers through essays and interviews.

2 **Know the college**

Colleges want to know that students have thoroughly researched their academic and extracurricular offerings and are willing and eager to learn, grow and contribute to their college community. If your child applies to a college without having done sufficient research, the application will suggest poor preparation. To convey adequate and impressive knowledge of a college, students (with the help of their parents) need to identify how and where they will thrive and express this through supplemental essays, interactions with admissions officers online, and interviews.



3 Virtual visit

This is the new and “now” way to learn about colleges, to “see” them, and to demonstrate interest. Whether it is on the school’s website or with companies like youvisit.com or campusreel.com, signing up for online information sessions and tours (live and recorded) can be fruitful. Why? How? This impresses colleges because many of them can track your child’s interest (I know, scary) and they, of course, want to know how much your child “likes” them, and doing these virtual visits informs a student’s college essays. This leads to my next two points....

4 Open emails and follow on social media

If your child is interested in a college, they MUST open the emails that the school sends. We all have email inboxes that are filled with “junk” but that’s the point: if a student is considering a certain school, he or she can sift through the junk and take the two seconds to open an email from a school. In one of the best and most revealing college admissions books of the past decade, Who Gets In and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions, author Jeff Selingo chronicles the origins, evolution, and impact of email marketing in college admissions. Bottom line, it matters, and opening an email is another way to demonstrate interest.





Similarly, so is following a school on social media. Colleges know that teenage eyeballs are on TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat and often they try to engage students on these platforms. Your child should give them what they want and have appropriate exchanges. Social media is a powerful tool when used correctly and might be the difference between a college admitting a qualified candidate versus waitlisting or, even worse, denying a qualified candidate.

5 Know the college's essay question and answer it well

Writing an awesome essay is more important and harder to do than most people think. No matter how big a university is, most top schools require a personal essay AND a supplemental essay for admission. These essays are even more critical now because most, if not all, schools are test-optional, which means that they have “lost” a metric of evaluation. Grades and the opportunity to engage in activities have been seriously affected by COVID, thus more emphasis must be put on writing. Essays give students a chance to reveal who they are, share their ambitions and/or experiences and offer the colleges a glimpse into their tremendous potential. Do not allow your child to underestimate or shortchange the college essay writing process!





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6 Take initiative for their extracurricular activities during COVID

The operative words here are: take initiative. Colleges are fully aware that all of our lives have been restricted recently and that it's hard to show "leadership" or do "community service" while staring at a computer screen. But it can be done, and many students have created passion projects during quarantine that are fascinating. Your child needs to check in with who they are, what's important to them, and use the time allotted to augment this. Colleges will be impressed by a teenager who takes initiative for their own life, health, and academic improvement.



7 Get the best grades possible despite the craziness of the world

This is the hardest one of them all. Despite having your child's life and learning upended, colleges are still expecting them to have amazing grades. Given the realities and compassion of test-optional admissions, I do not think colleges will give much grace to poor grades. They need a filtering tool to see who did well during times of crisis and who did not. Getting strong grades has always mattered and now it matters more.

This means that your child should have or should be taking a rigorous curriculum with Honors, Advanced, AP, and IB courses, if appropriate and available. If this has not happened, and your child wants to go to a top college or university, please know that they need a realistic college list since their competition may have what they do not. If this has not happened, and your child wants to go to a top college or university, please know that they need a realistic college list since their competition may have what they do not.



Questions Parents Need to Ask School Guidance Counselors

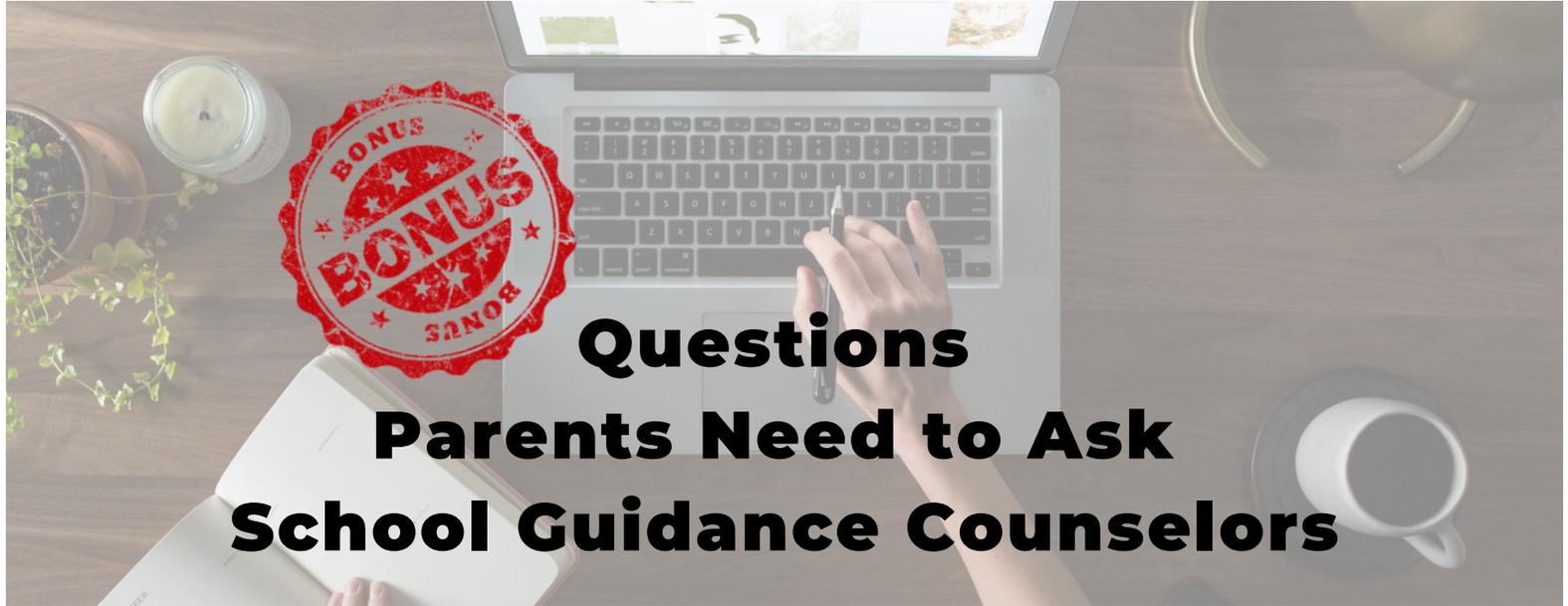
9th and 10th Grade

1. Is my child on an Advanced, Honors, IB, or AP track (especially for math, science, and foreign language)?
2. Should my child take the PSAT? When?
3. What extracurricular opportunities are there for my child (leadership, arts, athletics, community service)?
4. When should we start to attend college fairs? What should my child say to an admissions officer when they meet one?



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11th Grade

1. Can my junior child meet with college admissions representatives when they visit virtually in the Fall?
2. When should we start to visit virtually on our own?
3. Does our school use Naviance, Maia, or SCOIR? If so, what is our username and password?
4. When is our junior-year college information presentation?
5. Do you have any sample case studies of applicants for us to review?
6. Is there a list of students at certain colleges from our high school who we can speak to about their transition?
7. What information goes into the school counselor recommendation?
8. Do you read the teacher recommendations before they are sent?
9. Can we see the school profile that you send to colleges?
10. How often will we be able to meet with you?



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12th Grade

1. Do you have access to my child's Common Application?
2. Do you review essays? For grammar? Proofreading?
3. How many colleges will visit our school virtually this year?
4. What should my child say to an admissions officer?
5. When will you send transcripts to schools?
6. How do we know if our child's application is complete?
7. Does the school offer interview preparation?
8. How often do you communicate with admissions officers?
What do you say?
9. Do you advocate for students on their behalf?
10. Are you able to tell us when we will be notified of a decision?



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Barbara Corcoran
Real Estate Mogul, Business Woman,
Celebrity Entrepreneur on the hit show, Shark Tank

“ Shereem provided our son with every college detail and options open to him well beyond what was already provided by his excellent high school. It was Shereem's thorough knowledge that extended our son's horizons and it was his confident hand that made sure the applications were in on time and the essays well-written. Our son is thrilled with his, first choice school and would simply not have gotten into Columbia University without him.



William DeWitt III -
President of the St. Louis Cardinals

“ We were very happy with Shereem's diligence and persistence, and friendly rapport with both the parents and the student. We felt it was smart to get another perspective from a company who does this for a living and has a pulse on the college process on the East Coast. Shereem and his team were able to remove the tension that can sometimes exist between parent and student and understand both perspectives.





Educator and entrepreneur, Shereem Herndon-Brown is a dynamic leader. As a college Admissions Expert for two decades, his experiences in the field are unparalleled. As an Admissions Officer at Georgetown University, a guidance counselor at two high schools, Shereem Herndon-Brown has the distinction of having worked on "both sides of the desk."

Shereem is a Professional Member of the Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA) who has served on the faculty for the Summer Training Institute which is a four-day workshop designed to launch the careers of aspiring educational consultants. He also currently serves on IECA's Education and Training Committee. In 2015, he was selected to represent the association in China (Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai) as a part of a team of admissions experts working with international students. He is also a member National Association of College Admissions Counseling (NACAC).

He is a graduate of Wesleyan University with a Bachelor's degree in English and a Masters of Arts degree from the Breadloaf School of English at Middlebury College. In 2005, he was selected by the National Association of Independent Schools as an E.E. Ford Fellow for Aspiring Heads of School.

Additionally, he has served on the Board of Trustees at La Cima Elementary Charter School in his native Brooklyn, New York and consulted with the Harlem Children's Zone about best practices. His book, A Parent's Guide to College Admissions Success reflects his extensive knowledge about college admissions and is available on Amazon.com.