



A FREE Report Exclusively For Parents of
College-bound High School Students...

**5 THINGS FAMILIES
SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN
PREPARING
FOR COLLEGE**



CREATED BY YOURCOLLEGECONCIERGE.NET





In this free report, we're going to discuss what you should be doing right now if your child is in high school so that you can comfortably afford to pay for college.

But before we get to the nitty-gritty, we'd like to tell you what you shouldn't do.



Do NOT Be This Dad!

A couple of years back, we got this email from a distraught dad (not a client) who had just broken his daughter's heart by telling her (after she had already gotten herself admitted) that her 'dream college' (Johns Hopkins) wasn't going to be in the cards financially.

As expected, she wasn't taking the news well, and he was enraged and raging.

"I have a daughter freaking out at home... The price of a college education now is comical and... the struggling middle class get screwed. This financial formula that FASCA (sic) figures... is a joke. They decide that going into huge debt seems to be the American way. This country is going into the crapper."

-email received April 2011

There was more, but you get the gist. Jill was so worried about him that she reached out to him (a total stranger to us) to lend support and an ear to rant to; because by April of your child's senior year, that's often about all we (or anyone else) can do to help. Deposits are due on May 1.

You see, Dad figured his daughter was smart enough to get a scholarship. She was – but not at this school. Although all schools offer discounts, they use different instruments to do so. The school the daughter was 'freakin out' about in the email above only offers need-based grants, not merit-based scholarships. In fact, the majority of the most competitive schools do not give out scholarships for merit or talent. Not a single Ivy. Not Duke, Not Tufts. Not Northwestern. Not Johns Hopkins.

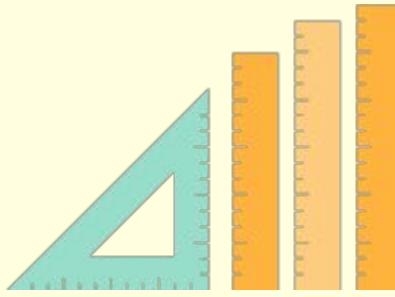
Had he known this in advance – as in October, before she applied – he could have averted disappointment and disaster in April



DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU!

Let's just say this wasn't the first time we'd heard this type of after-the-fact shock and rage-against-the-system anger from otherwise intelligent, hard-working, professional middle-class parents.

That's because there remains a prevailing and FALSE NARRATIVE that all 'typical' (as in middle and upper-middle class) college-bound students are screwed, caught in the cross-hairs of making too much money to get any financial aid and too little money to afford the ridiculous sticker price for college. Maybe you think that inevitably you'll wind up with a choice between an education that is merely 'very expensive' or one that is 'obscenely so'... and you're wrestling with similarly onerous trade-offs, like paying for college or retiring someday, or leveraging your life instead of disappointing your progeny-



It doesn't have to be that way. You DON'T HAVE TO BECOME THAT DAD!

For the past 8 years, we've helped more than 1100 families afford college. Many of whom earned well over \$150,000. I can point to hundreds of 'typical' families with whom I've worked and who took the time to learn the actual way college works today, who planned deliberately and realistically, and have enjoyed so-called 'atypical' results. Just a sampling of recent awards:

- ★ *Going to Cornell with close to a \$40,000 tuition discount*
- ★ *Will call Ann Arbor (Michigan) home this Fall with \$31,000 in grants/scholarships*
- ★ *Heading to Emory with more than \$30,000*
- ★ *Wash U \$33k; Richmond – \$39k, University of Chicago – \$44k; Columbia - \$38,000*
- ★ *Tulane, UM, High Point, Marist, American, GWU, Georgetown, Duke, BU, Case Western, Notre Dame, Cal Tech, Vanderbilt... All gave five-figure somethings.*

These are real people who rejected the prevailing narrative and took appropriate action. And I'm willing to bet that among them, are some families that probably look a lot like yours... because they run the gamut. No declared income to five, six and even seven-figure incomes. A mix of average, good, to great students. Families with no savings, some savings to those with trust-funds.

The fact is there's plenty you can do to put college within your child's reach, but you have to have the foresight to consider affordability BEFORE the admissions process begins in earnest. It's a common misconception that you can wait until you know where your child is going, and then consider how you're going to pay for it (like our Dad above).

Today, the inverse is true! You cannot decide where your child should apply until you fully understand the amount of financial aid and other non-need inducements that you may be eligible for at each school that your child is considering. Your funding plan should be fully integrated with your child's admissions strategy to create a target list of colleges that meet your child's academic expectations, post-graduation aspirations, social needs, and your budget.



Here's a checklist of things you should be doing right now if you're the parent of a college-bound high school student.

1. There is what college costs, and then there is what it should cost you. Focus on the latter.

I often see parents and students fixate on sticker prices and disregard private or out of state schools because they are deemed too "expensive". Indeed, the sticker price of a private college has reached a nauseating \$71,000 per year (hello, NYU). But that's where the institutional need and merit-based financial aid system comes in. Did you know that most Institutions offer Billions in discounts to middle and upper-middle class families, though not in equal measure or for the same reasons.

In fact, 66% of all students receive some discount, and in our practice we see families with incomes in excess of \$200,000 enjoying awards over \$30,000

per year! This past year, a family with an AGI close to \$180,000 received a \$28,000 need-based grant from Columbia University in New York. ([see actual award letters](#))

Institutional Endowments fund these awards and are by far, the greatest equalizer, making private colleges affordable and sometimes even less expensive than in-state public universities... even if you think or have been told you make too much money. Remember it's not how much college costs, it's how much of that cost you'll be expected to bear -- and that number is one that can be managed with informed, early and integrated admissions planning.

2. Check The 4, 5 and 6 year graduation rates at every school you're considering.

Huh? Many families are perplexed when I raise this issue, but the average time to graduate today is 5.5 years. UF, for example, graduates 65% of its students in four years – which is Best of State in my home state. Only 4 public universities make the list of the top 100 best graduation rates in the country (three of those are military colleges and the 4th is University of Virginia). Extra time in school means extra money spent, so look for schools that have a higher (as in 80% or better) 4 year grad rate.

3. Don't Rely exclusively on state-based 529 Prepaid Plans.

Though these instruments can be applied just about anywhere, they're never enough (even in-state)... and the money you save in these instruments will likely count against you in the Financial Aid Formulas.

I had a highly educated client recently express some concern that he wouldn't be able to use his state's Prepaid plan for his two sons if they enrolled out of state. I was happy to explain to him that he was mistaken, that he would be able to use an in-state Prepaid at out of state schools as well. This common misconception can be tragic, and it's shared by thousands of families who

currently own these instruments for their children. In Florida (where I am based), the state offers FL Prepaid, which remains one of the most popular 529 Prepaid programs in the nation.

I get more questions about Prepaid programs than any other college savings vehicle. While parents are delighted to learn that they're transferable to out of state colleges, they are almost universally disappointed to discover that their plan will only cover a fraction of the total college expense – even at an in-state, public university. Florida's 4-year, University tuition plan will pay, on average, about \$4,500 (update) per year, which is among the lowest payouts. Other state plans pay out more, but cost more as well. Regardless, with an in-state cost of attendance of about \$21,000 on the low end and \$35,000 on the high end, you'll still be on the hook for about \$16K per year wherever you live.

4. Don't depend on a scholarship. This is not a strategy (see Dad above).

Many parents of high-achieving students expect their child to get scholarships to meet the bulk of their college expenses. First, many top tier schools do not award merit-based scholarships (everybody would be worthy). Instead, the bulk of the money offered to high-achieving students from middle class families comes from the colleges themselves, based on demonstrated need. To secure these funds, parents must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and in many cases a CSS Profile as well.

There are, however some VERY SELECTIVE (competitive) colleges and universities that do grant merit (i.e., non-need based) scholarships to students that they desire -- these scholarships can be considerable, but you have to know where those opportunities are for your child. Great test scores, for example? Maybe consider Tulane or Union College... or any school with test optional admissions practices. From the Southeast? head North.

Finally, it's true that there are abundant opportunities for students to seek and secure private scholarship dollars, with websites such as FastWeb.com a reliable aggregator. But, these private scholarships tend to be awarded one time only,

are very small in amount, and represent only a tiny 1-2% of the overall volume of money awarded each year.

5. Don't run with the herd - Broaden your search

Applying to college and seeking a financial award is a highly competitive process. To improve your odds, take the road less traveled and apply to colleges where your student has a greater chance of standing out. These may include smaller colleges that don't have as many applicants from your hometown but still have ample funds available for both need- and merit-based aid. For many of these schools, one need not be a top student nor a student body president, though every part of the student's resume can help.

The key is in finding the right fit and then actively expressing interest BEFORE the application is even submitted.

Sign up to receive information, visit the school, Like them on Facebook, and never turn down an interview request. Back in 2011 (the same year Dad above was raging), one of my students was able to literally double her award from Duke because of a personal connection she had made while visiting the campus. You can see her Mom's email to me [here](#).

6. Don't procrastinate!

My bonus recommendation and probably the most important point on the entire checklist.. Evaluate your college plan today – the earlier you do so, the greater your options will be – and you may find that 'sticker price' need not limit those options. Put your finances in order now. At a minimum, and this is for all parents of high school students, find out what your current expected family contribution (EFC) is.

This is the amount of money that the government (based on a formula derived in regulations set forth by Department of Education) will tell the colleges on

your list that you can afford to pay for college for one student for one year.

It's often the number that many schools start with when it comes to doling out need-based grants as well as some merit-based scholarships. For our practice, the EFC represents the discounted net price (as opposed to the sticker price) of college; and for many families, there are legitimate, ethical and practical ways within the Department of Education regulations to manage the EFC, especially if identified before finalizing your child's admissions strategy and certainly before finalizing your child's college list.

Why? Because as we explained above, not all schools will meet the gap between your EFC and the school's total cost of attendance and those that do, meet them for different reasons and in different ways.

Becoming armed with this information in advance helps ensure that your child will apply, gain admission to, and be able to afford the colleges that will meet their educational goals, graduate them in 4 (not 6) years with a degree they can use for the next 40 years... all without becoming saddled with student loans, or your having to sacrifice your own retirement.

Don't make the same mistake that our Dad above and frankly most parents make, and put off planning for this until the acceptances roll in. There are new rules when it comes to college planning today. You can learn them now so that you can make them work for your family, or you can rant about them after the fact!

Harsh? Maybe, but true. Every year thousands of families leave millions on the table. Which is a shame. The reality is that 2/3 of first-time, full-time undergraduates will receive some type of grant or scholarship (that's free money) in the form of a 'discount' this Fall. And at the time of this writing, that discount rate has reached an all-time high of nearly 46%. So, making college affordable is possible.

Seeing a real return on your child's investment is achievable and sticker price need not limit your child's options, but you have to act. In fact, there are at least 17 more things that you could be doing (right now), and so many more details about the college process that I'd like to share with you, but this letter is

already way longer than the 140 characters the average student reads today.



So, if you want to learn more, and more importantly find out how you can apply what you learn throughout high school in a way that will make the journey enjoyable and Admissions Officers take notice, you should sign up for our upcoming webinar while there's still room.

Jill and I are hosting a special 'Back-to-School' master class on the College Admissions & Funding Process. The class is called 'How To Take Control of the College Admissions and Funding Process' and during the class you'll learn exactly what you can be doing to make sure you're on the right path to finding, getting into and affording a great college education... without losing your sanity or your family's life saving. Specifically, we'll be covering...

- More about what college admissions officers have told us (in private) really counts and what is urban legend
- Where you should be looking (and shouldn't be looking) for scholarships and grants
- A grade by grade execution plan of what you should be doing if you're a student (or parent of one) who is entering 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grade
- Exactly how need-based financial aid is calculated
- Whether your assets will count against you in those formulas; how much you can rely on your 529s and other prepaid savings plans
- What's changing in Admissions testing and how it could affect your child's admissions and funding prospects

More about the startling state of college counseling in high school - and what it you can do about it

Why it's routinely taking students 5, even 6, years to get through college and what you can be doing about it NOW to buck this trend

Live Q&A and much more

And unlike college, our class is free and exceedingly stress-free and I hope to see you there.

-Peter

p.s.

Believe it or not, colleges have been accepting applications since July. Your 'May' will be here way sooner than you think! If you have a student in high school, especially an 11th or 12th grader, I highly suggest that you sign up for our upcoming webinar while there's still room!