

COLLEGE PLANNING MINUTES



Volume 2, Issue 4

December 16, 2009

©HAMPTON ROADS EDUCATIONAL CONSULTING, LLC

Give and Grow:

How to Find Meaningful Service Options for Teens



Good service opportunities for teenagers are hard to find. I learned this when my youngest son was trying to qualify for National Junior Honor Society. Every place we called either didn't accept middle schoolers or was filled. He finally secured a few hours of babysitting in our church nursery, but upon arriving for duty a few minutes late (due, I was told, to an unavoidable rest stop), he was confronted by a more punctual classmate who told him to beat it. Fortunately, the adult in charge found jobs for both students, but when families lament the difficulty of finding good service options, I feel their pain. Here are a few suggestions I hope will help.

Interest-Based Options

In my view, the ideal service opportunity is one that allows a young person to explore a career

option, develop valuable skills, or simply contribute to a cause he or she values. To facilitate a match between worthy organizations and students, Hampton Roads Educational Consulting, LLC, has compiled information from about twenty local non-profit organizations that welcome student volunteers. Information includes (but is not limited to) how old the teen must be, whether training is required, when and where the service takes place, and how to apply. Organizations include hospitals, museums, humane societies for animals, libraries and recreational facilities. To review this information, you're welcome to stop by our office or call Wanda Fralick, our Community Coordinator, at 757-868-6034 between 10 and noon on Mondays through Thursdays. This service is free and open to anyone; it's our way of contributing to a cause we value.

Project-Based Options

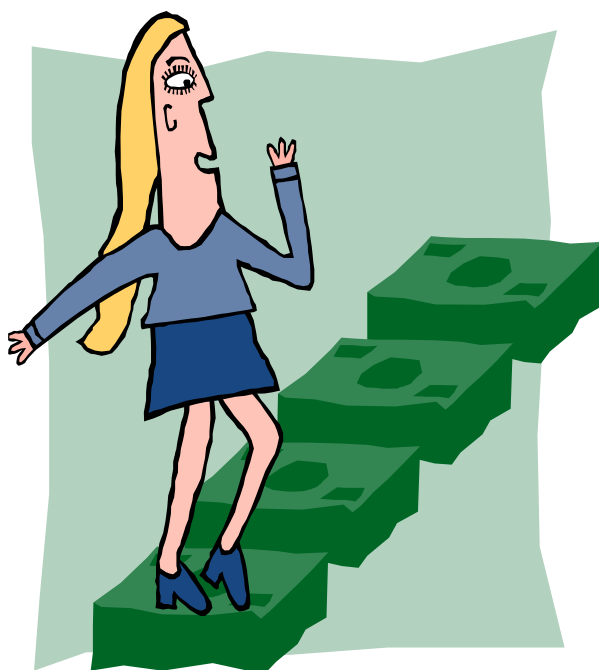
For students whose schedules don't permit a long-term commitment, the following organizations provide short-term service projects for teens. The projects are overseen by team leaders and the organizations also keep track of a student's cumulative service hours.

- **Youth Volunteer Corps of Hampton Roads** - www.yvc-hamptonroads.org: Contact Laurie Sepanski at 757-817-0825 or lsepanski@yvc-hamptonroads.org.
- **The Volunteer Center of the Virginia Peninsula** - www.volunteerpeninsula.org: (click on Youth Volunteering on the left side): Contact Carolyn Kinkaid at ckinkaid@volunteerpeninsula.org.

Cautionary Note to Parents

Please note that we have not made any effort to verify information or vet the organizations listed, and we strongly suggest that parents do so before allowing their child to volunteer.

Applying For Financial Aid: 5 Not-So-Easy Steps



Along with heralding the new year, January 1 marks the opening of FAFSA-filing season. As if the post-holiday period weren't depressing enough, families of seniors can now look forward to completing a 102-item form after taking down the holiday lights and hauling out the Christmas tree. I would have liked to title this piece something upbeat and catchy like: *Filing FAFSA In Five Fun-Filled Minutes!*, but there's really no way to sugarcoat the financial aid process. It's painful. For tips on how to help organize it in five steps, however, read on.

1. Register for PIN Numbers

If your child is a dependent student by FAFSA rules (which are not the same as IRS rules but are clearly stated on the website), both student and parent need to get PIN numbers to allow them to electronically sign the form once it's finished. Get your PINs at www.pin.ed.gov.

2. Complete FAFSA Online

To complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), go to www.fafsa.ed.gov. While it can't be submitted before January 1, you can begin working on it before that. The section entitled *Before Beginning FAFSA* is worth reading; it contains worksheets along with useful information on what documents to gather before starting.

3. Complete College-Specific Forms

FAFSA is required by every college that dispenses federal financial aid, but some colleges also require you to complete other forms that determine how they distribute their institutional funds. Find out which forms each college requires on its Financial Aid web page, and be sure to check the priority deadline. Don't wait until then to send forms in, though; some money is disbursed on a first-come, first-served basis, so the sooner you get your forms in, the more likely you are to get some.

4. Compare Aid Offers

At around the time your child receives his acceptance letter, he will also receive an award letter detailing every component of his financial aid package. Be aware that you can accept or decline any part of the offer, so you might choose to accept grants but decline loans. Once you've received all award letters, examine them carefully and compare what you'd pay at each college, including the terms of loans offered. If your financial circumstances have deteriorated since you completed the FAFSA, you can ask for your award to be reconsidered and you might get more aid.

5. Send in Acceptance Forms

Don't forget to send in acceptance forms to the admissions and financial aid offices. You also need to notify the financial aid office of any outside scholarships your child has received. After that, you're done—until next year!

Building Vocabulary: Bringing Words to Life

Building a rich vocabulary is critical to academic and career success. Sentence completion questions, which comprise 19 of the 67 items on the Critical Reading section of the SAT, are almost purely a test of vocabulary knowledge, and the ability to write a persuasive essay, whether it be for the SAT, an AP test, a personal statement, or a college course, is heavily dependent on the author's skillful choice of words.

Improving your working vocabulary, however, involves more than memorizing definitions. Words are like clay; the more they are worked, the more useful they become. Learning a word's dictionary definition is the first step towards adding it to your functional word bank, but to truly incorporate it into your spoken and written language, you need to start using it.

How Parents Can Help

Parents can do a lot to help their teenagers build



working vocabulary. If your son has a list of words to learn for English class every week, ask to see it. Start by discussing each word's basic definition as well as its nuances. Stingy and frugal both describe a person who is tight with a dollar, but one has a negative connotation and the other a positive one. Next, make a point of using the word in conversation during the week. Play a game where your son earns a point every time he uses a vocabulary word appropriately in everyday conversation, and then provide a small reward for a set number of points. Involve other siblings so that everyone expands his or her vocabulary.

Other Sources of Words

If your daughter isn't getting words from school, use Number2.com to generate a word list. It has an interactive word bank that quizzes a student on words and saves the ones she got wrong. Use this site – or another of your choosing – to compile the list of words to be mastered for the week, and then utilize the exercises mentioned above.

Choosing the Right Word

While ten-dollar words are great (and often show up on standardized tests), the best word isn't always the biggest. Help your child hone his writing skills by having him generate colorful synonyms for mundane words. For example, synonyms for stubborn include mulish and pig-headed as well as recalcitrant. Good writing is active, vivid and engaging. Find examples to share with your teenager. The most e-mailed articles in the New York Times (free online at www.nytimes.com) are often about lifestyle topics of general interest. I also recommend the books *Growing Up*, by Russell Baker, and *The Kitchen God's Wife*, by Amy Tan, as exemplars of the skillful use of words.

Last, show your teen that you regard vocabulary building as a valuable life skill. Look up unfamiliar words you encounter in everyday life and continue using the words memorized for the English quiz even after the test is over.

Governor's School Announcements

GSST Parents & Pre-Admission Parents:

February 16, 2010: Make-up Session for Parent Talks

Attend one or both talks:

6:30—7:30 Understanding Competitive College Admissions

7:30—8:30 Affording College: Demystifying Financial Aid

Location: The Mary T. Christian Auditorium, TNCC

Pre-Admission Parents: Change in February 3rd program.

In response to your feedback, the February 3rd talk will provide detailed information from GSST staff about each of the 3 strands. Interested parents may attend the Affording College talk on Feb. 16th (see above).

For more information, check the website (<http://www.nhgs.tec.va.us/governorsschool/>) after the break.

Happy Holidays!



Give the Gift of
*College Planning
Minutes* to a friend.

It's Free!

Visit www.hredconsulting.com
and click on the *College
Planning Minutes* page to
sign up.

Hampton Roads Educational Consulting, LLC
200 City Hall Avenue, Suite B
Poquoson, VA 23662

Phone: 757-868-6034
www.hredconsulting.com