



COLLEGE PLANNING MINUTES

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This Summer, Plant Your Teenager Where He'll Bloom



The time has come to replace the winter flowers with spring varieties, and as I wandered through the garden shop recently, I was reminded of last year's experience. I had waited until early June, so it was already hot outside by the time I planted two sets of flowers—vinca and New Guinea impatiens—each with dark, glossy leaves and vibrant pink blooms. I planted both beds in my front yard and watered them thoroughly. By the next afternoon the vinca were standing tall, craning their necks to the sun, while the impatiens looked like heaps of steamed spinach. Seeing this, I was struck by the extent to which we biological creatures are affected by our environment. The same hot sun that energized the vinca wilted the impatiens.

People are a lot like those plants; we thrive in some environments and languish in others. Unlike our leafy friends, however, a person's geography does not have to be his destiny. We can move from a suboptimal environment to one better suited to our temperament, and summer break provides an optimal time to explore new environments.

My second daughter was a good example of this. From fifth grade on, her passion in life was acting and writing, but the best public school option in our com-

munity was a magnet school for science and technology, so that was the school she attended. While it was a valuable educational experience and one she enjoyed, it was not the ideal venue for her to develop her interests and talents. Fortunately, however, we found several residential summer programs that did fulfill that objective, including a writing program at the University of Virginia, the Summer Governor's School for the performing arts and a program for young playwrights. These were the places where she found kindred spirits—other students and adults who were passionate about theatre and did not think it was ridiculous or crazy to aspire to a career as an actor or playwright. These summer programs were truly life-changing experiences that allowed her to develop into the person I believe she was meant to be.

Exploring New Environments

Trying out a new environment could be as simple as visiting relatives on a farm in Roanoke or traveling with the family to Manhattan. Beyond that, there are residential summer programs to explore just about any interest—from being a future Rockette to an astronaut. Check out these resources:

Teen Ink: www.teenink.com. Click on Summer Guide at the top of the page for links to summer programs. There are also reviews by teens.

National Association for Gifted Children: www.nagc.org. Look for Summer Programs on the left side of the web page towards the bottom.

Petersons: www.petersons.com. Look under K-12 Schools and Programs.

In conclusion, while I still believe it's great advice to bloom where you're planted, there's also a lot to be said for planting yourself where you'll bloom.

Summer Reading: Rediscover Books



One of the unfortunate casualties of the lifestyle of today's busy teenagers is time for leisure reading. During the school year, a high school student who is taking rigorous courses and participating in extracurricular and service activities is lucky to find time to sleep, much less relax with a good book, but summer will hopefully present students with some time for lounging around the house or beach with a good book.

Why read books?

Now that we get so much of our information from the Internet, books can seem downright obsolete. But I think they still have a few redeeming features.

- **Building vocabulary:** Many things written for the web are intentionally written in an abbreviated, outline format. They are meant to be easily read and comprehended, and my suspicion is that you don't encounter the same richness of vocabulary online as you do in a well-written text.
- **Appreciating writing styles:** How often do you read something on the Internet and stop to admire the beauty of the prose—(present publication expected, of course)? For the reason mentioned above, much Internet writing is either journalistic (newspapers, magazines, and blogs) or broken down into easily digested info-bytes. Books expose students to a wider variety of writing styles.

- **Pleasure**

Losing yourself in a good book is a unique pleasure that is distinct from any other form of entertainment.

- **To impress colleges**

Sorry to spoil the high-minded tone of this article, but you had to know this was coming. Students applying to college need to be aware that a reasonably common interview question is, "Tell me about a book you've read recently outside of school." Needless to say, a student does not want to draw a blank. Additionally, some colleges ask students to list the books they've read recently and again, leaving this space empty is a no-no.

Finding a good book

We asked local librarians for suggestions and were referred to the American Library Association's Teen's Top Ten: favorite books chosen by teens. To view lists from 2009 and previous years, [click here](#).

My recommendations: The following are a few books that I found to be well-written, worthy of mentioning on a college application or interview, and fairly short:

Nickel and Dime. Barbara Ehrenreich. A thought-provoking account of the true ordeals of a journalist who goes undercover to try to make ends meet as a minimum wage worker in several industries and parts of the country.

Growing Up. Russell Baker. A humorous, poignant, and wonderfully written biography that recounts the author's experience of growing up during the Depression under the influence of a strong-willed mother.

Complications. Atul Gawande. A young surgeon draws on anecdotes and studies to reflect on how doctors are trained and practice.

Keys of the Kingdom. A.J. Cronin. The protagonist, a missionary priest, is, in my view, one of the most memorable characters in fiction and a great role model for doing what's right despite peer pressure.

Enjoy and stay tuned for more books next month.

Keeping Track of Extracurricular Activities

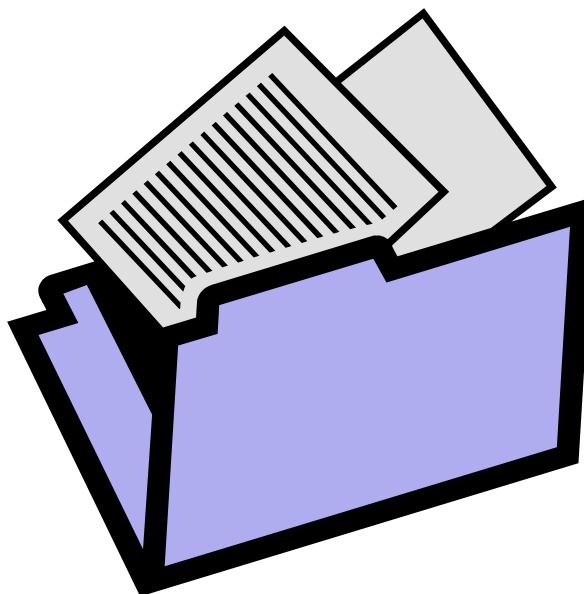
Families I've worked with throughout the course of their child's high school years often tell me that one of the best pieces of advice I gave them early on was to keep thorough, updated records of their teens' extracurricular activities. The reason for this is that the Common Application and many individual college applications include a detailed extracurricular grid for students to complete. For each activity listed, the student must report the number of hours spent per week, the number of weeks per year, and any awards or recognitions earned. To see the extracurricular grid for the Common Application, [click here](#) and scroll to page 4.

Imagine yourself and your daughter in the fall of senior year, trying to recall how many hours per week she devoted to the 9th grade Homecoming Float Committee, or whether the award she won on swim team that summer was Miss Congeniality or Most Improved. Now imagine doing that for every activity she's participated in and every award she's earned over four years. I guarantee you it won't be pretty.

Now imagine instead that you've kept a detailed record over the course of the four years, and all you need to do at the end is to judiciously decide whether her six month stint on the Planet-Savers Society is worthy of inclusion on the resume.

How to keep track of records

How can you keep your records updated? When I work with families at my office, I have started utilizing two spreadsheets, each one similar to the Common Application extracurricular grid. One sheet lists complete details for all activities a student is participating in during the current year. The purpose of this sheet is to ensure that all information that could possibly be needed is recorded for future reference. The second spreadsheet is a cumulative record of activities for all four years of high school. It is intended to be a working copy of what will eventually be listed on the application grid. Individual activities are grouped according to relevant categories; so soccer and track would be listed under athletics, for example. Grouping activities makes it possible to gain an overview of the extracurricular



ricular record and to see if there are categories that need shoring up or others that provide opportunities for leadership or outstanding achievement.

In addition to keeping the extracurricular grid updated, I've begun providing families with a binder that contains places to keep everything pertinent to college admissions—and to high school in general—in one place. There are pockets for transcripts, resumes, awards, and test reports, along with an extra sleeve for miscellaneous papers. You can easily make a binder like this for yourself to ensure that you can find your important papers and quickly identify any documents that you might be missing.

If you're like me, the prospect of organizing papers is about as appealing as scrubbing mold off the inside of your shower. But unfortunately, those of us who like organizing the least are also generally the ones who need it the most. Having learned with my first daughter how trying it can be to retroactively reconstruct four year's worth of minutiae, I urge you to get started on those spreadsheets. Come senior year you—and your son or daughter—will be glad you did.

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Timely Tips



Paid Two-Week Teacher Assistant Position:

The Center for Gifted Education has openings for teacher assistants in their Summer Enrichment Program. There are two week-long sessions, each of which has a morning and afternoon class. Dates are July 12-16 and July 19-23. Pay is \$7.25/hour. For information, contact Dr. Mihyeon Kim : To learn more about the program, visit <http://cfge.wm.edu/sep.htm>.

Space Flight Adventure Camp:

Students between the ages of 11-15 who are interested in rockets, robotics, and space flight might want to attend one of the week-long residential camps sponsored by the Virginia Space Flight Academy and located on the Eastern Shore at Wallops Flight Facility. The \$695 fee includes housing, meals, and activities. For information, visit www.VaSpaceFlightAcademy.org.

Local Volunteer Opportunity: Safety Town

Safety Town is a one week educational program administered by York County Parks and Recreation that teaches young children about various aspects of traffic, fire, home, and personal safety. Students in middle school and older can volunteer to assist. The weeks that the program will be offered are July 12-16, July 19-23, July 26-30, and August 2-6. Volunteers will work from 8:30 to 11:45 A.M. Applications will be available online beginning May 3rd. For more information [click here](#).

GSST Information

GSST Open House: June 1st

Parents of students who will be attending the GSST next year: Take the opportunity to learn about the program, meet your child's teachers and tour classrooms. Time: 6:30-7:30. Location: Governor's School.

Mentorship Symposium: May 18 and 19

Parents of seniors are invited to attend their son or daughter's mentorship presentation. These will take place at the Governor's School during the school day. Ask your child when he or she will be presenting.



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