

Launching College Success

By Laura Emmons

In 2013, ACT, Inc., the company that produces and administers the American College Testing readiness assessment test, conducted a study which showed that only 36% of graduating high school students chose a college major that reflected their interests. According to the Credit Union National Association, half of graduating seniors have no idea how much money they'll need to get a college degree. Nevertheless, the U.S. Census Bureau states that the average salaries for people with college degrees are two to four times higher than those without them. In addition, the college experience teaches new adults discipline, time management, interpersonal and team building skills, responsibility and self-reliance.

To obtain the best return on this massive investment, choosing the right major and best career path is vital. With more than 1,500 possible programs of study available at more than 4,000 higher education institutions in the United States, this is a daunting task. Figuring out how to pay for it may be even harder. That's where Dianne Keilholtz can help.

Dianne worked as a high school guidance counselor and special educator for twenty-eight years. During that time she saw the college admissions process become more stringent while college tuition costs skyrocketed. She's always loved teenagers; she finds them honest and appreciative.

Wanting to assist as many young adults as possible, Dianne

founded Launching College Success, an independent educational counseling service which helps families through the college admissions process. Her company is now headquartered in Martinsburg.

When to Start the Process

Dianne knows that the process of selecting the right school, the right major, and paying for college must begin no later than the start of a student's junior (or eleventh grade) year in high school. She also offers services for younger students, counseling ninth and tenth graders on which subjects to take in high school as well as the extra-curricular activities and volunteer projects that could sway a college admissions board.

Students and parents can get an understanding of the college testing process during the sophomore (or tenth grade) year of high school. That is when a student normally takes the PSAT exam for the first time. She advises families not to put too much emphasis on any of the test results as they are simply a measure of how a student does on one test that particular day. During summer breaks, Dianne suggests that students seize on every opportunity to visit as many universities and colleges as possible. If a student is driving by a college during their summer vacation, she suggests dropping by the campus to see the school firsthand. Most students are not aware of the multitude of options available for higher learning.

Choosing the Right Career

Dianne offers each student and their family a proprietary questionnaire of her own design which identifies their interests and budget. Dianne has been trained to administer the Strong Career Interest Inventory.



students navigate this difficult process and gain acceptance into all of the military academies in the United States.

For those who wish to enlist in the military after high school, she directs them to the ASVAB website at official-asvab.com. The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) is administered to all Armed Services applicants, and is used to determine talents and skills that are needed in the Armed Services. It can also help predict future academic and occupational success both within military careers and in the private sector.

What Not To Do

Dianne warns students to be wary of for-profit colleges. Students should always verify that the school of their choice is accredited. The U.S. Department of Education maintains a database of accredited programs of study offered in the U.S. It may be found at <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>. One way to be sure the college is legitimate is to ensure that credits earned will transfer to another college.

She combines the results from this aptitude test with the results from the Myers-Briggs personality test in an innovative manner, allowing her to identify the best career paths for her clients with extreme accuracy. She also considers the student's transcript, PSAT scores, SAT/ACT/AP test scores (if they've been taken before she initially meets with a client), hobbies, extracurricular activities and involvement in the community in identifying the best path for each student.

Dianne has worked with and wishes to assist young adults who have a variety of interests and career dreams. She supports those who wish to learn a trade skill and has researched and visited a number of vocational training schools. As long as the school offers opportunities for apprenticeships and certifications,

Dianne believes that these career paths lead to success.

Military academies have always been a great opportunity for some students, but the competition to be admitted into one of the four major military academies is fierce. Applicants must have good grades, high test scores, meet medical and physical fitness requirements, and receive a nomination from an elected official. Nominations can be secured by a student's congressperson, senator, the President or the Vice President. Committees assigned by the elected leaders interview potential candidates and often require written essays. Once a nomination is received and all other qualifications are met, admissions officers from the individual academies conduct further interviews. Dianne has helped

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Surviving the Admissions Process

She prepares a "Best-Fit" list of colleges based on the results of her questionnaire, aptitude tests, transcripts, test scores and in-person



interviews. Dianne offers advice on which entrance exams to take, but refers students to her colleagues for test preparation.

Colleges today want to see an applicant's unique attributes, i.e., things that are not conveyed through a transcript. That's why so many schools require one or more essays be submitted as part of the application process. Approximately 850 schools nationwide no longer require tests like the SAT or ACT, but rely on essays to determine admission. Dianne assists with the difficult task of preparing these essays. Although the student must write them in their own words, she helps build an outline and clarifies the elements which will give them their best chance for success, such as identifying a student's passions, leadership skills, community involvement and personality traits. She reviews college applications before they are

submitted, and conducts mock interviews when needed. West Virginia University supports a rolling admissions process based on a first-come, first-served platform. Early application is necessary to ensure enrollment at the beginning of a term. Dianne helps with meeting the WVU scheduling and admissions requirements.

Finding Funding

Dianne searches for scholarship opportunities from national, state and local sources, both public and private, which are uniquely tailored to each student's talents, interests and strengths. She also assists with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the West Virginia 4750 Promise Scholarship application.

Late Bloomers

Dianne has also helped people return to school after raising children, experiencing divorce, changing careers or other situations which prompted them to start college later in life. In addition to all of the services she offers recent high school graduates, she can assist with building a resume, taking the GED, and preparing for the College Level

Examination Program (CLEP), a series of tests which allow students to receive college credit for their work experience.

She also offers advice on whether taking online courses is appropriate. For students who are self-motivated with excellent time management skills, these courses may be a good fit. They save time and offer more flexibility in a daily schedule. On the other hand, the student misses out on the face-to-face interaction with the professor and other students. Many people find it difficult to grasp concepts and learn the material through online courses. Dianne can help determine if this method of learning is right for a client.

Vast Experience

As a member of the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA), Dianne has a breadth of resources available to help people realize their dreams of a college education. She has aided clients from Massachusetts to Florida, and everywhere in between. She even assisted a man from Botswana via Skype. She regularly travels around the country visiting colleges firsthand.

Currently, Launching College Success is spearheading a pro-bono project at Spring Mills High School to ensure that several students will be the first in their family's history to start college next year. So far, Dianne has a one-hundred percent success rate in placing her clients on a successful career path, starting with the right major at the right college.

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