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The Steps to Success for the College Transfer Student

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

A student recently wrote to me, "My family can't afford to send me straight to a four-year college. My dream is to attend a community college and transfer to UC San Diego. I'm adopted and have loving parents. My goal is to earn a degree in social work and work as an adoption case-worker. What are my chances of filling all the requirements, and holding down a part-time job and still transfer in two years? I am willing to live at home. The state budget cuts to public education have hit harder in some areas than others, but I hear many stories about students not being able to get core classes. I know getting the right advice at the right time is very important."

Unfortunately, this student's predicament is not unique. A slice of historical context helps. The Master Plan for Higher Education, ratified in 1960, created the community college system and its accompanying transfer option to a four-year state university. As designed in 1960 the system rested heavily on a healthy transfer function between the California Community Colleges (CCCs) (112 state-wide accredited two-year colleges) and California's public four-year institutions. The role of the CCCs remains critical to a healthy transfer path to California's public four-year institutions (nine University of California campuses, UCs, and 23 California State Universities, hereafter, CSUs). However, the demographics and fiscal realities of the state have changed dramatically. Students who plan to attend a community college and utilize the transfer path bravely confront a new world.

The following recommendations can help high school students plan how to use the transfer path successfully.

1. Don't make community college an afterthought: The community college option should not be a late addition to your college admissions plan. You should create a written game plan for the full two years. Although the plan will likely change based on the availability of classes, schedule conflicts or a change in a student's academic goals, having a plan ensures you get and stay on track.

2. Go beyond your high school's requirements for graduation: Earning a grade of 'C' or preferably 'B' or better in UC/CSU required coursework

in high school increases your chances of passing the required assessment exams that place you in college English and math coursework in a community college environment. That could mean skipping over remedial classes which have no transfer credits.

3. Participate in the Early Assessment Program: The EAP is offered to juniors at their high schools. Through EAP California juniors have the opportunity to measure their English and math skills towards the end of 11th grade. Juniors can assess their college 'readiness' and plan their final year in high school to take coursework which will strengthen their ability to be successful in the CCC system. EAP was made mandatory in March 2010 for students who plan to attend a CSU, some CCCs are participating and it may become mandatory for all CCCs. Learn more at www.calstate.edu/acadaff/EarlyStart/docs/ES_FAQs.pdf.

4. Identify your transfer path in high school: At the end of your junior year or early in your senior year begin to research both the CCCs as well as the 4-year public or private universities you are interested in attending to complete your degree. Visit the campuses and make appointments with the counseling departments. Then really zero in on the schools that make it to your final list.

5. Discover articulation agreements: Most CCCs have what are called "articulation agreements" often with both private and public 4-year schools. These matriculation agreements specify the required general education courses and prerequisites for your intended major. Select classes with your articulation plan clearly in mind. Since universities, especially state schools, can and do change their transfer requirements, staying current on the changes is your responsibility. The state's budgetary challenges can make the transfer path a moving target. Your best bet is to check your articulation agreement criteria at www.assist.org and identify a counselor you can work with at the CCC. Then stay in touch by meeting early and often.

6. Be prepared to enroll in classes at more than one CCC: Despite the inconvenience, you may have to take required, transferrable coursework at more than one CCC in order to get the classes you need to move forward

along the transfer path.

7. Take a College Success class: Learning how to balance academics with the other obligations in your life is critical. Taking a college student success course at a CCC which offers one during the summer before you start classes will focus your attention on the development of an academic plan with associated milestones. These classes are becoming more popular, and early research indicates students who take them are more likely to transfer successfully.

8. Your grade point average (GPA) is the best predictor of success: Just as in high school, your GPA (in classes that have transfer credits) is the single most important factor in the transfer admissions decision. Study hard and get tutoring help early. Don't wait to fail or drop a class. That only delays your transfer plans.

9. Don't let life get in the way: Students who can attend CCC full-time are more likely to earn a degree. Try to build the rest of your life around your academic priorities. Living at home for the first year or even two years helps to ensure that earning money will not get in the way of earning your degree.

Visit www.assist.org for detailed information to guide your transfer path; this website, and the CCC counselors, are indispensable tools as you navigate the process.



Elizabeth LaScala Ph.D. guides college, transfer and graduate school applicants through the complex world of admissions. She develops best match college lists, offers personalized interview and essay coaching, and tools and strategies to help students tackle each step of the admissions process with confidence and success. Elizabeth helps students from all backgrounds to maximize merit and financial aid awards. Visit www.doingcollege.com; call (925) 891-4491 or email at elizabeth@doingcollege.com

Spring Musicals Underway at Local High Schools

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The show made its Broadway stage appearance in 1959, with Carole Burnett in the starring role; she reprised the role on television. The Acalanes version is a production of the school's Concert Choir, and is largely student-run, from costumes to makeup to choreography. Miramonte's version takes the Princess Winifred challenge seriously, layering mattress upon mattress on stage to make a bed high enough for nosebleeds.

Guys & Dolls is set in New York City circa 1950. The Frank Loesser (he wrote the lyrics) website calls it "a fable about what happens to gambling men and the women who long to tame them." It says "Guys & Dolls is populated with gangsters and gamblers, [Salvation Army-type] ministers and showgirls."

Campolindo's musical features two full casts rotating through eight performances.

But don't choose just one show, or two; there are enough performances to enjoy all three! Here are details:

At Acalanes High School: Once Upon a Mattress

Venue: Performing Arts Center

Show dates: February 29, March 1-3

Show times: 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: adults, \$16; students and seniors (60+) \$14

Buy them online at www.acalaneschoral.org

At Campolindo High School: Guys & Dolls

Venue: Performing Arts Center

Show dates: March 15, 16, 17 and March 22, 23, 24

Show times: 7:30 p.m.; matinees March 17 and 24 at 2 p.m.

Tickets: \$18 and \$13, depending on show

Buy them: online at www.campochoir.com

or deliver form and payment to CHS choir room.

Unsold tickets sell at box office before the show.

At Miramonte High School: Once Upon a Mattress

Venue: Miramonte Theater

Show dates: March 15, 16, 22, 23; matinees March 17, 18 at 4 p.m.

Show times: 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$10-20; opening night special: \$5 for OIS and MHS students with ID.

Buy them online at www.showtix4u.com, or at the door before the show.