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Lynn's Top Five

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provide your student an admissions advantage or financial aid benefit.

3) Pay as you go. I don't think this gets enough credit. Think about it: Your child is no longer living at home and you are not incurring those expenses. Sometimes that alone will save you thousands of dollars. And if you really plan ahead you can be prepared to pay as they go for at least part of the costs. For example, if instead of funding your retirement plan at a moderate pace while your children are home, you could maximize and wherever possible accelerate that funding. Then, while your student is in college, you can put away less for retirement and divert those funds to the "pay as they go" approach. This can also be very helpful when filling out financial aid forms - fewer assets in your child's name and a lot more in retirement plans that are often off limits or count far less in college financial aid formulas.

4) It's work, but apply for every possible dollar in local scholarships. We often overlook the

Living in Lamorinda feels like living in a college town with Saint Mary's in Moraga, Cal just over the hill and so many other great educational opportunities nearby. And we are a community committed to sending our youth to college or to other post-high-school learning institutions. So, how do we pay for it? Let's review five ideas that might be misunderstood or overlooked.

1) Cast a wide net. Not everyone can nor should go to the best-known and/or most expensive schools. It makes great sense to look at the under-discovered, often overlooked opportunities. These schools are eager to expand their student community to include a diverse population, and many have unique attributes that could fit your student to a tee. By applying to a diverse array of colleges, your student increases the possibility of finding the most affordable fit. After a year at the wrong, "big name" school, my son's friend told him about Cal Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks. We had never even heard of the school. It turned out to be the best fit for him and they were able to tailor a financial aid package, athletic and scholastic plan that fit him (and us) well.

2) Go to school abroad. Many college students enjoy studying abroad for a year, but what about for longer? Just as our schools are looking for a globally diverse student base, so are foreign campuses. Sometimes the costs can be comparable to a UC education. Yes, it's going to be a bit pricey to do that college scouting trip, but it could be a fun part of a family vacation. Plan ahead for those great travel deals. And don't be shy about looking into your family tree to find out if you have a link to any international countries, religions or cultures with respect to universities abroad that could

benefit of having our children participate in the gathering of assets for college funding. One way they can be involved is by aggressively researching and applying for every local grant and scholarship they could possibly qualify for. Yes, time-consuming essays and interviews are involved for seemingly small amounts. But this is great for your kids because guess what they'll be doing for the next four years anyway? I also think that winning any of these is a fantastic boon for them on their resumes. It looks pretty impressive to be in your teens and say on a job application that you are the recipient of a local award. To those who employ youth, these things definitely grab their attention, even when hiring a summer babysitter.

5) Get help. There are many to turn to for help, but you will especially want to find a qualified college planning counselor who understands and likes your student. It's also very important to work closely with your certified financial planner as options become clear to determine which possibilities are affordable and pass on those that are not. The right college planning consultant can save you a lot of time and money by assisting you with the daunting job of finding and narrowing down your student's best options, as well as assisting you in preparing financial aid packages. And you should absolutely start working with your financial planner early on to develop a long-term strategy for successfully helping your children with college costs while tailoring a long-term plan that will fit your total financial goals and objectives in a realistic and affordable way.

And last but not least, try to enjoy this remarkable journey! When done well, the joy, not to mention pride, of being able to assist your children in attending the college or other post-high-school educational institutes that best suits their needs is worth it.

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