



The College Spy® Podcast with Michelle McAnaney

Episode 16

Not Your Mom: Why Working with a College Consultant is Better for the Whole Family

Welcome to The College Spy podcast, a podcast for parents and students addressing all aspects of the college selection and admissions process. I'm Michelle McAnaney, the founder of The College Spy. We offer college planning services to students and families across the United States and internationally. We are a team of dedicated educators who are committed to helping students and families identify the right colleges to apply to and get accepted. We offer our guidance and expertise in a way that improves student performance, increases confidence and promotes college readiness and maturity. The College Spy works with all students including students interested in the STEM fields, students with learning differences, international students, and third culture kids. To learn more about The College Spy, visit our website at TheCollegeSpy.com and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

Michelle McAnaney:

Welcome to this week's episode of The College Spy podcast: Not Your Mom, Why Working With a College Consultant Makes the Admissions Process Better for the Whole Family. Our college consultants often hear from parents some version of “they will listen to you because you're not me, and that's why we need to hire a college admissions consultant.” While this “not their mom or dad” theory may be true, what we are doing at The College Spy is a bit more than simply not being the parent. College Spy consultants have backgrounds in counseling and education, and over the years we have acquired skills that I will share with you in this episode. I will also cover other ways that college consultants make the admissions process which is often daunting and complicated, easier for the whole family.

First, let's talk about why kids listen to others and not their parents when their parent is giving the exact same advice and instructions. Some of this has to do with adolescent development. The purpose of adolescence is to develop a sense of identity and try on many different roles, make decisions for yourself, etc. If you took a psych class in college, you may remember that this is Eric Erickson's psychosocial theory of development. In order to develop a strong identity, teens have to separate from their parents and work towards independence. As they do this, there is often conflict in the family. Sometimes kids will do the exact opposite of what their parents say on purpose. I'm sure you can think of examples of your child doing this, and I know I can think of examples in my work as a college admissions consultant, especially around the college visit. I often advise parents not to give their opinion about a college visit until their child does simply because some kids will say the opposite, no matter what, in any circumstance.



This doesn't mean that teens won't take advice from you, but they really are more interested in what their peers, teachers, and mentors have to say. Do you remember the scene from *Father of the Bride*, when the Steve Martin character tells his daughter to take a sweater, and she insists that she does not need a sweater, it is not cold out, until her boyfriend says, "take a sweater" and she goes and gets one. Hiring a college consultant will help your child take their sweater. They will make better decisions about activities, homework, course selection, working with teachers, studying, which colleges to apply to, and even time management. We tell them to put their sweater on and they will, partly because we're not you, but mostly because the task of adolescence is identity development.

I think it's important to recognize that when it comes to the college admissions process, you are very likely as a parent to have a conflict with your child at some point in this process and for some families at many points in the process. Partly, this is true because of the identity piece that I just explained, but the other piece is that what you're asking your child to do is to position themselves to succeed in the admissions process. And this is a hard task. It's ongoing. It isn't just a one and done thing, like take out the garbage. It requires them to do their homework consistently, see teachers for extra help, try new activities, or maintain a commitment in old activities. And they also have to spend time researching colleges, visiting colleges, and making decisions about something that is big and something that is important. So expect to have some conflict with your child. That's a normal part of this process. And it's also another reason why parents hire a college admissions consultant. At The College Spy, we take nagging away from you. It's not that we are nagging, although we do a lot of reminding, but we make it so that you don't have to spend junior year and senior year and sometimes earlier nagging your child to do all of these different things. We take that off of your plate so that they are successful and moving forward in the process and there's less conflict in your family.

Another reason why you might want to work with a college admissions consultant is that you have a sense as a parent that your child is doing some things working towards the process of applying to college, but you're not exactly sure what those things are. Let me give you some examples. Sometimes parents know that their student is supposed to meet with their school counselor, or maybe they even know that their student did meet with their school counselor to talk about the list or to talk about the letter of recommendation that comes from every school counselor. But perhaps you don't have all of the details around when that's happened and what was actually said in that meeting and what your child took away from it. So what was said from the school counselor's point of view, but also how your child interpreted that information?

Another example would be students often write college essays in English class. Sometimes they do this in the spring of junior year, and other times it's an assignment for senior year English in the fall. But perhaps you don't really know if your child wrote an essay, or maybe you're not



sure if when your child wrote their essay, was it them just completing this assignment and getting it done so that they can get a decent grade in English? Or were they actually doing it, intending to hand that essay in? When you work with a college admissions consultant, at least at The College Spy, we keep you informed every step of the way. We know what's happening with your student, often because we are leading the process. And we contact you almost every single time we meet with your student to give you an update.

So this can be a big benefit for parents in terms of lowering their stress level and also looping them into the conversation when it's really important to have parents as part of that conversation. Sometimes this is as easy as cc'ing you on a follow up email sent to a student. So the student knows that we also told you what was happening and they aren't surprised or upset when you bring up the email that The College Spy sent.

And we also convince students to show you their college essays. We don't like to send the essay to you ourselves, we will, but we don't like to. We prefer to convince the student to show it to you. And it's not that hard to do. Oftentimes kids are so proud of their college essay that they really want to share it with their parents.

I also want to address the "I don't know kids." These are the students who just say, "I don't know" to everything. I was on a call last week with a student like this, he was zooming in from home and his mom was zooming in from her office and he just did not engage. I knew this was going to happen right up front because he refused to turn his camera on. It was a Friday afternoon and I suspect the student was tired and just not interested in having the conversation right then. However, the other problem really was that his mom was there. Mom's an important part of the process, and we definitely need parents to be involved. But sometimes students are more willing to talk about college admissions when their parent isn't there.

College Spy students know that we have an expectation of them to do some real thinking and some deep reflection. And so they're not surprised when we start asking them questions about how they feel about the courses that they're taking and the colleges that they have visited. My plan for the student is to meet with him privately next week and push for an answer to my questions. And then I will circle back to the parent and help bridge the communication gap that's happening in this moment between the student and the parent, making sure everybody is on the same page.

Overall, there's a different level of effort when the student knows that they're going to meet with another adult that isn't their parent. We are serving as accountability partners to the student, although we're not the student's mom or dad, and that could be the reason why the



student is sharing with us and being open with us and not giving us a hard time about doing all of the tasks that need to be done to get through the college admissions process.

There really is some skill to what we're doing as well. And I want to share with you some of the things that College Spy consultants are doing as we work with students so that you can do the same thing with your child and help them open up to you. I have five tips for you. Here they are.

The first one is that we really listen to kids. When a student doesn't want to do something, and sometimes they tell us flat out they don't want to do it. Other times, they just don't do it, and weeks go by and we're still saying, "Did you ask that teacher for a letter of recommendation yet?" And they haven't. What we do is listen to the student. We stop telling them what they should be doing and why. We find out what the resistance is and we name it, we want to know why they're not doing what they need to be doing, because we know that in general, there's a feeling associated with their procrastination. It could be fear, lack of confidence, anxiety, or a lack of understanding of why the task is important to do. Or, why the task is important to do right now. So if you can get away from telling your child what to do, and not be frustrated that they aren't engaging, and really listen to them, often times you can make a lot of progress.

My second tip is to ask the student what they think they should do once you find out what the resistance is. Don't just tell them. Students often have everything they need inside of them to solve their own problems. But they just need to talk it through with an adult. And so if you give them that space to tell you what they should do and hear about their plan, oftentimes progress happens.

The third tip that I have for you is a strategy that I learned when I was studying neurolinguistic programming. It's called pacing and leading. If you want to lead somebody into a task, perhaps the task is getting started on your college essay. Maybe it is making that appointment with an admissions counselor to get more information about a specific college. Maybe it is going to extra help for a class that they're struggling with instead of just telling them what to do first, you pace with them and you talk to them about what it is that they're not doing, why they're not doing it, how annoying this task is, how much they feel uncomfortable doing it, what other things are bothering them or getting in the way or weighing them down that they are busy focusing on when they're not focusing on this task for admissions that they need to do. And you really listen to what they have to say and you validate it because how they feel is real. It's their reality in that moment. And once you've done all of this great listening, you can slowly and successfully lead them to the new place.



A lot of students don't want to be led until they're heard first. So, pacing and leading can often be a really good strategy.

The fourth tip I have for you is to use the word “and” and avoid the word “but”. It's kind of simple. Instead of saying, “but you really need to be studying for the SAT now because it is in two weeks”, you can say, “and you really need to be studying for the SAT now because it is in two weeks.” Just that change of word can often lower a student's resistance because when they hear “but”, they immediately get their backs up, like, Oh, I don't want to do the next thing after “but” as opposed to the and, which means what they said was their truth and they also have something else they need to do. They know they need to do it. They're not disagreeing with you necessarily, or at least in their heart of hearts, they're not disagreeing with you. They know it needs to be done. It's just those other things that are important to them in the moment are really, truly important.

And my final tip for you is to advise your child to go to the source or the expert for help, instead of arguing with you. I do this all the time in my work. For me, I am the expert. So oftentimes when a student is having a hard time listening to me and agreeing with what I have to say, we go to the source, which is data. For example, sometimes I have students who don't want to maintain academic rigor their senior year of high school. Once they've met admissions requirements, they would prefer to take it easy senior year. And this is not what many colleges want. And I tell them that, and some kids believe me and will sign up for the appropriate classes that will lead them to the colleges they say they want to go to. Other students need the source or data from the college to convince them, and we go to something called the Common Data Set that's published by almost every college and we scroll to section C and we look at what courses are required and what courses are recommended and oftentimes, Hey, look, I'm right. I said you should take a fourth year of science and the college thinks you should take a fourth year of science, too, so that we don't really need to argue about it. We can just look up what's required.

And, for you, one of the benefits of hiring an admissions consultant would be that you have that expert. I often have families saying to me some version of “me and my kid are arguing about this. We need to ask you.” And then I can shed light on the situation and help them make a good decision. And sometimes it's the student who is mistaken, but sometimes it's the parent too, that they really don't know how the process works. And we can help everybody understand how the process works so we can feel good about going forward that students are doing what they need to do to reach their college goals.

Senior year can be a very rocky time for some families. It's helpful just to take the parent out of the equation and let another trusted adult step in and guide the student and the rest of the



family. At The College Spy, we help students in a number of ways. We have a high touch concierge level college admissions consulting service. It's a one on one and it's unlimited assistance with as many meetings as needed to get everything done in a way that the student is not just more likely to get into the college they want to go to, but they're also going to have a really good process along the way.

Another thing that we offer the summer before senior year is The College Spy Boot Camp. This is when we help students fill out their Common Application over the course of a week, and this is done in small groups. We have up to 10 students in a group. We meet two and a half hours a day, Monday through Friday, and students fill out the main part of the Common Application with my oversight.

Some of that work is busy work, and the students just get it done and stop procrastinating. And others are really strategy things. They learn how to fill out the activities section effectively, and during the week, they write their college essay. Over the weekend, the essay is due to me, and I provide one round of review, helping students move the essay from where it is, the draft, to the next step. If this is something that interests you, You can learn more at thecollegespy.com/group-workshops. Just click on the one that says The College Spy Boot Camp.

College Admissions 101

If you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed by the college admissions process, this is for you. Our next session of College Admissions 101 is starting soon. This four week course is the perfect opportunity for you to gain the knowledge and confidence that you need to help your student through the college selection and admissions process. College Admissions 101 is a live and interactive course on zoom for parents of students in grades 9, 10 and 11. Over the four weekly sessions we cover the key topics that you need to know to successfully navigate the college admissions process. At The College Spy we live and breathe college all day long and share expert insights into the frequent changes to this process. It's not the same process we went through back in the late eighties and nineties. So save yourself hours of research and costly mistakes that could affect your student's admissions prospects with this course. You'll be working directly with me, Michelle McAnaney the founder of The College Spy. As we discuss key topics, including:

- How to build a college list that best fits your child and their unique personality, skills, and interests
- How to research colleges to fully understand what they have to offer, including how to find those colleges that offer a lot of merit aid
- How to choose between SAT, ACT, and test optional
- The college application timeline



- College application strategies for success
- And how to think about financial aid options, both need based and merit based.

If you can't attend one of the four sessions, you'll get a recording so you won't miss any useful information. We also save time for Q& A in each session where you can ask questions about your child's situation and circumstance. Spots are going quickly. Head to thecollegespy.com and then click on Services and Group Workshops to register for the next session. I hope to see you there.

The College Spy's Tip of the Day

Today's tip is for you to use all of the resources available to you at the colleges your child is applying to. I run nine groups on Facebook and I often see parents putting questions into the group, asking one another things that many times parents either don't know the answers to or they don't realize that the answer that they are giving has to do with their own child, but is not necessarily good advice for all students. Therefore, I recommend if you have a question that you call the admissions offices of the colleges that your child is planning to apply to and ask your question.

Oftentimes people think that the admissions counselor's job is simply to review applications and offer an acceptance or to reject the student. However, their job is actually student recruitment, and they are more than happy to answer the questions that you have about what your child needs to be doing in high school in order to gain admissions at their college and in general how the admissions process works.

The other office that you can call if you have questions is the financial aid office on campus. The staff at the financial aid office is more than happy to talk to parents and to talk to students about paying for college and the financial aid process. So use the resources on campus that are available to you.

Today's College Spotlight is on Roger Williams University.

Roger Williams University's main campus is located in Bristol, Rhode Island. There are beautiful views from campus overlooking both Mount Hope Bay and the Mount Hope Bridge. Bristol's historic downtown neighborhood is a short drive away and boasts restaurants, coffee shops, and stores, as well as a bike path, park, and waterfront.



Newport and Providence are both about a half hour away. The campus opened in 1969 and is a combination of original buildings and newer buildings that were built as the school expanded. Of the approximately 4, 000 undergraduates, 55 percent are female and 45 percent are male. Roger Williams is considered less selective, with an acceptance rate of close to 90%.

The school is committed to an equitable admissions process and is proud of its use of holistic review process. The average high school GPA of enrolled students is 3.4. Test scores are optional and about 20% submit the SAT and 4% submit the a ACT. Of those submitted, the average composite scores were 1150 to 1260 and 25 to 31.

Schools offer 50 majors and 70 minors. The most popular majors are criminal justice, architecture, marketing, psychology, and business administration and management. The average class size is 19 and the student to faculty ratio is 14 to 1. The RWU Gen Ed curriculum is unique in that it is not designed around specific subjects, but instead six academic themes: writing, creativity and arts, global perspectives, Systems Thinking, Social Inquiry, and Quantitative Inquiry. Students have the flexibility to explore and take a wider variety of courses while completing their Gen Ed requirements.

In the first year seminar course, all freshmen work in a small cohort of students to question and explore a topic. Field trips, film viewings, guest speakers, and community service projects may be part of their seminar experience. Some recent seminar topics include Why Identity Matters, the Italian American Experience, Guns, Robots, Sex in America, and Pop Icons and Masterpieces, the Role of Art and Artists in Society. The senior seminar ties together a student's learning experience while at RWU. Seniors explore interesting topics in a small class, draw connections between their topic and their learning gained from their college experience.

RWU has a two year on campus housing requirement. There are traditional dorm options for first year students, including a small number of living learning communities. Returning students can choose from a wider range of options, including suites and on campus apartments. RWU boasts that they continue to rank in the top 5 percent of schools for student satisfaction of on campus dining, based on feedback from surveys.

There is a commitment to the use of local and sustainable ingredients in campus meals when possible. Students are involved in about 75 campus clubs and organizations, including Student Senate, Multicultural Student Union, Ballroom Dance Club, and Beach Cleanup Club. There are 23 Division III varsity sports and eight club teams, such as men's and women's ice hockey, eSports, and Ultimate Frisbee.



Students have access to paddle boards, kayaks, and small sailboats on RWU's waterfront. Sailing lessons are offered to students on weekends in September. There are no fraternities or sororities at RWU. Students socialize at on campus parties and events. Newport and Providence are popular weekend destinations for off campus outings.

Here are some interesting facts about Roger Williams:

Roger Williams opened in 1956 as a two year junior college located in a YMCA in Providence, Rhode Island.

The school is named after Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island and a 17th century revolutionary.

Bristol campus was built on a former dairy farm.

Historic Bristol is home to the nation's oldest 4th of July parade.

And the school mascot is Swoop the Hawk.

The College Spy gets insider info from a current student. We interviewed a student and here is what he said:

What is the best place on campus to hang out with friends or meet new people? The best place to hang out is Mount Hope Bridge. It is a bridge at the south side of campus.

What's the best food or meal in the dining hall? The food changes every day and can be a real hit or miss, but the stir fry is always good.

What's the best kept secret on campus? The smoothie place in the rec center.

What do most students do on weekends to have fun? Most students go off campus to the nearby towns and local attractions. And what is the best dorm to live in as a freshman? Willow dorms are the best because they are like little apartments.

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