How the college admissions process was transformed in uncertain times

By Aidan Nowosielski

Getting into your dream school, it's something we all aspire to ever since childhood. The pandemic has made it exponentially harder to realize these aspirations.

Applying to colleges is already a laborious and painstaking effort. Seniors correspond with admission officers at their potential alma mater, attend tours, and complete a slew of forms and essays. COVID-19 has affected everybody's lives, but impacts of the pandemic have fundamentally altered the landscape of the college admissions process. As a result of the pandemic, the class of 2021 experienced the most difficult application cycle in history this year.

Ms. Boucher is BISB’s college counsellor and she has 25 years experience in her field. She has global experience through her work in schools in Morocco and Indonesia. For college counselling, BISB has an extremely unique advantage with such a small school. Students receive a personalized and tailored approach throughout their application process. Ms. Boucher was stunned by the craziness of this year’s application cycle.

*Could you give some examples you encountered of the college admissions process being changed or impacted?*

The pandemic had a profound effect on this year’s admission cycle. First, most schools made submitting standardized test scores (SAT & ACT) optional since it was difficult for students to find places to take the tests. This allowed students to apply to schools where normally they would not have fit the academic profile of accepted students due to low test scores. Therefore, many colleges and universities saw huge increases in the numbers of applications they received. That drove the acceptance rate down, particularly for highly selective colleges/universities. Second, many seniors are having to make their choice on where they will attend without visiting the school due to campus closures; they have to rely on virtual tours.

*As Director of College Counseling, how has your role been impacted?*

The events described above have made it much harder for me to predict a student’s chance of admission to many schools. I also miss having visits from college/university admission representatives; that is a great way to learn more about their schools and also provides an avenue to advocate for my students. As a result of this, I have to rely on phone calls. My fingers are crossed that in-person visits will resume in the fall.

*What unique advice do you have for students regarding college admissions?*

Think outside of the box. BISB students tend to apply to many of the same schools. There are so many fantastic colleges and universities, both here and abroad – don't be afraid to consider something different. In addition, many state universities have outstanding honors programs – which tend to be less expensive, but provide an outstanding undergraduate experience for students.

For extracurricular activities, students should pick areas that they are interested in and excited about– and dive deep into those areas. They should not spread themselves too thin across to many activities.

*Are there any resources students can use to familiarize themselves with the college admissions process?*

In Skills and IB Activities and listen/participate and students will learn about the search and application process. At the start of junior year, all Year 12s and their parents attend a “college search and application process kick-off event” where their process/timeline is discussed in detail.

We appreciate Ms. Boucher for her resilience during these unprecedented times with this year’s tumultuous college admissions landscape.