



ST. GEORGE'S
SCHOOL

February 25, 2016

Dear Parents of the Class of 2017,

Thank you for participating in the mock admissions exercise during our recent Fifth-Form Parents Weekend. Ultimately, our goal was to spark interesting conversation about the decisions that colleges have to make, and hopefully, through the exercise, you gained some important information about the college process. Specifically, there are some lessons to be learned from each specific application.

“Baahir Bhatt”—Now here’s a student who has excellent marks in a demanding course load, but we don’t recommend taking high level courses just for the sake of being impressive to a college admission counselor. **Students should take the courses that are most interesting to them**, courses that they are genuinely excited about. It seems Baahir’s only strike against him is his disciplinary infraction, which Fitch, as a school built on an Honor Code, would take seriously. Admission officers recognize, though, that often experience is the best teacher, and these lessons can shape us into better, wiser people. The real mistake is not the disciplinary event, but might have been an unwillingness to address his mistake in the forward, direct manner that he did. **Colleges expect that students take responsibility for their actions, and that they handle immature behavior in a mature way.**

“Emily Diman”—Like Emily, we hope ALL students **take advantage of all the School** has to offer. In so doing, they will prepare their college application, but more importantly, for college itself and life after college. One of the strongest academically, Emily had the edge because she had performed well in a challenging set of courses. Indeed, at the end of the day, **the transcript is the most important part of the application file**. She might have been wise to consider an **early application** if her interest in Fitch were really high—that would be one way to stand out among other admissible applicants, but regardless of whether she applied early or regular, she forfeited **a great opportunity to present her unique voice and experience in the world in her essay**. The SG CCO will do all we can to help students find their voice, but they need to put good effort in to their application writing, and seek early feedback from their counselor and the SG Writing Lab.

“Jimmy Joe Gates”—First, **athletes should work closely with high school and college coaches to make sure their talents are recognized**. Athletes cannot control the evaluation that the coach makes, but they can make sure that they get evaluated; they cannot just sit back and assume that this will happen by itself. **Early decision might be a good route for a legacy applicant**, for that shows the level of interest ... but in the end, performance is always the key. Jimmy Joe could have served himself by working harder in his classes, and by being more sincere and less confident about being admitted to Fitch; it is important to take a humble approach in the process, and to build a list of six to eight “first choices.” No school is ever a sure thing until that letter comes, and no candidate should take anything for granted, especially if he or she is below the profile of that school!

“Brianna Jones”—Students should **use their essay to tell your story and coordinate their efforts with us**. Colleges want to know candidates as best they can, so make sure they understand the challenges they have faced. Many colleges are now wrestling with questions of race and class, and trying to determine what is most important to them. In some cases, being the first generation in one’s family to go to college can mean as much or more as ethnicity. There are a lot of factors in life that are beyond their control, but **candidates should let colleges know what makes them tick**. Furthermore, when it comes to paying for the endeavor of college, **applicants should have an honest (and early!) conversation within their family about financial aid**. Ultimately, the goal is to find an academic, extracurricular and financial fit.

There are some more general lessons we hope the students will take away from the exercise when we do it with them this upcoming spring:



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Take your application seriously—You need to be thoughtful and thorough in the completion of your application, following directions and responding fully. Pay special attention to your essays for that's where you can let your personality come through most directly. We encourage you to start early, and to generate lots of drafts; don't be satisfied with just one attempt at one essay topic. Your assignment over the summer is to complete the Common Application; be sure to work diligently on this. Also, think carefully about listing fully your honors, your extracurriculars and your work experience; don't leave readers guessing what any activity is or why it is important to you.

Give your best effort academically—The transcript will remain the single most important piece of paper in any application folder, for it addresses the fundamental question of whether you are capable of handling the work at any given college. As you have seen, it is the starting point for the evaluation of a candidate, so you want to make your record as strong as you can.

Coordinate your efforts with your counselor—You want a consistent picture to emerge from your application folder. One way to achieve this is to stay in frequent contact with your counselor. Yes, we will help to shape your lists, but we can also give you feedback on anything you write. Stay in touch over the summer!

Choose your teacher recommenders carefully—Teacher recommendations are another way for colleges to get to know you as students and as people. Yes, you need someone to write about your efforts and achievements in the classroom, but you don't need to go to the teacher who gave you the highest grade. Rather, consider teachers who can write about how you work and what kind of person you are.

Explain whatever needs explaining—You should make sure that you address any issues that might raise questions in the minds of readers. Did your grades take a turn for the worse at any point in your career? Have you faced any particular challenges, such as a hardship at home or a disciplinary situation? And, wherever possible, use your interview to discuss anything that is especially important to you.

Understand that St. George's supports you fully—You are fortunate to enjoy the full support of the School and the College Counseling Office. While colleges accept *students*, and not *schools*, you do benefit from your attendance at St. George's. You have us as your advocates; we write thorough and positive letters on your behalf and we follow up actively with calls and e-mails to our colleagues at colleges and universities. And while St. George's does not provide Class Rank or a GPA, we do provide a comprehensive **School Profile** that places your performance into context. Colleges know that you come from a demanding school that offers a lot of opportunities; they want to see what you do with those opportunities. Our task is to make sure that they understand and appreciate what you have done here.

Ultimately, our advice, then, is that students present themselves as who they are; they should not try to *guess* what an admissions officer *wants* to hear. Further, students should (and must!) craft a **balanced college list** that features schools of varying selectivity. They should like every college to which they apply; there's no sense in gaining admission to a school they do not want to attend. But this means that they need to look broadly and thoughtfully for colleges that will be a good match, and they will need your support and guidance in helping them get to that balanced list. We look forward to working with you and your child as we begin and move through the college process. Please call us with any questions you may have!

Sincerely,

The SG College Counseling Office
Kelly, Stuart, Chrissy, Brendan, and Jenny