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ANNOUNCEMENT

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Choosing a college major may seem like a daunting task when you are still in high school. You are still choosing your next year’s classes, but everyone from your parents to your counselors seems to be asking, “So, what do you think you want to major in college? What are your goals?”

“To declare or not to declare?” You may begin to fret. But before you take that leap to declare a major and get it off your back, be aware that a college major is not really all that heavy. It is not who you are or even who you will become. It is just one path on your way to developing as a person. A recent study from CareerBuilder showed that a third of all American college-educated workers were in fields unrelated to their major, and nearly half (47%) said their first job after college was not in fields that they had studied.

So, why declare a major at all before you enter a college or university? Doing so can help you in two ways. Firstly, figuring out early what you want to study urges you to reflect upon your interests, skills, and values. You can save on college tuition, which may cost as much as $20,000 to $40,000 per year if you have to extend your college stay because you can’t figure out quickly enough there what you want to study. Secondly, you have a higher chance of becoming accepted to universities of your choice. The passion and focus that are required in a university setting is missing when you announce yourself “undeclared”. Your personal statement that you include with your application may become a moot point to college admission officers.

In choosing a major, you should be thoughtful and methodical. You may also want to consider the hard side, whether you can make a decent living with it. Fortunately, any one particular major can lead to several different careers with above average income. For example, a biology major can lead to the following careers among many others: a physician, a medical sales representative, a medical and health service manager, a registered nurse, and an educator. According to the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor and Statistics May 2014 report, the highest paying non-managerial occupations include physicians. But the largest occupations with an above average income, that is, ones with more job positions, exclude physicians while including registered nurses, general and operation managers (in any field), sales representatives, and school teachers. According to the above Bureau, there are in fact many major occupational categories containing many more professions and careers under their umbrella:
Knowing the range of careers and professions that exist out there, one can rest assured that a major does not limit one’s job future or life.

Nevertheless, your major does concentrate the majority of your university studies under one field. Even interdisciplinary majors are tied by a theme. So, in order to enjoy your university life, plan your major ahead and well. A major is partly practical. It points to certain kinds of jobs and careers. A major is also philosophical. The cluster of courses you are required to take under a major provide you with a set of tools for thinking and certain specific sensibilities. You don’t want to be stuck taking many math and engineering courses as an engineering major if literature, and not computational mathematics, is what moves you. While it is theoretically possible to change your major while you are already a university student, it can be very hard in certain circumstances. Most importantly, choose a major that you will enjoy, that will help you grow, and provide you with several options of viable careers that are meaningful to you.

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As a college admissions consultant, I often have to answer the following question during my meetings: “How can I improve my child’s leadership experience?” With increasingly competitive admissions at our nation’s top universities, becoming a leader isn’t simply an asset anymore—it’s a necessity. Colleges love students who are leaders because these students improve the college experience for their peers and instigate change in the communities around them. Who wouldn’t want a charismatic, influential, and forward-thinking individual to be part of their student body?

However, it seems that leadership opportunities are rather limited at the high school level. For many students, running for a student body officer position feels like a popularity contest they probably won’t have a chance of winning. Becoming the president of a club isn’t guaranteed and there is only one captain per sport team. How can a student distinguish himself or herself from the rest of the crowd if there are only a handful of leadership positions?

I believe the answer lies in the larger community. When colleges evaluate leaders, they don’t just look at the title of a student’s leadership position. While becoming student body president is quite an accomplishment, the results that a student can deliver through leadership speak volumes about his or her character and create the best impressions. Giving back to the community allows students to not only demonstrate their leadership ability, but to also show their compassionate side.

Students can take on leadership roles to address social problems that affect the underprivileged in their area regardless of their personality type and previous leadership experience. If we take the time to identify issues that negatively impact our local community, we may start to see the effects of education inequality, higher rates of obesity, homelessness, pollution, and gang violence, to simply name a few.

At this point in my meetings, parents typically respond, “But my kid is only 15! How can he or she possibly stop something like gang violence?”

To be honest, I can’t either. Although you and I may not have the resources to directly resolve issues like gang violence, we can still be part of the solution. Students can put on after-school athletic programs to keep teens off the streets, tutor at-risk youth to keep them on the track to graduate high school, and start an awareness campaign to inform others about ways to prevent gang violence. Any high school student is perfectly capable of leading projects like these; it doesn’t take a superhero to make a difference in the community.

So how can parents help their students become better leaders? Here are several starting points that parents can implement in their daily interactions with their students at home:

By ThinkTank Learning College Admission Consulting Team
1. Discuss current events at dinnertime

Students will appreciate discussing recent topics in the news over dinner instead of why they received a bad grade on the recent test. While taking time to instill good study habits is essential, it is equally important to talk about the larger issues that affect our society today. Many parents and their children have difficulty communicating with each other so this is a great opportunity for discussion.

2. Lead by example and volunteer with your kids

As a parent, you are probably overwhelmed by work and familial commitments. Despite all of this, if you can prioritize volunteerism into your weekly schedule, it will send the message to your child that being involved in the community should be an important part of their life as well. Parents strongly influence the way that students think and act, so if you can be their role model and lead the way, they will take after you. When volunteering has become an indispensable part of your child’s life, their experiences will motivate them to continuously give back to the community in the future.

3. Instill a sense of responsibility through simple tasks

Throughout my childhood, I despised household chores. I found tasks like dishwashing and sweeping the floor to be a waste of my time, especially when I had copious amounts of homework. However, as I matured, I appreciated my parents for teaching me how to be responsible and independent. The lessons I learned through small tasks at home allowed me to better manage my time and lead others. Take some time to slowly incorporate more household responsibilities into your child’s daily life. They’ll thank you later when they can take care of themselves when they leave for college.

4. Identify problems in the community

Every community has different needs. For example, I grew up in a rural area so exposure to pesticides and chemicals seeping into the water supply are two of the many issues that local officials and families are extremely worried about. What kinds of problems are apparent in your community? How can your family make a difference? These are both great discussion points for parents to find opportunities for their students to make an impact in the community.

5. Find creative solutions that combine your future interests with your current skill set

If your child wants to be an engineer one day, I am positive that there are creative applications of his or her skill set to address the larger issue at hand. While this is the most difficult aspect of making a difference in the community, it will give your student a chance to think outside of the box and critically approach a problem. What kind of things can your child reasonably accomplish on their own or with your help?

Although these are general starting points, I hope that they will allow both you and your child to facilitate open dialogue and take a step towards leadership in the local community. Student leaders have a relentless drive to solve problems in their community and repeatedly inspire others to become more involved as well. With so many problems in the communities around us, the need for leaders has never been greater. Your child can be the leader of tomorrow.
Reaching the end of your junior year of high school should feel like a huge accomplishment. You’ve finished all of the classes that colleges like UCLA and UC Berkeley are going to consider for admission. You’ve taken all of your standardized tests (the SAT, the SAT Subject Tests) - or at least tried your hand at some of the harder ones that you plan to retake in the fall. Aside from your preview classes at TTL or your epic summer program that you’ve been packing for since March, you don’t have much to worry about right now. Or do you?

Many students make the choice to put off college “stuff” until the fall, when deadlines are looming and their heads are back in academic mode. Although I totally understand my students’ aversion to writing lengthy personal statements on an otherwise lazy summer day, there is one task they can start working on now that should actually be fun: generating, researching, and refining their college lists.

Why Should I Make a List?

Though I often spend hours helping my students select ideal colleges based on their strategic position and overall academic profile, I never make the final decision for them on where they will apply. This is because although I can offer educated opinions based on my training and experience in college admissions, what really matters to my students often has nothing to do with what I can tell them. Choosing a college is one of the most important decisions a person can make; it should not be taken lightly, and it should not be done under the influence of external factors.

For example, most students grow up with certain ideals in their minds about what they want in a college. Some are constantly bombarded with rankings and lists and Ivy League sweatshirts. These are the students that pick the college with the highest ranking, both overall and in terms of their major, and apply without considering any other factors. Other students think about college in terms of what they have read in books or seen in movies. These are the students who apply to a big name college that looks the way they’d always dreamed (the brick buildings, the stadium-sized lecture halls) without considering whether or not they would actually be successful there. Other students haven’t thought about college at all. So, when it comes down to it, what should students do in order to make this weighty life decision?

The All-Important College Visit

Ideally, by the time students finish their third year of high school, they should already have visited multiple colleges. Students are often unmotivated to do this, as they tend to forget they will actually be living at or near their chosen college for at least four years. You wouldn’t move into a house without at least walking around inside it and checking out the neighborhood – in the same vein, you have to be sure a college is right for you. Visiting is the only surefire way to make that decision, as often the decision-making factor is the feeling a student has when he or she first breathes the air on campus.

The college visit can do wonders for dispelling rumors and reputations about a college, as well. Often parents fear for the safety of their students in urban areas because they have listened to a singular horror story and imagined that it happens every day. Once they understand the environment and see their students excited, they are willing to compromise on location. On the other hand, students are often dismayed to find that the beautiful springtime photos they’ve seen of an East Coast campus do not fit at all with
the campus they visit in the winter. Once they feel that bitter wind-chill factor or that horrible humidity, students aren’t quite so excited about moving as far from home as possible.

To keep track of all of these factors at the college visit, I ask my students to fill out a worksheet while they are on their trips, then sort through their likes and dislikes upon their return. The worksheet asks questions about transportation, safety, class sizes, dorm quality, and social scene, among others, in order to touch on aspects of college life that students might not have otherwise considered. If students have not had a chance to visit multiple colleges, I will ask them to fill out a college questionnaire which, similar to the college visit worksheet, is meant to get them thinking about factors other than academics and appearance. Once I have a jumping-off point for what my student is looking for in a college, I can start to generate his or her comprehensive college list.

The College List: Researching Your Options

As college admission consultants, we don’t want our students to get into the best possible college. We want our students to get into the best possible college for them. To that end, I begin with a comprehensive list of 20-30 colleges that fit each student’s preferences and personality. Of course I take things like grades, test scores and extracurricular accomplishments into account, but I do not tell my students which colleges are “reach” or “safety”. Instead, I ask them to research each college for its own merit before they take the ranking and their own chances for admission into account.

This is a valuable process for many reasons, but most important to me is that my students understand the colleges they are applying to – what each college prioritizes in terms of reputation and budget; what concepts and values their mission and motto emphasize; what is unique about the academic department of choice; what interesting history or traditions they may have. All of these factors help to pinpoint the kind of student each university is looking for. If my student feels that he or she identifies with the image of this ideal student, then we have a winning college.

Through their research, I ask that my students refine their list of 30 into smaller and smaller stacks until we have seven-ten colleges that they plan to follow through with in the fall – with my help, or without. In any case, both of us can feel assured that we have not taken the decision about college lightly, and that wherever the student ends up, regardless of whether it is the dream school or the highest ranked Ivy, he or she will be happy.

Students from Amador Valley High School worked with one of our college admissions consultants, Michelle Walker, to start a club on campus called the “Super Pawers Club.” The club collaborates with Love & Second Chances to encourage adoption of abandoned dogs from Taiwan. They volunteer and run an adoption booth every Saturday and help clean up dogs that have just arrived from their 13-hour journey to America. The students have since helped many dogs and puppies find new loving homes. Keep up the good work!

These pictures are worth a thousand awwwwws:
When I began studying at University of California, Irvine, I had already developed a great interest in England. I loved the culture, the idea of tea time and of course, the accent. So naturally, when I learned about the study abroad programs available, I knew I had to apply for a chance to study in England.

In the fall of my third year, I boarded a plane, departing from LAX to London Heathrow Airport. It was bitter-sweet to say farewell to the United States, my college and friends for four months, but I was extremely excited for the adventure ahead.

I spent my semester abroad at the University of Sussex in Brighton, which is south of London. It’s a brightly colored city, known for its nightlife, and is filled with lots of bustling character. The city buildings are very close to one another, paved with cobblestones, leading up to the rocky beach shore at the very end.

The university campus itself, however, was actually a forty-five minute bus ride away from town. I was surprised to find that the campus was in the middle of the countryside, and very isolated from retail shops and restaurants.

Culture shock.
One of the first things they talk to you about in your study abroad workshops is the possibility of culture shock, and in this case, I experienced it—a sensation of personal disorientation in a new place. I grew up in a city outside of Los Angeles, and UC Irvine is a planned-city. I had little experience with public transportation, as it is inconvenient and difficult to navigate in Southern California. I had no idea how to get anywhere without driving my car, or asking someone to drive me. I was so used to the ease of getting in my car to pick up a few groceries, and then repeating the action the next day. Here, it would be wiser to get the bulk of my errands done, because it would take me a very long time to ride the bus and back into town. I started to feel stuck. Like time was slower.

In addition, I found myself missing California staples like tacos and In-N-Out. And from there on, I began to miss a lot of things, like my friends and family. I missed the Orange County weather—in Brighton, it was dark early and rained heavily often. I found myself disillusioned in the place I had always dreamed of going to.

That’s where I began to feel better—I reminded myself of all the great things I came to England for. I immersed myself in my studies. I partook in festivities with classmates and new friends. I embraced the differences.
I feel like it is very easy for someone to feel alienated in a different place, especially since it happened to me: someone who had felt ready to be in England for most of her young life. But this should not deter anyone who is interested in studying abroad in another country. The importance of studying abroad genuinely lies in the stark differences that arise when someone actually lives in another country.

Studying abroad is a completely separate experience from taking a vacation—you’re thrown into the daily life of a native person, rather than just visiting the popular tourist attractions. You get the opportunity to live with other non-American students and experience their lifestyle and culture. When I lived in a dorm with other British students, I was able to involve myself in picking up their slang and interests; I felt as if I was being immersed.

I would advise all students to study abroad if they have the chance and time. Many colleges will actually offer financial aid to help assist in paying for the program, as it does count towards course credit. Studying abroad is a great way to learn something new, because you take core courses and get to visit another country. The courses you take will most likely satisfy an existing college requirement—something that would be worked out with your own study abroad office on campus. A lot of students attend programs abroad that are actually very well known for their academic prestige and rigor. It is overall the perfect way to make the most out of your time in college. And, most importantly, you get to make a lot of memories that last a lifetime.
Summertime usually conjures up images of lounging by the poolside, drinking iced tea, and taking it easy. After all the hard work you put in during the school year, you certainly deserve (and need!) the physical and mental break that summer offers. However, summer isn’t just about having more time to relax; it’s also about having more time to dedicate to your passions outside of school. Free time is most appreciated when it’s balanced out with productivity – and what better way to be productive than exploring something new and interesting? Use that extra time between summer camps and classes to pursue topics that you don’t generally get to learn about in school. The momentum you gain in summer will help you take things to the next level when school starts again. Below are some ideas about how to use your free time wisely.

**LEARN SOMETHING NEW**

It’s one thing to sign up for a class; it’s another to delve into a new subject on your own. Teaching yourself something new is a great way to exercise your independence, drive, and curiosity. Whatever the subject matter or skill you tackle, there is great value in becoming your own teacher. Not only will you set your own rules, you’ll also learn to manage your time and develop a strong work ethic. Don’t forget to use your new knowledge after you’ve gained it! The following are just a few examples of what you can do:
Go to the library and pick up a few books on a topic that interests you—the mysterious workings of the human brain, beliefs that ancient philosophers had about the world, how to launch a start-up business. Then write a short essay about what you learned and how it applies to your life. When school starts, have one of your teachers or peers look over it and give you feedback.

Browse the internet for new recipes and cooking techniques. Then cook for others: your friends and family, the homeless in your community, your class on the first day of school.

Attend a Coder Dojo club (www.coderdojo.com) or take a free online course (www.coursera.org) and learn how to code. Then write a functional program which you can use in your daily life or which you can donate to a club or organization.

Start a discussion group or book club, or gather ideas to start one during the school year. This is a great way to build on what you’ve already learned so far and will give you the opportunity to hear others’ perspectives and ideas. Invite guest speakers to lead some of your discussions.

DO-IT-YOURSELF PROJECTS

Perform your own science experiment. Visit www.sciencebuddies.com for ideas or purchase a biology or chemistry kit from Amazon. Take notes during the experiment and then write a report to record the results and your impressions of the experience.

Find creative ways to recycle objects that would otherwise be thrown away. Use recycled materials (such as plastic water bottles, food containers, bags, broken items) to create home décor, flower pots, storage containers, bird feeders, and anything else you can think of. When school starts again, share your creations and ideas with others by hosting an event, starting a club, or talking to businesses about ways to go green.

Start a blog or create a website so you can share with others something that’s important to you—health, current events, life as a teenager, music, science, etc. Let your writing reflect your natural style. Do you have a knack for humor? Are you reflective and philosophical? Do you prefer the more straightforward approach of a reporter or journalist? Think about how others can learn from your point of view and open a discussion.

Create a video—a documentary, experimental short film, music video, or picture slideshow to showcase your summer experiences. Share your video with others to inspire them!
Summer is a great time for relaxation, recreation and refreshment. It is a good time, whether you are on a break between junior year and senior year of high school, or awaiting the beginning of your first year of college, to enjoy a bit of time doing leisurely things and bask in the summer sun.

It is very important to allow yourself some time off from studying and classes every once in a while, but it is important also to remember to keep your brain functioning and alert. Over the summer, many students will forget a lot of things that they’ve learned over the previous school year; in fact, memory loss can begin as early as two weeks after learning new information if it is not relearned and retained properly. This is why it is very vital that you remember to exercise your brain, if you will, every once in a while.

Reading is a fantastic way to do this. Reading books, old and new, helps you reinforce and build your existing vocabulary bank and uses your imagination actively. Reading a good book will force you to think analytically, critically, and develop many ideas about the storyline and its characters. Books engage your mind.

Many people will say that reading literature and canonical novels is the best way to go about this. Although, I do agree that reading literature provides you with a wider range of vocabulary and themes that could be beneficial to be exposed to before college, I still believe that reading young adult novels can still be helpful. In high school, I had an English teacher who called young adult novels like Twilight ‘hot Cheetos.’ To him, ‘hot Cheetos’ had little nutritional value, or in the book-sense, no educational value. But, as mentioned before, reading is good for the imagination, and therefore, for summer reading, reading in general will always remain helpful.

So whether you are re-reading the Hunger Games series or checking off the next Jane Austen novel, here are a few suggestions to get you started with some summer reading. These books are, in general, on the shorter side, but will nonetheless prepare you for another year of learning and thinking.
A House in Paris
by Elizabeth Bowen

“When eleven-year-old Henrietta arrives at the Fishers’ well-appointed house in Paris, she is prepared to spend her day between trains looked after by an old friend of her grandmother’s. Henrietta longs to see a few sights in the foreign city; little does she know what fascinating secrets the Fisher house itself contains.

For Henrietta finds that her visit coincides with that of Leopold, an intense child who has come to Paris to be introduced to the mother he has never known. In the course of a single day, the relations between Leopold, Henrietta’s agitated hostess Naomi Fisher, Leopold’s mysterious mother, his dead father, and the dying matriarch in bed upstairs, come to light slowly and tantalizingly. And when Henrietta leaves the house that evening, it is in possession of the kind of grave knowledge usually reserved only for adults.”

This Is Not Your City
by Caitlin Horrocks

“Eleven women confront dramas both everyday and outlandish in Caitlin Horrocks’ This Is Not Your City. In stories as darkly comic as they are unflinching, people isolated by geography, emotion, or circumstance cut imperfect paths to peace—they have no other choice. A Russian mail-order bride in Finland is rendered silent by her dislocation and loss of language, the mother of a severely disabled boy writes him postcards he’ll never read on a cruise ship held hostage by pirates, and an Iowa actuary wanders among the reincarnations of those she’s known in her 127 lives. Horrocks’ women find no simple escapes, and their acts of faith and acts of imagination in making do are as shrewd as they are surprising.”

What Should You Do in the Next Three Months?

**JUL**  
Freshman – Read at least 2 books.  
Sophomore – Explore occupations.  
Junior – Understand current events.  
Senior – Start on your personal statement.

**AUG**  
Freshman – Join school clubs.  
Sophomore – Ask your counselor if AP and honors level classes are good for you.  
Junior – Review your high school coursework and activity plans from now until graduation.  
Senior – Start on your teacher brag sheets and college application essays statement.

**SEP**  
Freshman – Plan out your year. Meet your guidance counselor.  
Sophomore – Plan out your year. Explore college catalogs.  
Junior – Plan out your year. Obtain dates and locations of college fairs.  
Senior – College Application Season!
Maybe you’ve lived always shared your room with a sibling or maybe you’ve always had your own room. Either way, when you move into a campus dorm, chances are you will have a roommate, and of course, a building full of hall mates to match. For some, this idea is horribly terrifying, and for others, this is very exciting—this will be an entirely new chapter of your life.

So I’ve put together some tips and a checklist in preparation for dorm life— to help you ease and feel ready to move in with a bunch of your peers.

**Things to consider bringing**

Your college dormitory will send you a list of things that you should bring, such as extra-long twin bed sheets, toiletries, shower caddy, a lamp, plug strip, etc. Here are some necessities that I found useful and common amongst my hall mates and myself:

1. **A kettle**
   
   If you’re already thinking about eating instant ramen all night long with your new friends, then you’re going to need a way to make boiling hot water. A microwave may not be accessible, but having a kettle will allow you to quickly boil water within minutes for ramen, tea and soups. Kettles can be bought for fairly cheap at Target or Costco.

2. **A set of eating utensils**

   And of course, a set of eating utensils so you can actually eat your instant ramen! These will also be useful in other ways.

3. **Board games**

   Board games like Quelf, Cards Against Humanity, Apples to Apples and Taboo are great games to bring to the dorm, because they are highly interactive and allow for a high number of participants, in contrast to a PlayStation which requires a TV and often only allows up to four players. The board games also work as fantastic icebreakers. These games are probably already popular with your own friends at home, and would easily build a good foundation for long nights of talking and tons of laughter.
4. Ear plugs and sleeping mask
Some nights, your hall mates will be noisier than others. Some nights, your roommate will be up late studying for an exam or writing an essay—typing loudly the night away. Having a set of ear plugs and a sleeping mask will help you better fall asleep and wake up feeling well rested for another day of school. No one expects that you and your roommate/hall mates will have the exact same life schedule, and you can’t always control whether they’re watching funny videos downstairs. Just make sure you set your alarm to vibrate or you might not hear it!

5. An outfit suited for interviews
Something important that I highly recommend bringing with you is an outfit that you can wear to an interview. You can pick and choose pieces so that you can dress business formal or casual. You may find yourself wanting a campus job or a nearby internship, and this will usually require an interview. If you do not bring a car to school with you, then you might have a problem going shopping for interview clothes. Be proactive and bring a set with you, just in case—even if you think you probably won’t get a job. You might be invited to a formal event, such as a club banquet or dance. Bridging off of this idea, think about the city your college is in, and activities you might want to engage in. Bring a swimsuit for the beach if your college is in a beach town, etc.

6. Photos of friends and family
Bring photos of your friends and family to decorate your room. You can get creative and string the photos up on your wall or use some nice frames to store them in on your desk. Sometimes, it’s nice to have familiar faces around when college life gets stressful.

These are just some ideas to get you started. Lastly, just remember that keep an open mind when going off to college and your freshman dorm! It may be difficult settling into an entirely new place, but after some time, you will definitely start to get comfortable with your new surroundings.

---

**CONGRATULATIONS!!**

**HARVARD ADMITTED ONLY 5% OF APPLICANTS THIS YEAR**

**HERE’S HOW FRANK BEAT THE ODDS OF ADMISSION!**

“On April 1st, I found out that I got admitted into Harvard…at first I thought it was an April Fool's joke! But when I shared my results with my college admissions consultant, he was not surprised at all…”

-Frank L.

Frank immigrated to the United States from China at the start of 9th grade. Being new to the American school system, with hopes of being admitted to an Ivy League school, he signed up with ThinkTank Learning for college admission help. Frank was able to explore his interests with various internships through ThinkTank Learning and he soon fell in love with politics after volunteering for a congresswoman. We helped Frank tap into his passion for politics and collaborated with the Chinese American Voters Education Committee (CAVEC) and Rock-the-Vote to encourage thousands of young Asian Americans to vote. Frank’s hard work finally paid off when he found out he was accepted into his dream school, Harvard University, as a Political Science Major.

CONGRATULATIONS FRANK! GOOD LUCK ON YOUR JOURNEY AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY!
Grit and the Measure of Success

By Melody Mark, ThinkTank Learning College Admission Consultant

Dreaming of being the next I.M. Pei, Jeremy Lin, or Yo-Yo Ma? What’s the secret to their success? Were they just lucky to have been born gifted? Certainly they were endowed with certain gifts at birth. But studies show that singular talent or high intelligence alone is not enough to assure greater achievements such as these remarkable individuals have found. In Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell argues that those who find great success are the ones who seized opportunities and worked extremely hard. A commonality he found among successful people like Michael Jordan, Bill Gates, and the Beatles is that they all put in long practice hours—the “10,000 Hour Rule.” 10,000 hours of practice is what he found was needed for developing excellence at a skill. Greatness comes over time with hard work. Succeeding in school, work, or other activities takes inspiration, drive, and resilience.

So often in my meetings with students, I hear the phrase “(s)he is very smart but lazy and unmotivated.” Some of these students will tell me that they understand the concepts and just can’t understand why they make mistakes and don’t do well on tests. When I ask how much they studied the details and practiced problems, they will usually mumble, “Not much.” It’s telling how they think a cursory review is adequate to score an A on a test. At times I will see a student who scores very high on the SAT and yet the GPA hovers around a 3.0 – 3.3. What does that say to a college admissions officer? Without knowing the full story, the first assumption is that the student is probably bright but has no work ethic to get the grades, and if that is the case, what is the probability this student is going to survive the challenge of college when there are no parents living with him to remind him on the daily to study?

According to Professor Angela Lee Duckworth at the University of Pennsylvania, “grit,” defined as “the perseverance and passion for very long-term goals,” is the best predictor of high achievement (http://bit.ly/IU9kKh). Her study showed that students with high grit who had lower SAT scores were still able to get high G.P.A.’s. It’s that good ol’ work ethic that wins the day. Talent by itself is not an indicator of grittiness. People with clearly defined goals, perseverance, and the ability to take failure in stride and keep plugging away with determination are the ones who most often succeed.

A friend of mine from high school was not the brightest by good measure, but she had ambition, extreme work ethic, and great organizational skills. She started a car body repair shop that struggled to stay afloat for ten years. She even had to take a waitressing job to help keep the shop open. All of that persistent effort finally paid off and now she owns two very successful shops and constantly travels the world. Why is she successful? It’s not her brains behind diagnosing what is wrong with the cars it’s her grit. How do we grow grit? How can we instill more grit in our students? Unfortunately science doesn’t have a lot of solid answers on this yet. The best idea Duckworth has heard so far is something called “growth mindset,” a concept developed at Stanford by Professor Carol Dweck (http://bit.ly/1hmIUWv). It’s a mindset where you believe that you can improve your ability with effort and you believe that failure is not permanent or a stigma.
It is to be determined among expert researchers whether grit is an inborn quality or whether it can be instilled through good training. My best guess is that it is a combination of the two and that there are ways in which students can try to cultivate more grit. Below are some suggestions to a grittier you.

**Passion and Optimism**

Seek things you love and are fascinated by. Finding the positive in the activities you engage in will help you keep going even in challenging times. Without deep motivation, it’s hard to drive yourself to do the work it takes for success.

**Productivity and Self-Control**

Instant gratification by going to the movies with your friends? Or are you going to put those extra three hours into studying for that SAT test? It takes willpower to choose the delayed gratification of a great score. It’s that old adage that practice makes perfect.

**Self Analysis**

Be willing to push yourself outside of your comfort zones and if things don’t go as well or as expected, study why. Be introspective about your failures and study how not to repeat the same mistakes. Be willing to try again and again. It takes a resilient character willing to look at flaws in oneself. Take responsibility and accountability for your choices and consequences.

**Support**

Find a good support system of family, friends, and mentors who aren’t afraid to tell you the truth, who will encourage you and bolster you in tough times, who believe in you. The people around you, like your parents, also have to show grittiness in holding you accountable, letting you fail, and instilling discipline in you instead of mollycoddling you and accepting your excuses.

**Take Risks and Accept Change**

If you truly want to improve, you have to be willing to take risks, show weakness, accept constructive criticism, and try new ways. You can’t be afraid to fail and you can’t be afraid of change. In the face of adversity, you have to have tenacity, optimism, and flexibility.
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