

NYSAIS Counselor Conference at Mohonk  
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(We added our descriptor download to our collective notes from the ACCIS writing retreat we recommended. Thanks to all for your enthusiastic participation and valuable contribution.)

Academic:

Generous learner  
Fences with ideas  
Intellectually hungry  
Grapples with texts and topics  
Embraces complexity  
Elevates class discussion  
Challenges teachers and peers to think outside the box  
Community service resilient  
Excels across curriculum  
Moves class discussion forward  
Inhabits the life of the mind  
True intellectual  
A scholar  
Love of learning for its own sake

What if they are the middle of class?

Persistent  
Worker bee vs. lover of ideas  
What he lacks in skills, he makes up for in will  
Creative and collaborative  
Willing to ask for help  
Regularly meets with teachers  
Self advocate  
Takes feedback well  
Maintains perspective  
Listens carefully and seeks help  
Strong work ethic  
Open to growth  
Demonstrates growth mindset  
Respected by teachers

Community:

Changemaker  
Impact player  
Pro-social leader

Zippy  
Effervescent  
Energizer bunny  
Charismatic and relatable leader  
Proactive activist  
Genuine passion for social justice  
High EQ  
Selfless leader  
Genuine concern for others  
Good listener  
Go to person for xyz  
Creative problem solver  
Made lasting impact  
Created legacy  
Compelling public speaker  
Reliable  
Extracurricular footprint extends through all four floors of our space  
Mobilzer  
Kid behind the kid who gets credit  
Glue that brings a project together  
Student you want in the dorm  
Kid everyone wants to be their own son or daughter  
Kid I wish I had the guts to be in high school

That kid who is harder to write for:

Late bloomer  
Fashionably late  
Hit stride  
Work in progress  
Didn't peak in high school  
Has yet to exhaust his full potential  
Someone worth investing in  
Singularly focused  
Didn't succumb to getting involved in everything for the sake of college

We also promised to share the information we brainstormed together about gathering information for the letter. Here goes:

Interviews with departments provide a ton of rich information - 2 hour meetings  
When doing it by department, you learn of the trajectory of each student  
Attend school events (try to attend a bit of everything if you can)

Questionnaires for parents and students

Gather comments from teachers who teach juniors

Request a parent letter

At start of senior year, show a redacted letter and ask students to write an opening paragraph for their own letter. Ask this to be taken seriously, must be reflective to be of value

Interviews with student - starting summer after junior year - practice for the real thing, connecting with the student in a new way (I know more about them and they feel like they've told me things in confidence)

Peer interviews or paragraphs or letters

Coach feedback

Chaperones for major trips

Observing activities

Question on Q: Who in your class do you admire and why (confidentially)? Also allows to take the temperature of the class

Download of ideas from deans/advisors

Anecdotes or teacher comments

ACCIS Colloquium

Writing Retreat

July 22-25, 2018

Ann Velenchik, Dean of Academic Affairs, Wellesley College

\*\*\*at the end of the day, your job is to write a letter that conveys nuance and information that cannot be found elsewhere in the application? You can't write a letter that is stronger than the kid b/c the disconnect will be obvious and you can never write a weak letter b/c of who you are as an educator."

Similar kids in the middle; how to distinguish their voice

"Good" kid-why you want them?

Format

Johnny One-Note: How much more can you add? Should you write more?

Bulleting vs. indenting

Fresh look at how to write recs

How to write about a student who struggles?

Discipline cases

How to be an effective storyteller?

How to "sell" the apathetic student?

Getting at the essence

Eliminating bias in the letter

"Show don't tell" phenomenon

You can't write them in and you can't get them in

The letter can provide nuance

When 20% of the class go to Harvard, Yale, etc? Lack of creativity from the ind. School

This process is dessert for students and parents especially from the independent schools

**At Wellesley:**

**Read Testing, Trans, SR, Recs, Common App and essays. They want the student's voice to be last, the student needs to have the last word.**

Add peer letters?

Add anecdotal info from 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. Pine Crest example.

Dean Velenchik: Don't want the student that "meets every day with teacher" = aggressive/intense learning which is not realistic in college.

Draws on writer's specific expertise and experience with the student. Don't rely on someone else's anecdotes.

How does the student think?

Does not knowing where they are applying help you write? Does it decrease the anxiety for the writer?

Add attributes for the institutions that would be great fit but don't name the colleges.

"punches above their weight"

Reiterates that student's part about medical leave or hardship is most powerful for the committee

Start emphasizing half-credit electives that are traditional courses.

Shy is a diagnosis so don't ever say it.

"Raises her hand and participates."

Don't make your letters sound like an encyclopedia b/c that's how everyone starts to sound the same. Too much of everything and not enough of anything very specific.

The rec needs to be the highlight reel where you can show how the student stretches him/herself.

What are the student' assets???

Don't get in the letter with the kid. Stay out of the letter. This is not about you.

Try not to throat clear at the beginning of the letter....jump write in or write it out and then cut before sending the letter to colleges.

The committee is okay with redacting quotes...the footnote police will not come after you.

No hyper-thesaurus

Bullets are for visual opportunities and you must use headings. Upside of bullet is quick access to information but you can't lose nuance. When you are trying to tell a story, bullets are not helpful. Facts, quick info, and stats=use bullets.

The college application process and the data makes it so hard for kids to be a human being. The format does not allow it; it doesn't inspire you in that way. It's a tool...tools=checklist. The letters and essays are the only spaces where you can honor the student has a human being.

Tip: be careful about over medicalizing in recs.

Three basic categories: Physical health issues, mental health, eating disorder

When it comes to health, silence is harmful in the application especially when it's transparent in the transcript.

Don't say something and then with one "and" you take back your previous statement.

Stanford looks like a fancy taco bell. When when you are on campus there is no one...b/c they have negative admit rate.

Be careful when "I" is used too much in your letter...it's not about you.

When emphasizing a student's purity of motive, be sure to not inadvertently throw the others in the school group under the bus.

\*\*\*Focus on growth in letter

Helpful adjectives/descriptors:

**Academic**

Really smart  
Intelligent  
Bright  
Organized  
Curious  
Engaged

**Collaborative**

Creative  
Cerebral  
Intellectual  
Reflective  
Insightful  
Synthesizes ideas  
Challenges ideas

Good listener  
Active participant  
Writes fluently, cogently  
Empathetic  
Invested  
Thoughtful  
Generous  
Patient/Kind  
Diligent  
Passionate  
Forward thinking  
Leads discussions  
Takes initiative  
Extends work beyond assignments  
Finds the nuances  
Deals well with contradictions  
Raises the level of conversation  
Makes use of support resources  
Thinks outside the box  
Questions orthodoxy  
Unafraid to ask questions  
Risk taker  
Works independently  
Self-directed  
High potential  
Growth  
Intellectual maturity  
Understands "grey" vs. black and white  
Finds joy in ideas  
Loves learning  
Upward trajectory  
Bold  
Wrestles with ideas  
Comfortable with ambiguity  
Open to constructive criticism  
Helpful to peers  
Admits to errors  
Goes beyond expectations  
Passionate about particular subject  
Talented in particular subject  
Resilient  
Worker bee versus intellectual creative type  
Seriousness of purpose  
Practical  
Good problem solver  
Ambitious  
Learner outside of the classroom  
Brings classroom learning outside

### **Extracurriculars/Cocurriculars**

Leadership  
Teamwork  
Resilience  
Focus  
Determination  
Time management  
Impact in the activity/role  
Mentoring  
Creativity  
Service  
Compassion  
Dedication  
Passion  
Initiative  
Willingness to try new things  
Patience  
Coachability  
Perseverance  
Fun  
Commitment  
Relationship building  
Role model  
Humility  
Magnetism  
Mental toughness  
Competitiveness  
Gritty  
Talented  
Moral compass  
Judgment  
Independence  
Zippy  
Socially aware/connected  
Community builder  
Savvy about the world around her  
Activist  
Advocate  
Engaged  
Entrepreneurial

### **Character/personality/work habits**

Risk Taker  
Funny  
Witty

Clever  
Engaging  
Charming  
Genuine  
Authentic  
Conscientious  
Grounded  
Mature  
Humble  
Inclusive  
Friendly  
Compassionate  
Contemplative  
Confident  
Gracious  
Grateful  
Emotive  
Sensitive  
Puts others first  
Unselfish  
Generous  
Thoughtful  
Patient  
Mindful  
Approachable  
Easy going  
Intense  
Empathetic  
Loyal  
Kind  
Trustworthy  
Responsible  
Integrity  
Positive  
Bridge builder

Resourceful  
Upbeat  
Makes people around them better  
Brings out the best in others  
Supportive  
Encouraging  
Good friend  
Energetic  
Enthusiastic  
Exuberant  
Sensitive  
Strong willed  
Strong minded  
Determined  
Not a joiner  
Late bloomer  
All in  
Nonconformist  
Different drummer  
Cautious  
Emboldened  
Brave  
Intrepid  
Courageous  
Adventuresome  
Stalwart  
Confident  
Assertive  
Takes Initiative  
Takes control  
Respectful of others  
Leads from behind  
Collaborative/collegial

\*\*\*problem at women's college...women are just as competitive as men but there's cognitive dissonance in that you can't show it around boys. Be nice and be quietly competitive. Cause of so much anxiety amongst women? Show your desire to win or be the best.

Outline:

Overview

Observations regarding academic growth

Observations on Mary's leadership and areas of impact:

If you use bullet points, separate by categories.