

# Episode 11 - Advice for the Class of 2021

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## SPEAKERS

Moira McCullough, Deena Maerowitz

**M** Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. I'm your host, Moira McCullough. And today we are talking with Deena Maerowitz, who will share her insights and advice for students and parents of the class of 2021.

**D** Deena Maerowitz 00:12

I also tell clients because everybody gets really worried. I mean, they feel like oh, this process is so competitive. I'm never going to get in. You know what all you can control is you creating the strongest applications you can the strongest profile. So what goes on around you, and that's especially relevant right now. You need to sort of push away and focus on who you are, what you know about yourself what you know about what you want in a college and work on that.

**M** Moira McCullough 00:49

This is the College Scoops podcast and I'm your host Moira McCullough, we focus on everything college related from the admissions process to where to eat, stay and explore on and around campus. Guests include founders, educators, authors and experts in the college space. Join us as these experts share their knowledge, experiences and lessons

learned to help you have stress free, informative, and tasty college journeys. Whether it's your first or last child going to college, or you're just interested in going to a college town for a game or mail, we've got you covered. If you haven't already, please subscribe to the College Scoops podcast to get the inside scoop on everything college related and leave us a review. Thanks to all of our sponsors, partners and the entire college scoops Ambassador team for helping us bring valuable content to our community. If you would like to support College Scoops as a sponsor, please head over to [patreon@patreon.com/collegescoops](mailto:patreon@patreon.com/collegescoops) and sign up as a sustaining listener, insider or Deluxe sponsor. We have exclusive benefits for our members free ebooks and even a College Scoops care package. Deena had a multifaceted career including experience in graduate admissions and working in the public policy arena around education as an educational consultant with The Bertram Group. Deena advises students throughout the entire college admissions process planning both undergraduate and graduate education's her clients have been admitted to Ivy League and top tier colleges throughout the United States. Deena graduated magna cum laude from Mount Holyoke College and received her law degree and master's degree in social work from the University of Connecticut. She has served as a counsel in the United States Congress, where she focused on education issues, and in the private sector for National Public Interest organizations, such as the Children's Defense Fund. Prior to becoming an educational consultant. Deena was Associate Director of Admissions at Columbia University Business School, where she reviewed hundreds of applications and gained keen insights into what makes a candidate stand out. Welcome, Deena, thank you so much for joining us today.



Deena Maerowitz 02:59

Thank you, so Much more for having me. I'm very excited.



Moira McCullough 03:02

Well, I'm thrilled because you and I met through your colleague Holly, Holly had a son who went to the Island School and all three of my kids went to the Island School first semester, and their head of admissions, introduced Holly and I, and said, I think that you guys would get along, and you're in this similar area with the college space. And then Holly was kind enough to introduce me to you and it seems like we were long lost friends, and I'm very glad to meet you, too. So Deena, can you just give us some information on who you are and what you do?



Deena Maerowitz 03:35

Yes, I would love to. So I am an independent college admissions consultant, and I'm a partner in The Bertram Group, which is an educational consulting firm based in Westport, Connecticut. My partners work on all aspects of the admissions process from day school to boarding school. I do college and graduate school and my other partners do therapeutic placements. I am a lawyer and still a worker by training. And I always wanted to work on the policy end of things. And I did. I worked at the Children's Defense Fund in Washington DC as the deputy director of educational policy there. And I worked on the hill. While I was in DC, I started to work with high school students on the side who were would visit me in my offices, and wanted to figure out how they could do what I was doing. And so I started to work with them on Fridays, meet with students during my lunch. And I realized that I loved that part of my week, much more than the rest of my policy work. It just took too long for me policy work educational quality, and this was really satisfying. So I left DC and became an Associate Director of Admissions at Columbia Business School, and I stayed there until I had my daughter, who's now 15 and thinking about the college admissions process herself. So and I've been doing this too Ever since. So that's about 15 years.

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Moira McCullough 05:03

I have a rising senior in high school. So this is very personal to me also to say, you know, can you give the class of 2021? Some advice? It's been a crazy spring and a lot has gone on? And how do parents and students stay sane in this whole college admissions journey that we're going through? And I know you'll have some words of wisdom for us, given the recent changes, what to focus on? And what to really work on with your students?

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Deena Maerowitz 05:35

Yes, I'm so glad to be talking with you about this. Because if I can do anything for my clients, try to reduce the stress and anxiety around this process. And really, right now, what's been happening in our country in our world in the past, since January really is something we've gone through together. So we're all arranged A lot of upheaval and change and through COVID and the political unrest that we're feeling right now, this experience is impacting everybody. It's impacting families. And it's really impacting colleges, and it's impacting college admissions offices. The most important thing I would say is that no student going through this is going through this alone. Everybody is up in the air about how things are going to look in the fall, what the process is going to look like, how it's changing. My job has been to keep up on the changes as much as I can, and they're things are changing daily, and to really give the families that I work with a sense of how to cope with the changes and how to stay calm with the changes. You know, college

admissions officers are made up of people with families, and so they know that their families have experienced this and they're going to know that the families of the applicants that are coming in that are applying this year are also going through the same sort of turmoil.

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Moira McCullough 07:00

I think that kind of sets the stage right then and right there, as you described it imparting on students and parents that you're not alone in this. Yes, is kind of feeling that stress that angst and business and life as we know it has changed, and how are we coming together to cope and move forward?

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Deena Maerowitz 07:20

So the advice I'm giving families has really been impacted as changes, much of it is, is the same. And that is really focusing now as a student as a rising senior on what is most important to you in terms of your academic interest in the areas of interest. How are you exploring new things that maybe you couldn't explore before seeing this in any way as an opportunity? And we know that on the common application in the fall, there is going to be a question about or anything that you'd like to tell us about this time, bring COVID and so I think it provides in some sense an opportunity to look a little bit deeper and that's Always what I want my clients to do is just sort of look into themselves and find out what matters to them most. And then you're at a very strong way to convey that to the college's.

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Moira McCullough 08:09

Well, that's something even to when you say self reflection and look at what matters to you most because especially given the scenario I've heard some students and families talk about well, I thought I wanted to move across the country. Even something as simple as location may have been something that you were set on a student or family knew exactly a student knew I wanted a plane right away families now students saying I don't want that anymore. That is something that they've learned that it's valuable to help them going forward.

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Deena Maerowitz 08:40

Oh, yes, absolutely. I mean, I always say that during the college admissions process, you want to explore the things that are most interest and if those interests change, then that is

just as valuable to you as a person and to you as an applicant. Then it is if you stick with something right, sticking with something that you don't like doesn't work for you isn't going to work for you in the college admissions process, you can really learn about yourself from figuring out what you like and what you don't like. So if your priorities have shifted, that's a great thing to know about yourself. And you're going to bring that insight to the college admissions process. And that will be appreciated in the college admissions process.

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Moira McCullough 09:22

When students are going through it, I think sometimes you're in school, everything's kind of laid out for you. And you have, you know, set curriculum that you're working on, you have set activities that you're working on, and kind of with the changes that have come up frustrating or challenging, but as you said, it's an opportunity and how do you take hold of that and make it work? And my other comment, when I think about the uncertainty is focus on what you can control, right? Not what you can't because that's wasted energy and that does no good because you can't control that. So what is it in the college process now that you have control over and how can you make it work set You will find the right place.

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Deena Maerowitz 10:02

Absolutely. Well, even by this point in high school, right, as a rising senior, you have completed your freshman year, your sophomore year and your junior year. And obviously this past junior year for rising seniors has been way different than juniors have experienced before. And there were already some aspects of your junior year that were completely out of your control. People had to take their classes at home, they had to live with their families if they were away in boarding school man to go back and live at home. Many students who are taking classes and they're no longer receiving grades. So there's already been a lot of this process that's been out of everyone's control. And there's a lot of anxiety as a result. And so yes, you want to focus on what you can do, right? So what you can do is to try to figure out what are you doing this summer that's valuable to you that's interesting to you. Have you learned something else about yourself during this time with your family that you didn't know before? Do you have a particular role in your family that you didn't understand or that you didn't develop as much? How are you using this time to do any sort of online community service or an online interest that you have? If you know art is your thing? Are you exploring through the Museum of Modern Art or through the many free college courses online? If sports is your thing, how are you changing your focus? And not really in terms of the subject matter, but how are you shifting? So that's one thing to really consider. The other thing is that students aren't able to visit colleges in the same

way. So how are you shifting that how are you learning about what is most important to you in terms of your criteria, your priorities that what you want to college and how are you doing that research, and then also really knowing that there are limitations in terms of the testing this year, we know that he found out yesterday that the sap is not going to be offered online for students this fall. For this summer testing, maybe a limitation for many students, if you have the opportunity to test if you have that, if that can be in your control, then you absolutely should prepare for those tests and still take those tests. But again, the colleges are also responding to this right. Columbia today just said they were test optional Catholic University just came out this morning and said, We are actually test blind. So there are lots of changes, focus on what you can focus on. If you can take the test, take the test. If you can focus your interest in terms of subject matter online or doing something remotely then do that and start working on your common application, you know, start to do what you can.

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Moira McCullough 12:42

Okay, so we covered a lot there. So testing big point because I know that's an angst of many families. So there are options with test optional testing but what would you recommend to your families and students and anyone going forward is if you can take it, take it if you have the opportunity to still prep for the ACT or SAT and take the ACT or SAT

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Deena Maerowitz 13:06

and do well on them. It can be an extra data point for you in the college application process. Another way to show a strength in particular subject areas if it's the subject test or in the ACT or SAT if you're taking the main test, so I would say yes, you shouldn't see this as Okay, I don't need the testing. If you don't have the opportunity to take the test, no, and be reassured that the colleges are going to completely get that. But if you can take the test and do well on the test that can be to your advantage.

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Moira McCullough 13:35

Okay. I think that's really important because as you said, you could look at it and say, Wow, I don't have to take it, but you don't want that to prohibit you in your college list. And then you talked about taking the time to focus in on areas that you really enjoy, and learn more about whether it's online learning, or a hobby or something around that you never had the time. Because you were over, programmed at school running from a Right, right, a club and going to arts and then jumping on for the softball team. So now you have

some time that you could actually do something that you would like that you never had the time for before. So that's another great point. And I think the whole when you talked about like looking at the common app and spending time now doing the work before going back to school, which we know will be challenging because of the uncertainty there. So taking some time now to really delve into that common app.

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Deena Maerowitz 14:32

Yes, to work on filling out the data information to work on the activity section on the common app, which is often a bear for students because that is a part of the application that's really important to the colleges because it really shows them how you will possibly be engaged in their community because your listing in priority order, the things that were most important to you throughout high school so it gives them a sense of things that you might be involved with on their college campus. In their community, and you know, colleges are always asking the question, hey, what's in it for us? What's in it for us if we accept you. So that activity section just like for colleges that look at your resume, that's an important part. And so to really work on the activity section is important to think about your priorities, what's been most important to you. And also to know that the spacing limitations on that particular section of application are really, really rigid. I think it's 150 spaces, and it's character spaces, not words, for one section of your entry. And then, so for your role, and for the title, it's very limited character spacing. And so to really focus on how to fit in what's most important to you, about your role and about the activity within those limitations,

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Moira McCullough 15:46

which I think sometimes one might think about and think oh, I'm just gonna do it's like shopping list. I'm just gonna write down everything and title. I don't really have to give much thought to that but you're throwing in a whole nother aspect. To say, be very mindful and thoughtful as to what you've done and how that could translate to what I could do for the college going forward in terms of your level of engagement and being part of the community.

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Deena Maerowitz 16:12

Yes, I always tell my clients that in college admissions, we work very hard on crafting our essay prompts. And we worked very hard to make sure that we're asking for specific information. So you have this opportunity to really answer our questions. It's really frustrating for us in admissions, and when students aren't answering what we've asked. So

if you see an essay prompt, that says, tell us about your favorite summer activity, we want to know about your favorite summer activity. We don't want to hear about a list of all the summer activities you've done. We want to know what was most important to you in terms of your summer activity. And the same goes for every area of the common application. I mean, I can tell you from my own experience in admissions At Columbia Business School, we looked at what these responses were, essays were a really, really important part of our admissions process for a reason. And we worked really hard to craft the essay prompts and we looked very closely at how students responded to them. So take this time and think about the common application essay prompts, which we know what they are already. We've known since March or April, that they're going to be the same with the additional question that's coming up this year about COVID. So start to work on those and really look at the prompts and answer those prompts.

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Moira McCullough 17:34

I like that because I know we mentioned it in our introduction earlier. Again, you're speaking to as a former admissions representative,

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Deena Maerowitz 17:44

you know, right. I left my policy work in Washington DC, because I had been working on the side with students who'd come from Southeast DC and from Anacostia and really wanted to know how to do what I did, which was I was working in educational policy. And then I was working on the hill, I found out that I really loved working with students in a direct way, as opposed to the educational policy, which took a long time. So I was Associate Director of Admissions at Columbia Business School and in the business school admissions process essays are a huge part of what we look at. And that's really prepared me for my work with college students because we work so hard on the essays.

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Moira McCullough 18:26

And that's something that students need to hear. And it's good to hear because there is a reason for it. And as much as the thought went into preparing those questions, the same thought on the other side with students filling those stories out and completing their stories. It's really important. So thank you so much for that. And that's the other connection. We have. Columbia Business School,

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Deena Maerowitz 18:51

We have too many connections. It's incredible.

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Moira McCullough 18:54

So when you're talking with then your families and trying to guide them through that Those are kind of the steps that you would take them through in terms of a we're all in this together. Things are changing daily. We change and adapt,

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Deena Maerowitz 19:11

exactly. Adapt, look inward, focus inward on who you are. And on researching why you're a good fit for the college, what does a college offer? What What is it about the college that really grabs you? What's in it for them? And why do you want to be a part of that community, both academically and in terms of the broader campus community? So focusing on your own engagement? I also tell clients because everybody gets really worried. I mean, they feel like oh, this process is so competitive. I'm never going to get in. You know what all you can control is you creating the strongest applications you can the strongest profile. So what goes on around you, and that's especially relevant right now. You need to sort of push away and focus on who you are what you know. about yourself what you know about what you want in a college and work on that. And then also just know, right? You're not alone in this. every college understands what you've been through because every college admissions office is made up of people, people with families who are also dealing with the same issues. Understand that it's a universal experience right now, even though we're all experiencing so much stress and anxiety. I think another thing that we are all noticing is that there is an understanding among all of us that we're all in it together. Some people obviously, this is much more difficult than others. But everybody understands that there's stress in the world right now. And there's stress in our country, and there's stress on college campuses, and there's stress in homes.

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Moira McCullough 20:47

That again, goes back to creating a sense of even playing field in terms of like, everyone's in it, how can we work together and I think when you talk about finding the right fit to and making Ensure that there's a fit on paper, but there's a fit. Also, is this the community that you want to be a part of? Are these students that you want to be best friends with and that you'll grow up going to each other's weddings,

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Deena Maerowitz 21:11

right? Are these your people? You know, I always say when students are looking around college campuses, look at the layout of the campus, look at what the dorms look like, Listen to the college tours and info sessions, see what it's like off campus and look, hey to these feel like my people, these feel like the people I want to get to know during my college experience.

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Moira McCullough 21:30

And given the situation that we're in right now, if you had families that didn't go on that many college visits beforehand, yeah. What are some of the tools or resources that you would say and here's what you need to do to get a better feel for Columbia. You can't go there right now.

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Deena Maerowitz 21:47

Well, again, the colleges have been pretty amazing about responding and they have created online tours and info sessions for students and not only are these really valuable for students, because you You can sort of get a video tour, and very often have zoom Question and Answer experiences with admissions officers. But you can also sort of make a connection with somebody in the school, right you are getting on their radar. At the same time, you're finding more out about the school. So I would say online info sessions and tours, reaching out to the reps that represent your school from the colleges is also another really important thing that you can do since you can go visit in person, reach out to the rep, there are great guides, your guides through college scoops are amazing. And they're really important ways to be reading and exploring these colleges online. I love the Fiske guide to the colleges. That's one of my favorite guides that I recommend to all my client families. And then there are resources like College Scoops.

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Moira McCullough 22:49

and you mentioned about reaching out to the area representatives and I think in the past that has always been more of like a follow up to if they visit your school, you know right up to them. Thank you. But as you pointed out, I think that they are, as you said, accommodating and they know times have changed. Don't worry about advocating for yourself reach out and say, I'd like to learn more about the business school.

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Deena Maerowitz 23:13

Absolutely, because everything has shifted for them. So, you know, I've been advising my

clients to say, Hey, I just wanted to introduce myself. This is the high school I go to, I know things have really changed in your admissions office and possibly in your process this year, but I'd really like to be connected with you and stay in the loop on any changes. And I really think that admissions reps are going to be very receptive to that. I definitely I've been encouraging my clients to do that.

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Moira McCullough 23:40

Well, I think that's so important because in the past, again, it's been a more of a response of not necessarily a proactive, they've been reacting be proactive, take control of it. You have every right to ask these questions and I kind of always say the college visit in my experience with my kids have been this is happening. For that you actually have control over, you get to go pick who you want to visit, where you want to visit who you want to see. So take control of that. Whereas other aspects, obviously, of the college admissions process is more structured, this is what you need to do. It's very well defined.

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Deena Maerowitz 24:16

I'm a lawyer, and I also have my Master's in social work. And this was not a career that I thought that I would end up in, but it actually turns out to marry my training really well, because I'm always really gonna encourage my clients to advocate for themselves, right to know places where they can be proactive in the college admissions process. And, you know, on my end, sort of to really try to mitigate the stress and anxiety around this process. And I think the way that you do that is by being as proactive as you can, knowing that you've crossed every t that you've dotted, every I mean, there is a certain amount of this process as we all know, that's out of your control right after your application is submitted after you've been interviewed, after you've done everything you can, then it is up to an admissions committee. But to know that you've been as proactive that you've reached out that you've presented who you are in the best way that you've done your research. And you know, this college is a really great fit for you. And you've conveyed that that can remove a lot of anxiety and stress around this process.

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Moira McCullough 25:21

Exactly. So in terms of going forward with the students, again, looking at the summer as an opportunity for the common app wrap up to those particular colleges, following them on social media, trying to connect look at the panels, as you mentioned, you mentioned that they have student panels and they're being really creative and in trying to come up with new ways to continuously communicate who they are their community and introduce

their members of the community to prospective families.

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Deena Maerowitz 25:52

And because right now you're not getting the chance to really see your people on campus, any outreach that you can do with current students, and honestly to collect that information for my clients and, you know, you have student ambassadors to really talk to students about what the student experience is like because of course, admissions officers are trained, but it also is nice to talk to students and really be able to ask very specific questions that matter to you. What are students doing here? Are you part of a fraternity or sorority? And if you're not, what do you do on weekends? How many students are off campus during the weekend? What don't you like about your college and really asking honest questions can help you to find out whether that place is a good fit for you.

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Moira McCullough 26:32

It's night and day. I mean, I learned so much about that we had a great experience that I really love to share in terms of my daughter when we were walking on one particular campus. Somebody had said to us piece of advice, ask directions and attractions and they're like, that's not the point. The point is to ask a student for help and directions and just listen to them. Watch them, hear what they had. We did that on one particular campus. My daughter did and sure enough, she went off with these two women who basically said, Oh my gosh, we're going to take you there. And it ended up being this whole conversation, dialogue and experience for her that she realized that oh my gosh, this is a school that I could actually, it moved up the list. And now really, I think I really liked that school. And sometimes you can't articulate it. But that's the point. There's a vibe, there's a connection, and you feel it in your gut. And at the end of the day, you'll have all the data that you want all the resources that you want.

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Deena Maerowitz 27:31

Yes, exactly. And, you know, I think that as you do the online info sessions and tours, and I say this, even when I'm getting my clients in terms of their on campus tours and info sessions, and this is, again, one of the reasons why I feel like your service is so valuable, because in admissions, the campus tours and the info sessions are pretty carefully curated, and they're probably going to be even more so online. So to ask the questions beyond just what those tours are. info sessions are is really important to actually connect with the students. how friendly are people? Are people smiling on campus? Right? When you stop and ask someone for directions? Are they going out of their way to help? Or are

they like, I don't know, I'm only here during the week, I'm not even here on the weekend. So I wouldn't know where that building is, or I wouldn't know about that organization. I mean, you really want to find out from students who are going to be very honest in a way that you might not be able to see the depth in other ways. You know, and especially when you're trying to determine if these are the people that you want to spend the next four years with in your community.

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Moira McCullough 28:36

This is going back in time now, but I'll never forget, I was stuck between two colleges. And I was a swimmer, and I was invited to stay over with the swim team at this one particular college. So I got on that bus. My parents put me on that bus. I arrived on that campus. The some team members that were hosting me came to meet me and they were supposed to be together. bonding thing that night. And the next thing is I realized that half the team is transferring. I don't like the school. And here's why. And they gave me a list of reasons why they didn't like it. I'll never forget, I called my parents I said, Get me out of here, get me on the next bus. And they said, Absolutely not stay there and try to learn more, meet more people, make sure if there is a fit. And there were two women across the hall who ended up scooping me up and taking care of me for the rest of that weekend. And it was the most valuable lesson that I experienced. And if I hadn't taken the chance and went to visit that school and talked with those people, I may have made a choice to go to a swim team and be at a school where half the swim team wasn't even there. So I think that's the other thing is getting outside of your comfort zone. And it's uncomfortable. But those students I always tell my kids, those students were in your shoes a year, two year three years ago, they want to help you.

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Deena Maerowitz 29:57

Right? I mean, really, you need to explore that. You know, that's Absolutely something to look out and, and I do it as a college admissions consultant, I look around on campus and I try to gauge to people look happy here, the students look like they're just walking with their heads down or they like making eye contact and smiling and stopping and talking to other people. I look at students are sitting in the eating halls in our men and women sitting together or is it like people are sitting by themselves, you know, when I look at the diversity and how people are engaging, so all of these things are really important to ask about.

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Moira McCullough 30:32

And if you can't look at them on a campus visit, capturing that information. I always say to my kids, you know, you may hate this, but keep that journal and write down the first three things that come to mind. It doesn't matter that they're pros or cons. The fact that you're writing something down that resonates with you that stands out about that college good and bad, will be of use 10 months down the line.

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Deena Maerowitz 30:55

I send my clients out with a checklist when I say I want this checklist back from you. After your college visit right now I'm saying I want because they're not doing actual visits in person. I say I want just a list of pros and cons. Just give me three pros and cons. If you can come up with a con, just give me the pros, that's assigned to me too. And sometimes clients are worried like, well, I feel really bad saying this about that are unlike No, you know what this is about finding the best fit for you. So you don't have to worry, you're not going to sound negative. This is about what works for you and what doesn't work for you and find out what doesn't work for you can be just as important. So don't be afraid to be really honest about the things that you don't like, right because there are thousands and thousands of colleges in this country 4000 colleges and so there's a place for you out there. And it's my job to help find a list of colleges for you that every single college on your list ultimately for my clients where they work for me is a place that they're going to want to go to and they're going to be able to thrive. So let's find that and it doesn't mean that you're a negative person or You're being pessimistic if you find things that you don't like, it means you're exploring,

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Moira McCullough 32:04

that shows that you're really doing the due diligence and making sure and doing the self reflection and think, yeah, I like that school. But the con is that the sports teams, there's on a big sports team. They're on the weekend. Right? Right. Right.

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Deena Maerowitz 32:16

So the academics are great, but I didn't feel like the social life was what I wanted. Okay, well, you know what, let's find a college for you where both of those things work, because I can guarantee you that those colleges exist. Exactly, and especially given what's going on now community means more than that we ever did because of the loss of it. So definitely, you know, it goes beyond just what you're going to study. Think about what campus life looks like, think about the engagement of students. One of the things that I asked my clients to consider is, do you want a work life balance? Sometimes the clients that I work

with had incredibly difficult, rigorous high school experiences and they are going on to Super rigorous, highly public Competitive colleges. But sometimes I see clients who really just like, I need a little bit of a break. And that's understandable too, right? I mean, I think it's really important to also look at having a balanced life, right, to be hardworking, but then also know that there's a community out there for you to engage with and that you're going to enjoy being involved with on campus.

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Moira McCullough 33:26

Well, and I always say, you know, four years a, it's a lot of money. And it goes by fast. What do you want out of that? You have to answer and I think it's important to if you were saying to new families, or to somebody who's just starting the process to, I find that to there's things that I would recommend a parents to say, and then also to students, I mean, my third one, you would think it would be so much easier. Every kid is different. And I said to him, pick where you want to go on your first college visits, and he said, Where do you want me to go? And I said, That's not my choice.

D

Deena Maerowitz 34:02

Many families since you had your first child, this may be the biggest change in your license your child was born. Right. And when you while you were pregnant, or before you adopted your child, you went through a lot of you thought about things about you thought about what their life was going to look like you thought about how you were going to take care of them. You thought about the support that you might need. And so for the college admissions process, be good to yourself, but also really be exploring all of this. Try to be easy on yourself, right? This is a really important step and it's okay to ask a lot of questions and it's okay to switch gears and trust your gut.

M

Moira McCullough 34:44

If that's something that sounds so simple, yet, it's something that I think you constantly have to reinforce and mentioned time and time again, because it's easy as you said, there are very few rites of passage left at college admissions. We are fortunate to have This opportunity. And it's one that should not be taken lightly because everyone is working families are working together very hard students worked hard throughout the high school, but parents have their support. And as I said to my son, we're a team and what can I do to make the process easier and less stress free? Because at the end of the day, I don't want the last two years of high school to be a memory of fighting stressed out times. I want to enjoy the moment. And how do we do that?

D

Deena Maerowitz 35:28

Absolutely. I also think it's really, really important to remind students and their families that ultimately you're looking for a college that really fits you who you are as someone who's interested in academic areas and who you are outside of that. But what really matters much more than the name of the college that you go to is how you engage once you're there. What are you doing Once you're at that college? engagement in college is so much more important? Then the particular name of where a student ends up picking a college feels like this enormous monumental decision and get it. But this one choice about what college you attend. It's not going to make or break your chance for future success you're doing as good job as you can in finding the right environment for you. But really, what's gonna matter in terms of your life is how you use that opportunity once you're on campus.

M

Moira McCullough 36:26

Okay, so there was a great presentation at our school several years ago, and thank goodness it came in for when my son My oldest was going through it. I love Frank Bruni. I followed as a New York Times Op Ed, he was the restaurant critic for me. Yes, right. Right. foodie. I'm a Frank Bruni fan. And he came to our school to talk about his book, which I loved where you go is not who you'll be and I loved it because it made me reflect. I walked out of there and I thought I cannot be a bumper sticker. mom came on And I said to my kids, I'm not going for the bumper sticker. Where do you want to go that you'll be happy. And there's a place for everyone. And it may not be the one that everyone is wearing the sweatshirt, if that's the place that you will thrive and you will be happy, then let's go for it. So that's a great book that I always share and recommend to people because I think it's humbling for parents to read that, because we come in our mind and I thought, Oh, these five schools, I think you would love these schools. And my son's looking at me thinking,

D

Deena Maerowitz 37:32

I really love the challenge Success Program at Stanford, which really does focus so much. And there's a lot of research and evidence that really talks about what is important for students in terms of success is really how they use the opportunity on campus and finding a good fit. She also really emphasizes sort of ways to reduce anxiety and stress around this process, even the way that we talk about that. The college admissions process, I have a daughter who's a rising sophomore. And even though I try to not make her stressed at all about this process, she'll overhear me talking about these issues. And she worries about it. And it's really the last thing I want for clients to do is to worry, I want them to explore. I want them to do work that shows they're reaching out that they're being proactive that

they're taking initiative, but to know that this is just one step in their path. And there are many, many, many other steps that they're going to take as adults that are going to be very important to them. And this is just one, right and it's okay, they're going to be fine.

M

Moira McCullough 38:39

And if you had to impart that same one or two tips of wisdom to a parent,

D

Deena Maerowitz 38:46

a few things well, reminding teenagers that where they go matters less than what they do when they get there. And really as your parenting, invest in those things that really help your son or daughter to be independent. Do they know how to cook meals, do they do their own laundry? If they have a learning disability? Do they know how to talk about it? How do they ask for help? If they're struggling? If they need emotional support? Do they know how to reach out for that? Who do they reach out to to have a plan in place for those things are really important, right? I mean, this is about your son or daughter's first steps for independence for many families. And so, you know, one way that you can really help your son or daughter is to help them learn to be independent.

M

Moira McCullough 39:25

It comes into play, especially given everything that's going on. I mean, I remember my daughter calling me from school in her first couple weeks and said, What do you think? And I said, I'm not the right person to ask. Yeah. advocate for yourself, you have a network there, that is better equipped, and that will be there for you. And you need to establish that relationship early on.

D

Deena Maerowitz 39:47

Yes, you know, I mean, for clients, and I work with clients that have mental health issues, and I always say, let's make sure that we've got a plan in place for you, you know, before you get on campus, so during the summer, we're going to find out where is it The counseling office, where is the Office of disabilities on campus? Who are your contact people? Do you have outside people resources that you can reach to? If you're triggered by something? How are you going to handle it? Right? Being proactive, taking charge of your own sort of independence? That's the most important thing that you can do as a student on campus, right? If you're struggling in a class, how are you going to handle that we're going to go to not hiding from that, but really being proactive and taking charge

and asking for help when you need it. And so encouraging your students to do that. super valuable.

M

Moira McCullough 40:32

Yes. And it was interesting. We just had two students, seniors who just graduated from the high school that my kids have gone to on our podcast and we said, if you had one bit of advice, what would you give to parents? And they said, Listen, and I loved it. Because I think it's so hard not to it's Yeah, part to want to jump in and help them and sometimes that help them support and I'm at fault for that folder. We all are as parents,

D

Deena Maerowitz 41:01

it's the one job where you become less and less important as time goes on in terms of like when when they're little, we do everything for them. And then you're so used to that, and then they become teenagers, and it's their job to do things for themselves. And you've got to let that happen. Because that's how people become independent. That's how teenagers become adults.

M

Moira McCullough 41:22

And that's, that was our job. Our job was to do that, and we've done it and now let them have that confidence so that when they do move away if it is the first time that they have the confidence to continue to do what you've taught them to.

D

Deena Maerowitz 41:36

Yes, and you know what, it feels uncomfortable. It's really feels uncomfortable, but that's okay. I think parenting teenagers, for me working with teenagers, getting comfortable with being uncomfortable, is something that I think about all the time, because you may not get the response you want when you say something, but it's okay to say something it's okay to say. I really want you To explore that yourself, Well, how do you think you can handle that problem, even though it makes me really uncomfortable for you as a parent to not jump in and solve that problem? It's a super valuable lesson for your kid to figure out how to do that themselves. And of course, to know that you're always there, but to know that they can handle life's problems is the most valuable gift that you can give your kids.

**M** Moira McCullough 42:21  
Okay, so you do know I'm going to take that section, I'm going to record it so that

**D** Deena Maerowitz 42:28  
you can play it back to me because, you know, I can talk the talk, but I'm a parent too. And I screw up all the time, just like every other parent.

**M** Moira McCullough 42:35  
That's it. That's what we're in this together. That's what we said. Yeah. What do you wish you knew before you attended college?

**D** Deena Maerowitz 42:42  
Oh, I think about this all the time. And I think part of the reason why I do this work is that period of my life was really so important to me, but I have some regrets. What I really wish that I done was to worry less about my grades in college to worry less About how smart other people thought I was, and to really, really explore coursework and things that I didn't know about and areas of learning topics that I didn't explore as much. And I really wish that I'd let myself have that opportunity. I went to Mount Holyoke College, which was part of the five college consortium and I had the opportunity to take classes at all the other colleges and I did take classes at Hampshire and UMass and Smith. But I was always intimidated about taking classes at Amherst College. And I wish now that I hadn't been intimidated about that. So I wish that I'd let myself explore and take more risks.

**M** Moira McCullough 43:38  
I'm going to collect all those questions because everyone comes up with such a great answer. And it's silly. Oh my gosh, because they're all so real. And they're all valid. They're all things that all of a sudden I had one answer, and then I listened to what you just said. And I thought, Oh my gosh, that's exactly another regret of mine. Everyone has regrets. And if I could do it over again, what would I do? It's the lessons learned. Is there a favorite dessert on a college campus that you would recommend.

**D** Deena Maerowitz 44:10  
When I go to visit colleges in New York City, I always used to go to kitchenette, which was

kitchenette, uptown, which was which close last summer. I'm a huge fan of like homemade old school desserts. So I used to love their cakes and pies, and I would always go there. So now they are close. So what I do is I go to Magnolia, which is now in several places around the city. And I hit them up for their banana pudding. And not only do I eat it there, but I also always take some home for my family. Campus desserts are always a big part of my campus visits.

**M** Moira McCullough 44:51

I'm surprised you and I have not run into each other. Deena, thank you so much for joining us today.

**D** Deena Maerowitz 44:56

Oh, this was so fun. Moira, thank you so much.

**M** Moira McCullough 45:04

Thank you to Deena for joining us today to all the students and parents of the class of 2021. And I am one of them. We hope today's conversation shed some light onto what to focus on going forward. Mainly what you can control. There's so much out of our control. Yet there are so many aspects of the college journey that you as a student, or parent have direct control over. As you start your summer take some time to reflect on the last couple of months, and how you will incorporate that into your story. Being proactive is essential, and learning what resources are available and most useful, helps to levy unnecessary stress. Remember, parents we have worked very hard up into this point to raise independent, resilient and hard working kids to better prepare them not only for college, but for life. They are ready. You can find all of our show notes and links to the helpful resources mentioned throughout our conversation on our website.

[Collegescoops.com/podcast](https://Collegescoops.com/podcast). You can learn more about Deena and The Bertram Group on their website at [The Bertram Group](https://TheBertramGroup.com) and also on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Please take a couple of minutes to rate review and subscribe to College Scoops. Thank you for listening to our College Scoops podcast. Our entire College Scoops team strives to make the college journey a little bit easier, less stressful, fun and tasty by sharing all the inside scoops we have curated along the way. We would love to hear from you about topics to cover and your ideas and everything college related. Reach out to us at [Collegescoops.com](https://Collegescoops.com) or follow us on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.