

Episode 23 - Sydney Montgomery

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SPEAKERS

Moira McCullough, Sydney Montgomery

M Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. I'm your host, Moira McCullough and today we are talking with Sidney Montgomery about some of the challenges and struggles, first generation college students encounter.

S Sydney Montgomery 00:12

Your story is impactful and it's powerful. Don't ever be ashamed of where you're from, or who you are or what you have to do to support your family or what you have or haven't had, because their stories like has shaped your personality and it shaped your character and it's why you're going to succeed.

M Moira McCullough 00:37

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 run campuses. Our 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 and formative 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 meal, we've got you covered. If you haven't already, please subscribe to the College Scoops podcast to get the inside scoops and 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 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. Sydney Montgomery, owner and founder of S. Montgomery Admissions Consulting has over a decade of experience working with and inspiring teenagers from all walks of life in addition to her seven years working with and managing others. A nationwide educational consulting company her experience has also included being a private performing arts teacher, academic tutor and mentor, a graduate of Princeton University, Harvard Law School and the University of California Irvine division of Continuing Education. Sydney has guided high school students through the college admissions process since 2012, and has helped students navigate the law school admissions process since 2015, the daughter of an immigrant mother and a military father, Sydney knows firsthand how daunting the college admissions process can be for first generation college and law school students and aims to push students to be inspired, empowered and achieve their full potential. Sydney is an associate member of the IECA serving on both the graduate school committee and ethics committee, as well as a member of the Potomac and Chesapeake Association for college admissions, counseling. Welcome Sydney to the College Scoops podcast. we're so thrilled to have you here today.



Sydney Montgomery 03:06

Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited.



Moira McCullough 03:08

Well, I love seeing your smiling face because you were the last face that my colleague Mark and I saw at the spring into summer conference, the IECA conference. And you were, we were sitting there on a Friday afternoon. It was a beautiful day. And here we are in our video chat room thinking that there's no one that's going to want to come and speak to us on this beautiful day. So thank you so much for supporting us during the conference and introducing yourself and all the wonderful things that you do. And we're thrilled to have you on today because we would love to talk to about your experience on the challenges and opportunities that first generation students have. So could you just introduce yourself a little bit before we get into our conversation?

S Sydney Montgomery 03:51

Of course. So I'm Sydney, I'm from Maryland, and I went to Harvard Law School. I love what I do. I love that I get to work with my 12th graders and I work with prospective law school stuff. And, you know, my parents were both military. So I was a Navy brat. We didn't move around, but still definitely part of that strong community. And it's just been it's been an interesting ride educationally. It's just been really well.

M Moira McCullough 04:15

First off, thank you to your parents and your family for your service. That's first and foremost. It's a wonderful opportunity and a challenge as a family. So yes, first off, when you and I were talking, we were talking a little bit about, you know, college experiences. And could you just really enlighten us on the first generation, a lot of people use first generation as a term and I know that presents a lot of questions and, you know, discussion, so maybe we can delve into that first,

S Sydney Montgomery 04:42

Of course, so I consider myself first-gen, especially now, I'm the first lawyer in my family. So I'm certainly first gen for law school. And when I was coming into the tournament for college, I wasn't really sure if it applied to me. I sometimes say I'm like half the first gen. And my dad got his degree. online through the military, basically around the same time that I was in college, so he didn't have a degree when I was applying, and then my mom she had her degree, but she, they both met in the military. And she kind of went back to community college later and then went to GW. She transferred to GW for two years. So she had a degree, she had a degree in biology, but she didn't do the typical, like high school to college transition. Neither of my parents did, and they didn't do the typical dorm situation. And so I want to talk about first gen, sometimes it's very easy to be like, Oh, you're the first person in your family to go to college. And I think there are some students who are, are not really sure that label applies to them, or I have students who are like, Well, my parents went to school in a different country, and and they're not sure if they're first-gen. And I don't know I think that time can be broadening and limiting. Because there are so many students for whom they're not freshmen, but they have the same issues and they don't sometimes take advantage of them. Opportunities are the support networks because they feel it's not the space for them.

M Moira McCullough 06:04

That is such an important distinction that you've made, because it is a conflict. And I've

heard that before. And people kind of hesitate. And they're like, Well, I'm not really sure where I fit in, if that's the case. So thank you for that clarification, because I think everyone struggles with it. And you're right, you don't want it to be limiting.

S

Sydney Montgomery 06:24

Right. And I think if I went to Princeton, for undergrad, and I think was even more limiting, because they have the term which a lot of schools do, you know, first-gen low income, it's kind of it's one, one label. And I didn't consider myself low income, yet. I would, as I continued on, but when I first got to Princeton, I still thought, you know, we're very like middle class, which in and of itself is a very weird term, like, what does that even mean? But I wouldn't have said that I was low income. I think probably appropriately. I was maybe lower metal. And so I was like, well, that, that that group is not for me, because that's not how I identify myself. But I think I missed out on a lot of resources. Because I still worked. You know, I worked three jobs every year at Princeton. And I, you know, definitely resonate with, you know, having to support family financially, not in the same sense of like sending money, like all my money was going home. That's not the case. But I did support my parents and I didn't realize until I got to law school that that wasn't normal.

M

Moira McCullough 07:29

As a student, there's so many pressures as a high school student going to college to begin with, just in general, first time living away for many students first time doing everything for yourself, signing up for your classes, walking into a cafeteria, just navigating the, the walls and halls outside of the classroom. So that in itself is a stressor. So share with us a little bit about that because I can imagine I was uncomfortable stepping foot on campus, but and I had a job but I didn't have three and I was sending money home so that that right in there is something that you over, came and had to manage.

S

Sydney Montgomery 08:08

Right. And I think it's, it's hard because I think academically I did come from a public school system that did. Well, I wouldn't say that they super prepared me for Princeton, but they prepared me in the sense that I wasn't like last about how to make a schedule and all those other things. But I was very, like, shocked, I think, socioeconomically especially when I did encounter other people who were public school, and who considered themselves on a class and then it's like, oh, we're going out to dinner. I explained this a lot in law school, we're going out to dinner and you find out that dinner is an average of like, 30 to \$40. And you're like, Oh, snap. Like, I can't, I can't do that. Um, I so when I knew I had to get a job. I

was a work study, eligible and I did but then I kind of had this mindset of like, high pay low hours, because I knew the amount of money that I needed to make. And I knew the amount of hours that I had. You know a lot of people work dining hall or they work the front desk of the student center. But I ended up doing a lot of babysitting. So I babysat for professors, families, and those usually paid a lot more like closer to 20 an hour. I know that I like my junior and senior year, I actually, I don't know, I guess I babysat them, but they were like, eighth grade, or sixth and eighth grade when I started in like eighth and 10th grade, like when I left and I'm actually still very close to them, but I would pick them up after school, and I would take them to the orthodontist and I would take them to tennis and I would, you know, do those sorts of things and kind of make this like family unit. But it provided me an opportunity to study while I was working, and I did that on law school too. I made some children who were Francophone, and I picked them up from school and and supervise them but also studied while I was working with them,

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Moira McCullough 09:53

Well that in itself, just advocating for yourself and getting that job that must have been the first hurdle to knowing That, okay, there are certain jobs that you would have been eligible for. And you would many students take part in, like you said, working in a campus center working at the gym working, you know, these other jobs, but you actually took it a step further where you recognized, I want something else. And how did you advocate for that?

S

Sydney Montgomery 10:16

Yes. So I think that, you know, when you go to a school, like Princeton, or any school really, like you're told, you know, when, when you're in a position where you don't have maybe as many like professionals in your family, and you go to such a school, you're kind of told, take advantage of all these networking opportunities. And networking in college really looks like social activities. So I wanted to join a sorority, which I did, I'm a member of Kappa Alpha Theta, and I love my sorority, but that meant I had to come up with dues, and I had to join. And, well, I didn't have to, but I did join an eating club at Princeton, which is sort of like a coed fraternity situation. And you know, Princeton does supplement financial aid a bit, but they're expensive. And I couldn't take out loans for all of it. So I you know, I knew that there were things that I I wanted to do like I wanted to go to these formals. To get into the eating clubs, you have to go to the formals. To go to the foremost, each form was like \$100. So you know, there are these little things that you kind of had to do to like work your way up the social ladder, that a lot of black students actually at Princeton don't, or low and low income students who are not just black, they don't partake in because of finances, and I didn't want to miss out on any opportunity. I wanted to take

all that the school had to offer. And so for me, I was like, Okay, I need to figure out how to make some more money. And sometimes that I didn't even ask my parents for the money because I knew that even if I asked them, they could come up with it, it would be because they'd be sacrificing something else. Um, I know that there were a couple of more than a couple of times when I just add like peanut butter and jelly or like, you know, my roommate she lived. Her parents were actually from the Princeton area and they like gave her \$20 every week, which was like fantastic, but she really didn't need to spend it. And she's actually like one of my best friends now, but she He also helped me out, you know, I wasn't too proud to admit when, when I needed help. And I and I think that you have to do that I was in the financial aid office a lot. Like I need, I just need like something.

M

Moira McCullough 12:14

So when we talk about, you know, hitting the ground running from an academic standpoint, that's what a lot of students are worried about. And you set your public school prepared you for college, and not to say anything was easy. Yeah. But sometimes we don't think about the other ways to hit the ground running on a college campus, say a, you know, from a health health standpoint, from a mental health standard, social standpoint. So you advocated for yourself, you're in with the financial aid. Did you find somebody to mentor you like is that something that's set up on college campuses to help incoming freshmen?

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Sydney Montgomery 12:51

We had like a Resident Advisor an RCA is what they're called at Princeton, and they have like an advisory. But I don't know, 12 to 15 students, and any was great, but I wouldn't really call him a mentor, I don't really know that I felt like I had a mentor, I think you try to find them and I was a dancer. So I was in a lot of different dance companies, but I think there's a lot more that could be done. I know that I wanted to do an unofficial study when I graduated, and I never did. But at Princeton, you have this thing of like taking time off if they think that you're not doing well academically or mental health wise, instead of like, kind of failing out, you would take it you would take time off, you take a year, and then you would come back when you've gotten yourself together. I started to notice that the black students that started with me in my class, many of them didn't end with me. You know, there's this high rate of minority students ending having to end up taking time off and I think a lot of that is because as the first in your family, there's pressure to succeed, right? You you've made it like your church is my whole church. Oh my gosh, was like praying for me and they were like you, you have to succeed like, you know where and it's like hard when you feel like you're not succeeding, or it's it's a struggle you're afraid to ask

for help. I think there's a lot of people that are, you know, especially in black and minority communities, mental health is stigmatized. And so, getting therapy sooner, honestly, I think that all freshmen should just have one introductory therapy lesson.

M

Moira McCullough 14:29

I agree. I think that should be required.

S

Sydney Montgomery 14:31

Right. But so, you know, there's just there's so much that I think when you are talking about supports for freshmen students, that's Yes, you need an academic advisor, right? Yes, you need a mentor like an A person who has done who is first gen or like, just had a similar experience who can help you navigate it. But then you need some discussions around mental health. You need discussions around free tutoring, and where to get it. I take advantage of all of that I went to their writing center 57 times I put it in my thesis as an acknowledgement. And I had a free french tutor. I don't really know that she was really a tutor, but it was someone to help you with the language. I really struggled with french at Princeton, the level of reading and writing that they expected from me and I had taken French from sixth grade to like senior year, like I had six years of French, going into Princeton still placed in 103, which is just above the one on one level and still struggled the whole way. Because the level of reading and writing that they were expecting me to have, I just didn't have that kind of preparation. And it was really it was really hard for me, I can speak french well, but the the grammar wasn't really emphasized growing up in school. And so like learning how to get those supports, I think I'm naturally just the question asker and there's like this fear of failing that makes me feel like okay, we have to figure something else out. I that fear also happens financially when I'm like, okay, we have to like we must make money because there is no other way and I don't don't care how I did it. I mean, legally. But I think there needs to be so much more on that. And then someone that can also help you deal with like, just class shifting. If I had a mentee, I think that's something that I would really talk to them about.

M

Moira McCullough 16:16

That in itself could be so helpful and informative and a distressor. right from the get go. If you had that type of partnership, relationship, informal networking opportunity.

S

Sydney Montgomery 16:30

Yes. Because I mean, when I got to Princeton, that was the first time that I had been around well, and also been around I guess, what was considered maybe average, which was not my definition of average. So it was a lot of it was a lot of adjustment to kind of figure out how to navigate that, you know, if my sorority sisters are asking me to go to their debutante ball, what is what is that and, and do I want to go to that and what do I wear to that? You know, there's just like a lot of little things that aren't fully explained

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Moira McCullough 17:01

Not at all and and having the courage really to ask about it is something that is hard for anyone to do.

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Sydney Montgomery 17:09

I will say I didn't ask about the Debutante ball. I just didn't go.

M

Moira McCullough 17:13

I remember I walked into my freshmen room and I saw a photo of my now very, very dear friend who was my college roommate at the time, and she was at a debutante ball and I looked at I'm like, what were you at a wedding? And it is it is something that you know, it's just, you're introduced to so much and as you said, it's almost trying to choose what you want and can't physically emotionally mentally tackle and take on and did you find it easier as he went along?

S

Sydney Montgomery 17:43

So that that ever running joke that the older I got, the more low income I got, because by the time I graduated Princeton, I had understood that I was maybe lower middle class. And then I got to Harvard Law School and the wealth distribution was such that I was like, Oh, I'm low income just Okay, cool. Like I'm on max financial I joined the like the low income society. And I feel like I, it became easier in a way because I was more comfortable with myself and where I came from. And I'm not like ashamed of anything, right? I'm very proud of my my parents and my upbringing. But I just became more comfortable with my story. And I think that that helped a lot. But it did become harder in some ways, because I will never forget. I think it was like my one year, Harvard had this like etiquette class for low income students on teaching us how to navigate from dinners. And I learned that I don't know how to eat apparently, I was very bad. I was very bad at all of it. And I learned that I had two different types of blacks going on. There was just like a lot and I remember

calling my dad and being like, cool, so I don't know how to use a fork. I don't know how to eat. I don't know how to do any of these things that I that I thought I did. Like, I had a girl over for dinner once and she ate chicken wings with a fork and a knife and I, I don't think I've ever felt more culturally different from anyone. But those things didn't upset me. I think as much.

M Moira McCullough 19:07

It's almost as if I think you said it right. In the sense of you went through Princeton,

S Sydney Montgomery 19:13

I'm so grateful for that.

M Moira McCullough 19:14

You up to be more aware or to be able to handle kind of what you experienced at Harvard Law School in a way that you might not have been able to had that been your first

S Sydney Montgomery 19:24

it would have been really rough. It would have been really rough if I had gone straight to Harvard Law School. And I met a person because I did a lot of mentoring. And I met a one on my third year who was actually foster care student. And there were there was it was a lot of just a culture shift. And I think there's a tendency to not branch out sometimes when you're first gen or low income student and just feel like well, these people are not my people. And I can only stay with my people or they won't accept me or we don't have anything in common. I think it's just a common thought. And that was my thought when I got there. I had Such a chip on my shoulder. I was like what he's like, and not even most people that consider which most people at Princeton aren't rich. But in my head as a freshman, I was like, well, these rich people, and I have nothing in common. They don't know what the real world is like. And I kept thinking, well, one day, they'll learn about the real world. And then I remembered that, like, they're probably going to go into a high powered job. And so maybe their real world was always going to be different from mine. But I really think there should be more supports to try to integrate people as much as possible because even though my sorority sisters and I come from very different backgrounds, we do still have some things in common. And I do like joining a sorority was the best thing that I did at Princeton. and integrating with my classmates at Harvard Law School was also really great, but I do recognize that it takes us and it takes a certain level

of understanding on both sides and that's it and understanding that there were things that I couldn't do my section went on a ski trip, my first year and it was supposed to be like, you know, \$300 per person for like a long weekend. I obviously did I do that, there's so much money that you're asked to pay as a student at school outside of tuition costs in books, we really don't talk about that enough, like just the social budget that you need.

M

Moira McCullough 21:12

It's so true. I think one thing we sometimes forget is that there's a whole lot of people out there that are like, each one of us, like, all your insecurities are all the things that we're dealing with personally, that there are people out there who are in your shoes. And if we allow ourselves to be a little bit vulnerable, and open up to meeting people and sharing that I remember, you know, I didn't go on spring break to senior year that was just not in the cards. It just I didn't have that at the time actually going home to work. So I mean, you and I were two totally different people to different backgrounds, but some of the things that we experienced, and I'm not at all comparing and putting us on equal to the things that I experienced when you talked about your stories. I'm like, Oh, I felt that as well. So I think so. Sometimes you're absolutely right. It's, it's having the courage and the confidence, which is really hard. And that's, I think, part of going to college, that's part of college life, right?

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Sydney Montgomery 22:10

The schools could do more to, like, really like, I think a social budget should be a portion of a scholarship or a merit or something. Because I think when you admit students that you know, are on full need, and you don't give them a social budget, what you are saying is, I understand that there are parts of this experience that you are never going to be able to do you are going to, you know, you're going to be foreclosed from certain opportunities. I remember. I was talking to the sky at Harvard Business School. I'm just trying to like learn about the business school my first year, and because they go on crazy trips, like they're going to China and to Germany, and so someone's you know, penthouse or whatever. And I was like, Well, how do you? How do you do that? And he was very like blunt with me. He was like, Your friends are based on how much money you have. Not like they care how much money you have, but you just won't be able to do things like if, if the high power people are all going to Germany for the weekend, and you can't go to Germany for the weekend, those are probably not going to be your friends. And it kind of filters down like that. Because, you know, you know, they're going to bars and people are buying tables, like it's a very expensive lifestyle. And I just really sat and thought with that, you know, because you go to business school for the networking connections. And when you think even like Harvard Law School, like some people will be presidents and congressmen

actually have. One of my friends is running for Congress, Adrian Perkins in Louisiana, and it's so fascinating. I'm like, I'm 26. I have friends that are running for Congress. But you have to be friends with those people. If you I mean, not to say that you go to those schools for the connections, but to get kind of the intangible benefits of going to some of these schools. You really do need to widen your circle. And I think that schools need to be aware of that when they are accepting lower income students that they need to give them those kinds of supports.

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Moira McCullough 24:09

Absolutely right. And when you look at all the tuition breakdowns, and they put supplemental costs, and that's typically for books for, you know, transportation, but it is not for what you said from a social aspect, or even just putting that cost there.

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Sydney Montgomery 24:27

So that I know, if I'm comparing two schools, and I'm looking at two aid offers, like, they might look the same, but this school, you might have to pay an extra 1000 or \$2,000 a year to be part of the social life of the school. Absolutely.

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Moira McCullough 24:41

So that was leading into our next question is in terms of what can schools do more? or How can students get help from different avenues and you've, you've highlighted them in terms of a more formal networking? Yeah, their ship program, you've mentioned also putting down like the additional costs associated with going to college. What that means from a side effect.

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Sydney Montgomery 25:02

And some colleges, I think are not trying to admit they maybe haven't admitted to themselves. The the differential, you know, they want to focus on all the things that the university provides. And they don't want to focus on the things that students may do outside of that. But you, you really do have to.

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Moira McCullough 25:21

I mean, when you're looking at, as you said, you have two or three choices that you're

looking at. And if you looked at from a tuition, I remember sitting with my kids and saying, okay, you had x merit aid for this school, but that didn't cover the other school is actually less, it's less by 15,000. So the 15,000 you've gotten married is actually wiped out by the tuition of the other schools. So now we're still looking at apples to apples. So I think you're absolutely right. You have to have that knowledge. If you're coming in, in a way that you are paying or receiving financial aid for school in order to get the full college experience of that particular program.

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Sydney Montgomery 25:57

Right or or make that decision about that. Like, I'm not going to participate in that, and I'm okay with that. But I think it just causes so much tension when you didn't know. And now you're here and maybe you can't participate in that. But you're, you know, you're really resentful.

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Moira McCullough 26:12

I think knowing it, you have that information. Now you do with it, as you will. And you make that decision. Is there any advice you would give to a student who is approaching you know, the fall and going to school, any advice that you would give to them as they navigate their first couple days, and now knowing that we're in a virtual environment, which is different, but actually presents a whole nother set of opportunities and challenges,

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Sydney Montgomery 26:36

Right, both both opportunities and challenges, I think, in general, like pre pre COVID, post COVID, I would say, to own your story. I think that's the biggest piece of advice, even you know, in this virtual age, like don't, your story is impactful and it's powerful. Don't ever be ashamed of where you're from or who you are or what you have to do to support your family. Emily, or what you have or haven't had, because the story is like, has shaped your personality and it shaped your character and it's why you're going to succeed. So take it as like a, an accomplishment, you know, wear it proudly. I know for me, I'm always very transparent about my background. And I think my students really appreciate that about me. I'm not afraid to say I didn't come from money. I'm not afraid to say I can't afford something even now, because it's not, it's not something to be ashamed of. It's, it's not like maybe we should be ashamed of how much things cost. So I would tell students to stand proud in that and your friends, the people that you will make connections with will respect you for that. And the people that don't are not people that you necessarily need to be

around. You know, I know that with a virtual environment. Sometimes people feel like they have to hide their background. I just can't ever get those backgrounds to work and it doesn't look weird, but you know, people are very concerned about that. You may see someone and they live in a really nice house. And maybe you don't. But you know, again, just just kind of own it. And sometimes speaking truth to things is really important. Because I know there was one time when I like there was a group thing, and it was going to be pretty expensive. And I was like, Oh, I, I can't really do that. And they're like, Oh, well, we don't have to do that. We can also do this thing. Actually, one of the greatest things that I learned was in law school, you know, you want to go out to dinner. I mean, no one's going out. But you could do like takeout, right? You want to go out to dinner with your friends. And one of my friends just literally was like, hey, this month, I can't order out. But can I just like, bring my leftovers to your apartment. And I was like, actually, this month, I can't afford to order out either. I just felt like that was the only thing that we could do.

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Moira McCullough 28:44

And how much fun I mean, it's sometimes so framed once you have that particular attitude and approach. As you said, You both just sat there and thought, Oh, we only said that earlier. Maybe we would have had set or apartment and just talked.

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Sydney Montgomery 28:58

I think I'm also you know, because I know that there's some Christian students who are listening who are maybe we're not loving them, right? And who are who may be wealthy first-gen. Students, I'm like, Okay, well, what advice do you have for me, I would still say make a mentor makes the connections, figure out the landscape of the school. I think being friends with someone two classes above you, no matter if you're in grad school or an undergrad can be really helpful. I think one class is like, they just kind of went through it. But two classes, I think that's when you start to have some reflections, some introspection and some hindsight. So that would be really helpful and take advantage of all of the academic resources, even if you feel like you don't need it. I think having them you know, I signed up for a lot of things that I wasn't sure I was going to use.

M

Moira McCullough 29:45

Right? But it's but it's knowing that, hey, you know where they are. If you are in a situation where it's the 11th hour and all of a sudden you needed that help on that french homework or presentation, you had that resource available that you could reach out to and saying You know what I do need help. So, right? You're absolutely right. It's having those in place

and the network and infrastructure in place. So that should you need it. It's there for you.

S

Sydney Montgomery 30:11

Exactly. And I sometimes tell my rising seniors, if they're open to it, if we have that kind of relationship with rising freshmen, that now would be a great time to start there. Because there are a lot of things that you're going to experience here first year virtually or in person. And that moment, when you are maybe like having a crisis, or climbing or not fitting in, there's usually sometimes a waitlist, like a little bit of a gap if you call mental health services at schools. And so, that moment when you really need to talk to someone they might be like, cool two weeks from now we can schedule you. But if you kind of build those relationships when you first get there, then if you have such a moment, you already have a person you're already connected.

M

Moira McCullough 30:53

Absolutely, from both a mental standpoint and and also I would say students who have learning differences The earlier you get the documentation in place and know where to go, the easier will be because as you said, When I heard some of the waitlists, you know, in terms of sure we can take you in for an appointment, it's three months out, and I'm thinking at that help now, I don't need that help pen. So great advice. Thank you for that. So, one quick if we can you have a Barrier Breaker program.

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Sydney Montgomery 31:26

It do. I'm really excited about it.

M

Moira McCullough 31:28

You just spent a couple minutes describing that for us, really.

S

Sydney Montgomery 31:31

So my whole thing is I don't believe that educational consulting should only be for the wealthy. And of course, I do one on one services. I work with ninth through 10th graders in early insights program and 11th to 12th graders in a holistic College Counseling Program. But the barrier breakers program is really geared towards first gen students on their parents, mostly students, but I will have resources for parents as well. And it is it's \$50 a month, just one flat fee and you get You get the opportunity to submit questions to me

every week, roughly, there will be a recorded video sent to you. That is like talking about the college admissions process or high school study tips or things that you need to do to navigate the transition as a first gen student or financial aid. There'll be kind of different topics. But I will also be answering all the questions that come in through the week to make sure that they have support and I am thinking about doing kind of like a monthly or every two month like a parent call just so that they can get their questions answered. I don't want the kids on any kind of live video because they will be recorded, but as parents want to come on, and have those questions, I think that would also be a great opportunity. And then it's a it's a community. So there'll be a place for you to post questions. It sort of is like a Facebook group, but it's on our course platform site. So you don't have to worry about social media or any of those things. Parents will also have access to that and you know, throughout the week if you do have questions or something You can ask them there, you can support each other. What I really love about it is I also have a barrier breakers law school edition. And it's the same thing. It's really supporting Christian students, mainly Christian minority students through their law school journeys. And so you have this opportunity really to be in the barrier breakers college edition. And if you are a pre law student, I know that you have a community that you can graduate to and you can go straight into the barrier breakers law school edition and kind of be supported that way. But um, you know, it's it's counseling time, there's no annual contract or whatever. It's just like if you were paying Netflix, \$50 a month, four hours, video a month, you know, just China answer questions.

M

Moira McCullough 33:42

What an incredible resource and community you are growing and developing. And I will say both from we've talked a lot about the students. But I appreciate especially since I'm a parent, that you have that option for parents because I think sometimes we as parents think that we're helping are kids yet we don't know how to help. And your community, your program would allow that free flowing discussion and opportunity for parents to learn, and be able to support their students in a way that is more meaningful, impactful without being another stressor in their life.

S

Sydney Montgomery 34:17

I don't think it does any good for me to give all this important information to the teams and then have them try to explain it to their parents and cause potentially some conflict there. You know, I want everyone to be on the same page. We're all on the same team. We're all supporting the student.

M Moira McCullough 34:33

I love it. So we're going to have links to that in our show notes and our blog post when we share your podcasts. I love asking our guests two questions. One, the first one is What do you wish you knew before you attended college?

S Sydney Montgomery 34:47

So there, there are many things that I wish I knew. I wish that I knew that it was okay to say no. And like that's really so something that I'm working on now. My life is very difficult. I'm not great at it. So but there are so many things that I think that I did as a freshman that didn't really go in alignment with my values. Because I felt like I couldn't say now,

M Moira McCullough 35:16

I love that and I may have to use that.

S Sydney Montgomery 35:19

Absolutely take it to compliment

M Moira McCullough 35:23

Is there any particular food or, or dessert or experience on a college campus that you would say if you were around Princeton or Harvard Law School to take advantage of

S Sydney Montgomery 35:35

I cheated a little bit because my boyfriend's a PhD student at Princeton, so I do actually go back often. The dining halls the unlimited food is fantastic. And science at Princeton has really great ice cream and all the dining halls. That's great. My favorite meal of all time. Was this one random time I was in the tower eating club and they had shark on the menu. It's the only time I've ever had shark. It was very good. Highly recommend it.

M Moira McCullough 36:01

I would have known I'm a swimmer. So I don't know. That might freak me out and not bode well for me when I go for my next swim.

S Sydney Montgomery 36:10
No, it was so it was so random. And I was like, I must I must try this because it's here.

M Moira McCullough 36:15
I think you have to almost right. You have to

S Sydney Montgomery 36:17
Never in my life have I ever been presented with that opportunity again. So I'm glad that I took it.

M Moira McCullough 36:22
And if you hadn't you would continue to be talking about that to this day. opportunity that you didn't take eating shark.

S Sydney Montgomery 36:30
Yes, but no, it's not ice cream. I'm a big ice cream person. There's always sprinkles. And they have really cute like waffle cones and they're amazing.

M Moira McCullough 36:39
What Sydney, thank you so much for coming on our podcast today and sharing your insights and guidance and advice for students. I can tell already that you're going to be tremendously successful and your barrier breaker program. I just think it's absolutely wonderful because you're taking things that you learn and wish you had when you were at Princeton and at Harvard Law School, and trying To give back to your students and families, so thank you.

S Sydney Montgomery 37:05
Yes.

M Moira McCullough 37:08
Thank you to Sydney for joining us today to help educate us about the challenges and

opportunities first generation and low income college students face when arriving on campus. Knowing the full cost of attendance not only from an academic perspective, but also in order for students to engage in the full college experience is really needed. colleges can do more to help students navigate their college years by providing the resources networks and financial aid needed to attend college. Find a mentor and take advantage of all academic and other resources the college has to offer sooner rather than later on your story, whatever that story is, and it's okay to say now. You can find all of our show notes and links to the helpful resources mentioned throughout our conversation on our website at [college scoops comm slash podcast](https://collegescoops.com/podcast) You can learn more about Sidney and as S. Montgomery Consulting on their website at [S. Montgomery Consulting](https://www.smontgomeryconsulting.com), on Instagram, on Facebook, on Twitter, and Pinterest. 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.