

Episode 4

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SPEAKERS

Patrick Meade, Moira McCullough

M Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops Podcast Episode Four. I'm your host, Moira McCullough. And today we're talking with Patrick Meade all about college interviews, and how to best prepare for the different opportunities available.

P Patrick Meade 00:12

A lot of ways the interview when it is evaluative. It's about imagining a student on the campus, navigating a classroom, working in a small group lobbying the dean's office for some kind of policy, change all the stuff that colleges want their students to do when they're not in the classroom study.

M Moira McCullough 00:34

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, informative and tasty college journeys. Whether it's your first or last 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 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 slash college scoops 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. Our guest today is a former Assistant Director of Admissions at Johns Hopkins University, where he recruited students and read applications from all corners of the globe. at Hopkins, Patrick Meade focuses on the messaging and marketing of the undergraduate experience and extension of his senior thesis. an exploration of liberal arts colleges, the study of the distinctly American small residential college experience. Patrick is currently a membership engagement associate for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, an honor society founded by John Adams in 1780. to convene leaders from every human endeavor to examine new ideas and address issues of national importance. He designs and implements panels, lectures, receptions, and other programs that provide members with opportunities to connect to each other, and the work of the Academy. Patrick graduated from St. Mary's College of Maryland in 2014, with a major in English and a minor in museums and society. He's an avid sailor and native of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Thank you so much, Patrick, for joining us today and welcome to the College Scoops podcast.

 Patrick Meade 02:54
Thank you for having me.

 Moira McCullough 02:56
I have to give a little insight as to how I know Patrick. Patrick, and I go way back. We have swam together. We have sailed together. Patrick has been an instructor swim instructor for my kids. So I have known Patrick for many years. And I've enjoyed every single interaction that we've had. And Patrick actually came on board to the College Scoops team, awhile back providing his insight and expertise as a former admissions counselor. So Patrick is back once again. And we are thrilled to talk about one of the most popular blog posts on college scoops was one that Patrick wrote. And it was about 13 questions that one would ask in a college interview. So that's what we'll be discussing today. But before that, Patrick, can you give us a little bit on who you are and what you're doing?



Patrick Meade 03:47

Sure. So I wish I was still teaching swimming to your kids,



Moira McCullough 03:51

My kids wish you were still teaching swimming them as well.



Patrick Meade 03:54

I think we all grew up a little bit too fast. And that's the problem. So right now I'm working for the American Academy of Arts. sciences as their membership engagement associated. And it's a society of professors sort of like an honor society for academics and business leaders really at the top of their field. They're elected by their peers, they're elected by existing members. And they sort of join this organization. And it's like a think tank, we produce papers and do research, but we also do a lot of just chances for networking and getting these these professors together. So I plan the fun stuff, I do a lot of the programming panels and lectures and, you know, evenings at museums, just sort of the chance to get, you know, a nuclear physicist in the same room with insurance, you know, CEO and have been bounce ideas off of each other. And, and really, it's been fun. It's only been a year, but it's kind of born out of my, my life working in around colleges. So before before that I was at Johns Hopkins University as an assistant director of admissions. And before that, I was an undergraduate at a place called St. Mary's College where I was the student director of admissions, and I didn't see them all connected. I think that academia higher ed, it's I'm fascinated by it, I still think about it all the time in my current job, but I do kind of miss being an admissions officer.



Moira McCullough 05:08

I think this year is a different type of year too. So I think it presents a whole host of new opportunities, shall we say, but the place that you are at sounds incredibly interesting and exciting. And I know that you have so much insight, because you still have that huge network in admissions, in terms of some of the things that are going on and some of the changes that we'll be seeing in the near future. One of the things that I know I've asked as a parent, and I know my kids have asked in terms of interviews, and that's the topic for today. How does one prepare, how do you help your student prepare, and then the different types of interviews and I think that's something that a lot of students and parents have questions on. Can you give us a little insight as to as an admissions person, what those opportunities are and the different tiers of interview is available?

P

Patrick Meade 06:01

Absolutely. I think that your two questions are totally related, you know, how do you prepare definitely depends on what type of interview you're about to go into. I think sometimes, because there are so many different versions of how colleges operate, there's, we use these broad words like interview or essay, or just application deadlines, and they're actually different. You know, as you know, parent has been through this and every school is slightly different, and they have different nuances. And it can be tempting to think that it's just marketing and that every school is doing the same thing, but they're just calling it something different. But I think you miss the point, if you don't actually kind of, you know, pull that thread and figure out exactly what the point of the interview that you're potentially signing up for. is so you know, I just mentioned quickly all the, all the roles I've had in the higher ed sphere, I was an applicant. And then I was an undergraduate who was student Director of Admissions are running for sort of students side of a small college admissions office, and then I was an alum who was working in service of my alma mater. And then I was a professional admissions officer who you know, and in all those roles, I did interviews, the big difference was when I was 19. And doing an interview, I didn't have any authority, I was just a student. And so the reason I was sort of doing that interview was to help the young high school student I was talking to understand more about the school, okay. And I would notice that when I was doing those informal informational interviews, sometimes students would come in and be very nervous, and I was just, I was nervous, I was just a college kid. I was I was just there to sort of volunteer and, and maybe make eight bucks an hour as a student interviewer, but my role was not to determine who got into the school and who didn't, you know, these kids would come in so anxious and, and have their stats in their resume and be so formal. That approach didn't match the tone and the purpose of what we were trying to do.

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Moira McCullough 07:48

You were trying to calm them down and get them relaxed let's just having a conversation.

P

Patrick Meade 07:52

Absolutely. And really, it was it was for their benefit. It was not for my own benefit. It was for them. You know, it was supposed to be solicited. To be helping them figure out if they wanted to go there. And in some ways I was sort of being salesy and saying I love this place. And this is what I like, and I was trying to get them excited about it, but they were too busy being nervous about the interview to relax.

M

Moira McCullough 08:12

That's a great point. Because I think as much of a role of you trying to go in as a student, and selling your resume selling yourself to that school, you actually are saying, it's also an opportunity to be in the driver's seat and determine whether there's a fit for you, and whether that school is the right match. So you as an admissions person, as you said, you were trying to sell your school and show why that was a right fit, why they should continue to pursue applying to your school.

P

Patrick Meade 08:43

And the only way to do that is if a person you're interviewing, it really isn't an appropriate word in that in that term, but the only way for you to figure out if the place is a good fit is to learn more about the student and so, you know, you start asking questions as the interviewer but eventually the conversation doesn't go anywhere - it's like listening to podcasts. If people aren't giving anything on the other side, the conversation don't go anywhere.

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Moira McCullough 09:05

Exactly.

P

Patrick Meade 09:06

So that is probably the most informal and sort of, hopefully comfortable version of an interview is speaking with a current student. You know, you're only a couple years apart. Your high school sophomore, junior, or senior, their college sophomore, junior or senior, you know, it seems like a world of difference. But really, they remember what it was like to be in your shoes, and they don't have any authority over who lives and dies in the admissions process. They're really just trying to help you, the student figure out more about the school, I think the next tier of interview, that shouldn't be any scarier. They're just slightly different formats is the alumni interview. And I know that a lot of schools we talk about schools that have really strong alumni networks tend to have really strong alumni interview processes. You know, I know a lot of Ivies are really, really well organized and they strongly encourage interviews and they can basically guarantee that all their applicants sit down with an alum who lives in their neighborhood and they It is also, I think, a special opportunity for the high school students to learn about the school, those alums are not getting paid, depending on who they are, they tend to be very busy people who have full schedules, and yet they've carved out time in their lives to talk to students. And it's not because they love being the gatekeepers. Because the reality is, as someone

who worked in highly selective admissions, those alumni are also not making the admissions decisions, you know, the decision does not live and die by that along and that interview, they're giving their time because they really feel strongly about their alma mater, they feel maybe obligated to give back because they had such a seminal experience as a student or because the colleges position them to do really well in their lives. And so they feel like, you know, all they can do to get back is to sit down and do interviews, or they're a parent who understands this process and wants to make it easier. And so, again, they shouldn't be scary. I think that the alumni interview is just a grown up version of the current student interview, which is that you're having a conversation with someone who's still passionate about a place that they're giving up their time to talk about it. So that's another opportunity. To learn about fit, I think schools change. So even the St. Mary's that I went to almost eight, nine years ago, is probably different than what I experienced. And certainly like the you Penn of 40 years ago is different than the one that you're applying for.

M Moira McCullough 11:15

Exactly.

P Patrick Meade 11:16

But you're learning something from that alum about whether it's a school worth investing of your time and you're sort of you're gonna feel emotionally invested in it. And if they had a trajectory that is appealing to you, right, if they loved their time, and are still friends with the people that they were friends with and still referenced, the professors that they studied under, that's an indication that's a school that's worth considering for you. And so again, it's a chance for the interviewee to learn about the school, not necessarily to dazzle anybody.

M Moira McCullough 11:41

Okay, great mindset in how you're approaching both the informational with the student and the alumni. So it's an opportunity for the student to come prepared to really get a better feel if those are his people, if that's the type of community that he wants to be he or she want to be associated with going forward. So I think that kind of puts a student at ease in a sense, or as you said, it's a different preparation style that would go into that particular moment.

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Patrick Meade 12:10

I think that's absolutely right. It is just about a different preparation. You shouldn't spend all your time prepping for an alumni interview, remembering all your stats and figures and the things that you've accomplished. You should know that right? Like, if you sit down with your aunt at Christmas, and she asks what you're up to, you have an answer. And that's effectively what those alumni interview folks are doing. The one thing that they may be evaluating you on is your ability to have a conversation. And so I think the preparation focus is misguided when it's all about the answers to the questions I think you should focus on if you tend to be nervous focus on how to relax. You know, if you're not super comfortable speaking with adults who aren't your parents, then you should really think about Okay, how am I going to approach this so that I can seem comfortable and able to participate because in a lot of ways the interview when it is evaluative. It's about imagining a student on the campus, navigating Classroom working in a small group lobbying the dean's office for some kind of policy, change all the stuff that colleges want their students to do when they're not in the classroom studying. And so if you know it's more about those sort of personality traits that make it easy for you to talk. And so people get nervous, and that's completely fair. And you can expect the alumni to be nervous themselves. But if you are really worried about that, that's where I would focus my energy I wouldn't focus on like, what do I want to be when I grew up? I better have a really compelling answer about being Secretary of State, you know, that's not the point. The point is, can I talk, am I comfortable?

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Moira McCullough 13:34

I like to distill that down into the art of communication. It's walking into that room and having the confidence in the presence to conduct yourself in a way that is engaging and that would keep that person's interest. You're looking them in the eye, you're shaking their hand, maybe not now, but hopefully in the future, that you're going in with a certain mindset and confidence that you are comfortable in who you are, and it's just a conversation and highlighting as you said, not what is on the application or the stats in the past facts, but allowing something else of you to come out that would show that this is the type of person that we want to have in our community that will help our student body be diverse and grow and thrive.

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Patrick Meade 14:16

Well, I don't want to get too far ahead, you know of our conversation here. But that blog post I wrote about questions you can ask on the interview, the best way to feel comfortable is to be prepared, the best way to prepare is to have something to say. So if

there's a lower, you know, if you're worried about it being awkward or uncomfortable, there's a lot of conversation and you have 13 questions that you're genuinely wanting to ask them. That's a great way to take control of a conversation, because all of a sudden, you're on the asking side, and people love talking. And so if you give these interviewers a chance to expand on something, then it's not gonna feel like you're on trial, because you're asking questions.

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Moira McCullough 14:52

So let's delve into that a little bit. Because as you said, that was I loved that post that you wrote. It generated a lot of discussion and interest with our community because I think you're right. You're prepping for the conversation. You're prepping for the art of communication. But then when you get in there for those particular interviews, what are some key questions that one should ask? And my son had just recently had an interview and I said, Don't ask what's on the website. That's something that doesn't show that you took the time to learn more than five minutes of what that college is about. They already had it on their fast fact sheet. So let's delve into that and figure out how do you come up with those questions? And tell us a little bit more about your thoughts on the question you have heard you would recommend and maybe some no go zones?

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Patrick Meade 15:43

I think the biggest no-go zone is the one you just mentioned, which is don't ask a yes or no question. Don't ask questions about things that you can google later. Particularly. It's almost like a an etiquette thing. That almost seems like you're quizzing your interviewer and they may not know the answer. You know, if you ask what's the average LSAT score And the student interviewer or even the professional admissions officer has like a blank moment and just can't remember, you've introduced something uncomfortable into what should be just like a nice conversation. So instead, I think you should ask, again, think of your think of who you're talking to. It's like any other conversation, if you're speaking with a current student, asking them, why did they pick the school? That's the best, you know, that's the information that they can provide you the website cannot provide you those sort of personal elements. Right? How did you find it making friends you know, in the first semester, you know, are the classes you'd recommend if I end up coming here, how would you structure your your first semester freshman year?

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Moira McCullough 16:36

I like that one - My kids I don't think asked that and I think that's a really good one. How

would you structure that freshman year and the class structure?

P

Patrick Meade 16:43

There can be questions that you would like to be asked yourself about something that you're an expert in? right if you know, you're an expert in being a high school, junior Barnstable High School, what kind of questions would you feel comfortable answering and you know, what do you have advice about one because it's, it's flattering to the interviewer which is sort Part of the point and also because you're really going to learn something, it's those sorts of candid moments and completely subjective personal opinions that actually help you figure out if a school is the right fit for you. It's the same reason why we encourage people to go to campuses, because you're going to see certain things you're going to see types of people, you're gonna see, you know, the way campus operates, you might overhear some conversations, and all those little details sort of contribute to that visceral feeling of, Oh, I want to be here. And even if someone's experience is not identical to your experience, you sort of have that that sense that you like something or don't like something based on what you're hearing. And so it's definitely worth asking people open ended questions that they can expand on questions that maybe are a little bit emotional, again, like what's, what's your best memory? If you're talking to an alum? What do you remember most if they're in their 50s, they're not going to remember every single day of college but there they may have some things that really, really stuck out - stuff that they still text their friends about, because it was like that moment, and if you're talking to a professional admissions officer, they have an emotional attachment to the school to. So even if they didn't go to I didn't go to Johns Hopkins, but I work there for a reason. And I had certainly a lot of opinions about the faculty and the campus and the way it was structured in the curriculum. And a lot of it, you know, it was my job to just memorize those things. But I had personal opinions too. And so if a student asked me, who is your favorite professor, I would have an answer, I'd say, Oh, you know, I didn't take his class, obviously. But I've been emailing with a guy in the writing seminars department, and he was so excited about talking to potential, you know, new undergraduates, and he's been so generous with his time, I can only imagine how much more generous he is with actual students, since I'm just a staff member,

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Moira McCullough 18:38

Right, which would resonate with that student that all of a sudden, they're an English major, or they're interested in a particular subject and to have that type of authentic reaction from you as an admissions person to say, Oh my gosh, if I could do it all over again, this is one person or if I attended this school, this is one person that I would reach out to, which you can't get anywhere if they had not asked the question. That information

would not have come out in a discussion. The other thought I loved, which I know was on your list and in your article was to ask what speakers come to campus. That opens up a whole avenue for discussion on who are you bringing to campus? In what disciplines? How would you spend an afternoon or an evening or the weekend? Right, in terms of that level of opportunities for learning outside of the formal classroom?

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Patrick Meade 19:27

Well, that's it. I mean, and that's something that is interesting to me. So that's a question that I would ask, but if you are less interested in the politicians and speakers that come to campus, but you really want to know about the performing arts, don't ask, do you have a drama club? You know, the answer is usually Yes. And also, that's the end of the conversation. Think about what you're actually curious about you. Do you have to be a drama major in order to participate in the drama club. You know, that's actually information you can use to figure out Oh, I'm a I want to be a biology major, but I want to participate in the performing arts. You don't want to just ask These top level by me, I got a lot of questions over my many interview my long interview career about like, do you have neuroscience? It's like, Yeah, I think so. I mean, let's check the list of the pamphlet unfolding in front of you. But you know, the question about, is there a lot of crossover between the biology and neuroscience departments because I'm interested in that sort of space between those two disciplines? Or, you know, easy to double major. Exactly. One of the questions that I noticed on here that I was like, oh, that actually is a good question. You know, asking about the curriculum, and those responsible You know, sometimes they are things that make us a little nervous about a potential job or school for the university has a really strong corporate column with a lot of requirements. And you're very, very left brained and you're afraid of math and science asking, Hey, how would English history and museum studies you know, triple major satisfy his math and science Requirements write successfully, it looks like I have to have four semesters of that, how am I going to do that without failing? And maybe they say you won't, you're gonna have to take calculus to graduate from this college. And then you say, Oh, well, I don't know that I can go to this college.

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Moira McCullough 21:12

In the discussions with my kids, I know that there's certain majors too, if you didn't start first semester in the fall, taking this set, set of classes, the opportunity to maybe take some of those extra classes that one might do just because they are curious, and they want to take an art class, that might not be an option at certain schools. And that may really, as you say, factor into this is the right place or open up your mind and look at maybe a

different major or a different program.

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Patrick Meade 21:44

And I think that sometimes, high school students are a little anxious to ask the questions that are about the things they're nervous about, because they're afraid it comes off as rude. But the reality is they'll have an answer for you. And if it's answer you don't like that's okay. It's a fact finding mission that you're on. Even at the most selective even if your dream college, those interviews are not all about you dazzling them, it's about you figuring out what you need to figure out to make a decision.

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Moira McCullough 22:10

Well, you said something to that was very important in terms of finding information that wasn't the answer that you wanted. That's important to know. And that's keeping that journal and writing down at the end of the day when that decision time comes, pulling all that information that you learn through this series of interactions with that college. And that might be a deciding factor where if you have two schools that you're deciding between, you may reflect on what's a better fit for you at that moment. When you say in terms of I think the hardest thing is you come up with these questions to ask and they're a yes or no to your point. But delving deep into those types of open ended, which then leads to another discussion, for instance, like one that you had, I'm interested in being pre med Can I or engineering? Can I still study abroad? The answer maybe yes, but you'll take summer classes. It may be a five year program. Is that something that you're willing to embark on? and financially? Is that an option?

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Patrick Meade 23:08

And that's, you know, if you get that answer at one school, even if it's a school that's a little further down your list, and you're like, Oh, I had no idea that if I want to be pre med and study abroad, I may be limited by the programs I can go to, it'll prompt you to ask the same question of the other five schools on your list. Absolutely. And at the end of the day, to do this, right, you're always going to have at least two schools to pick from, you're going to have to make a decision at some point. And so to your point, the more information you're armed with, the easier it is to narrow, narrow things down and then you you're going to find out eventually, if you don't ask in the interview, there'll be a sophomore at the Career Services Office, and then you'll learn that you actually can't study abroad and then you'll be disappointed. So get ahead of it.

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Moira McCullough 23:47

Well, I think also when you said your goal is to help, explain, promote and share what makes that particular school unique, but also the opportunities that student may have to succeed at that institution. But it is we said, it's also an opportunity for that student. We talked about two of the same questions being asked to two different institutions. I remember my college interview, I went for my test or safety interview at the first college. It was just a practice interview at the college that I ended up attending, because I went in there, I didn't want to go, my parents made me and I thought, okay, it's close to home. I'm never going to go there. And sure enough, that attitude maybe that I had, that I'm never going to go here. Sure. I'm just going to go in and talk. I had the most insightful, engaging, fun, interactive interview there. Then every other interview that I went to, could not compare. And it was amazing because at the end of the day, that was an interview where that interaction and communication with that admissions representative made such an impact, an impression I made that no one else could attain. That discussion that we had, which I think is another opportunity when you go in for these interviews to find out the way an admissions person handles that particular question. How do they respond? Are they open and engaging? Or are they not so much? Is that kind of the community that you represent?

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Patrick Meade 25:17

Yes, and that sort situation you're still talking about - an interview that you had when you were 17 years old. I can't believe it. But I am too. I remember, St. Mary's was just a school on my list. It doesn't have a ton of name recognition. It wasn't it's very far from where I grew up. But the conversation I had with actually an admissions officer who came to my high school, we're still friends. I did actually DM on Instagram the other day to see how she was doing during all this, you know, quarantining and, it was such an important moment. There's an art and a science to the college search. And so much of it is about preparation. And you're so good at telling people about how to prepare and how to approach all these visits, but what you're doing is lining yourself up for success so that when you get in the interview room or on the tour You can surrender and just feel it out and have that sort of visceral emotional reaction to it. And that, to me, that's the whole point. And so much of college is like that. And so much of life is not like that, when you are a college student. It's kind of like this weird magical time where you're, you're so surrender to something and you're so committed. And it's everything is so beautiful, and the food is so good, and everything's super heightened. So the college search kind of gives you a taste to that. And I think more students would do well to just kind of surrender to it. And just embrace the fact that oh, I felt a certain way here or I, you know, I thought I wanted to go to Harvard, but turns out I don't like it. I don't like Cambridge. That's okay. Even though

it's Harvard.

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Moira McCullough 26:43

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Patrick Meade 27:17

Now, you said something that will lead me into the next question when you mentioned you have these formal interviews or informal informational interviews. But you also mentioned when that college representative comes to your school, and or you have a college fair, is there a different structure format or strategy that you would have when speaking with college reps that are not formal interviews, but are again, an opportunity to engage with an admissions representative? Yeah, I mean, I do think that if we are talking about tiers that would be close to the most sort of consequential interview because you're speaking with somebody you know, who are ultimately is being part of the group that makes the admissions decisions. But I, I really think that, again, it's almost more consequential on both sides. So certainly, it's someone who can make admissions decisions, but it's also someone who has insight into how admissions decisions are made. So it's an opportunity for you again, to ask questions and get answers about this process about maybe how you should structure your application essay, or what you can do to stand out in the process. So you know, it's okay that even though you may be a little bit that much more intimidated to talk to an admissions officer, you should actually be asking maybe even more insightful questions than you are of the alumni and students interviewer because they, they have the actual insights. That said, I do think that more preparation going into those conversations is definitely a good idea. If it's a smaller school, their application volume is lower. And so therefore, they're probably going to remember more interactions. The bigger the school, the bigger the application pool, the less likely it is that a conversation you had, you know, that was relatively informal with an admissions officer. But they'll remember you specifically, when it's time to read the file, but they might they'll, they'll definitely remember you if something really strange happens. So, so in some ways, it's almost preferable to be a little less memorable. But by hitting your marks and just sort of asking the right questions, and you'll walk away with a lot of information if you play your cards right there.

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Moira McCullough 29:21

So when you talk about that, when you talk about the planning aspect, and if you're given the opportunity, people ask us a lot, should I really go? Is it something that I should take the time to register for? and financially, if that's a consideration, should I make that trip to that particular institution for that interview? What are your thoughts on that? I mean, obviously, not not the required ones. But if there's informational or alumni, what's your take on it if there's opportunities for that?

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Patrick Meade 29:52

I think if it's feasible, if it's sort of within the realm if you're already heading to town, or it's not that far away, or it's not that expensive, You should definitely take advantage of those opportunities. And not necessarily because the interview itself is so crucial. But because when the admissions committees are trying to determine between similar applicants, they're really trying to figure out fit. And who is more likely to attend the school, you know, who's, who's more enthusiastic, who's more committed, versus the applicant who just had the school on the list. And so if you interviewed, it'll be reflected in your file. There'll be maybe some brief notes about the conversation. Again, they're not notes like, you know, he wasn't that funny. But their notes about oh, we talked about this and that, and we met on September 12. But that could make a difference between when they're trying to figure out okay, is this student genuinely interested in us? Or are they just ticking a box and we happen to be their third most important reach school, you know, on the list of applications? You know, the same logic is applied to that, you know, the supplemental essays were your answer. Why do we want to be Why do I want to be a student here, that's a chance for you to write something That makes it clear that you're genuinely interested in may actually come if you got admitted girls want to admit people who want to come, that's their whole their whole game. So if you can interview I think it's another chance to express interest. But if you're going to bother, then you should really do some preparation and actually ask questions that express your interest. Because if you go all the way to the interview, and then the notes and the things that he doesn't seem that interested in the school, there didn't seem to have any insightful questions about the place. And it's not necessarily as impactful as notes that say, Oh, they, you know, had genuine curiosity about our film department.

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Moira McCullough 31:33

Well, so it goes back to what we were talking about in the beginning, one, don't look at it as a ticking off the box, look at it as an opportunity for you to be in the driver's seat, also, and use that as an opportunity for you to learn as much as you can. It's an opportunity to

learn more about what you can't find online and about your true interests. And whether this is a place that you would be happy to call home and try that and want to spend four years that and a whole host of money at So those are two things to keep in mind as you go through the journey. The other thing is, I think, if there are interviews available, signing up early, and making sure you get on the list, I know that a lot of times they close out, and all of a sudden your thoughts are especially alumni, I think that you know, they have a certain number of allocated spots that they have. So another recommendation would be probably to if you are looking at a school that offers that get on board and schedule sooner rather than later.

P

Patrick Meade 32:28

For sure. I mean, I think that's the case. I mean, the way things are going COVID aside, we would have days, sometimes it happens where we just couldn't accommodate any more people in our building, you know, and so you had planned to show up on a Tuesday in October with your mom and visit the campus and all of a sudden, your whole trip might get completely confused because there's just no room. So the earlier the better. On the flip side, I do want to put out a plug for my former colleagues and that admissions offices are made up of admissions officers who are just people. So we completely understand the realities of Hey, they wanted to interview and we couldn't accommodate them. And so I don't want anyone to ever think that it's the end of the world if, if they can't do an overnight visit, or they can't interview because of their own personal money, time, all those things, or just, you know, there wasn't any space on the schedule. And that's where actually, you know, developing a bit of a rapport with the admissions officer can be helpful. So if you're ever worried if there's something that's really eating away at you, like, I wanted to interview but we had a lacrosse game, and we just couldn't make it that weekend. If it's really bothering you, you can drop an email to the admissions rep assigned to your high school, and just let them know that I wasn't able to interview but I am really interested. And, you know, there are three questions that I was intending to ask. And what they'll do is they'll hopefully, if they have the time, the bandwidth, they'll answer that email, or they'll pass you off to someone who can, but they'll add that email to your file. So there'll be a record that you made an effort and that's okay too.

M

Moira McCullough 33:56

So that's really important is that admissions representative that is assigning your school is someone a that you should have a relationship with, you should know their name, you hope that they might know your name.

P

Patrick Meade 34:10

Right. And every interaction with them, again, is an opportunity to demonstrate interest on the students part, but also an opportunity for that student to get information that will help them fine-tune from a decision making status. And that's crucial. I think that just sending an email, basically, that's a lot of words to say, Hello, I'm interested is not really a good use of the admissions officers time or your time. I think anytime that you are reaching out, and it should be relatively frequent, it shouldn't be like all the time, you should ask a question or have a reason for reaching out beyond just like I wanted to get on your radar.

M

Moira McCullough 34:43

Okay, so short, sweet and to the point, but there needs to be a purpose and just don't get bogged down in sending emails for the sake of email without direct.

P

Patrick Meade 34:51

Yes.

M

Moira McCullough 34:52

Are there any type of recommendations that you have in terms of thank you notes? What's your take on that handwritten email? The timing of it.

P

Patrick Meade 35:02

Audience is really important to consider, you should always send a thank you note one because it's a good habit to be in. And, you know, I sit on hiring committees, my you know, office now and we look for them. So if you're not if you start doing it when you're 1617, by the time you're looking for jobs, you may be in the habit of firing off a quick email, which in most circumstances is perfectly fine, and email, but you want to match the tone of your thank you to the tone of the interview that you had, if you had like a really lovely sit down with, you know, a woman who lives in your neighborhood who went to the college and did a long conversation will interview and serve duty and it was like a nice thing that I think of a handwritten thank you note that maybe takes a couple more days to get through the mail makes perfect sense and would be appropriate and really appreciated by that interview person. But if you sat down with Patrick Meade the admissions officer in the high school cafeteria, and I gave you my business card, an email within 12 hours is probably preferable, more appropriate. makes more sense.

M

Moira McCullough 35:57

Okay, so it's not only an etiquette thing, That will is a lifelong skill that will serve you very, very well throughout your college years and for your first, second, third, fourth job opportunity. But it's something that if you're going to do it, there is a better way to do it in terms of the timing of it. If it's an email, and it's an area representative, or as you said, a college fair firing it off within 12 hours, there's a timeframe for it to make it impactful.

P

Patrick Meade 36:26

And just the reality of the mail system of a university is this crazy, you know, lab time thing that you know, the blender will never get to the admissions officer. So it's a sweet idea. I know, we used to have a lot of students who I'm sure they still do have students who get creative and they start, you know, building collages and doing all these other ancillary projects and making cookies and stuff and that stuff never gets to the admissions officer. For like safety reasons, for practical reasons for a lot of reasons. And so the schools will clarify what they're looking for and you should be able to feel it out pretty quickly, but an email is almost always preferable, just because we can then log in Get electronically and respond quickly and and move on.

M

Moira McCullough 37:04

Were there any in all the times that you worked in admissions any crazy stories that you thought? Okay, that question either was the best question that I can remember or boy, I wish I asked that when I was going to college. Or one that you thought just left a mark on you or impression on you and I think the ones that those are kind of easy that you said the questions that could easily be answered on the internet.

P

Patrick Meade 37:29

Right and those that don't leave a mark at all which is part of the problem. I think they're like you know, some very, very good questions. I'll be honest, I think that I don't want to discourage enthusiasm but the ones that stick out are sometimes the ones that were a little uncomfortable because the student was so enthusiastic and they were rattling off stats and they knew things about me because they had done this like weird googling. And they just made you a little uncomfortable because mostly not because I was in danger but because they were so wrapped up in whether they were going to get into the school, and it seemed like they admittedly they lost the plot a little bit about why they wanted to go to the school. They were just so obsessed with in this case, it was Hopkins and I wanted to go there since I was six and I know, Dr. House, who went to Johns Hopkins. And that's why

I wanted to go and and you left thinking that student is probably not going to get admitted, just because of the 10% acceptance rate. And now I feel bad because I feel like people are too invested. And so the best conversations are the ones that felt like genuine conversations.

M Moira McCullough 38:32

I love the phrase, listen with curiosity. You'll come out of that conversation that meeting with I think key points that you never even imagined or you never when you entered never thought that you would ask or learn. And it's just being able to listen and then instead of constantly going in there with your 10 questions and being so focused on those that you're not listening to the admissions representative answer those.

P Patrick Meade 38:57

And I'll actually say this is something that I think is important. When you sit down with a parent and a student together, the parents definitely should be listening with curiosity, and probably only listening and not talking. Because I can think of a couple of instances where the parent really for whatever reason just completely railroaded the conversation to the point where you weren't even sure if the student wanted to go to college at all, let alone the college that we were sitting in.

M Moira McCullough 39:31

Well, that leads me to a question that I've had, and I could not believe this. When I was taking my daughter Megan, who you know, to a college interview, I did the thing that I love to do most which is I dropped her at the admissions office. I waved goodbye and I went to my favorite coffee shop that I knew that I could sit at and take in the scene of the college students in between classes. And I'm sitting there and all of a sudden I received a text from Megan saying get back here quickly. They're interviewing you next. And I wanted to respond and say, You must be kidding. And she wasn't. And I actually went back. And I've never heard of this before. After the interview with Megan, they actually pulled me in as a parent with her there and asked me if I had any questions. I have to say, I was not prepared. I hadn't because my son had been to the same campus one year prior, and he had driven himself. So there was no conversation about mom, they wanted you there for that parent interview. Does that occur at other schools and if so why?

P Patrick Meade 40:42

It's a colleges decision but maybe that was a college trying to appease the parents who have a host of information. And I think that is a huge distinction. I mean, there are so many kinds of colleges in this country, and I actually wrote my my senior thesis about the small residential liberal arts college, and a America and how distinct it is from basically any other education system in the world, including like, most colleges that we talk about Michigan is big. The Land Grant schools or the Ivy's a small college lives and dies by those personal interactions, because their yield is so complicated when they're doing admissions, you know, they only have maybe 500 400 hundred 50 spots to fill. And so they have to be very, very clear that who they're admitting wants to come because five empty beds is a budget crisis for a school like that. And so they they take a whole different approach to the admissions process, any sense that they're evaluating you kind of evaporates because a lot of times they they really want you to feel good about the school and so engaging the parents sitting them down, really is a chance to just let the parent vent or ask questions or get any of the things that maybe the parents concerned like about financial aid or about the school's name recognition or something like that. And so there they are solicitous, you know, to the point of being maybe making people uncomfortable because They're still happy to have you on campus. And they know that your decision sort of is gonna be make or break while you're visiting. And so they just sort of pull out all the stops. And that's there's nothing wrong with that. I just think it's it's a little bit of whiplash when you're visiting a campus where they sort of pull you and push you out the back door, and you have 45 minutes and a tour guide with a microphone. And then you get someplace and there's a tour guide waiting for you and your daughter for a private hour and a half long freewheeling tour. Okay, point. And so sometimes it's actually good. I recommend people if they can structure their days if they're going to visit two colleges in a day to pick two different schools, you know, one that's going to be small and intimate and quiet and maybe exhausting, and then one that's going to be exhausting in a different way because it's just like a cattle call just for the comparison.

M

Moira McCullough 42:47

It's a great point, because I think, again, you glean a lot from that experience and that interaction that is gonna help you in your decision and you may find out that Guess what, four tours that are going on at the same time on the hour. Every hour for eight hours that cycle, that type of community may be overwhelming to some. And that is, again, information that is extremely valuable for the college journey.

P

Patrick Meade 43:12

Well, that was my experience completely. I was just sort of outgoing kid you knew me

when I was in high school I was, you know, I kind of, I was very comfortable in my big, rough and tumble public high school, and I sort of figured, Okay, the next step is to go to a big urban school, and I applied to, you know, BU and GW and all these places, and I was ready to go there. And then I visited this place called St. Mary's, and it was so the opposite. It was so intimate and quiet and, and very residential almost felt like a boarding school for high school. And I had the realization like, Oh, actually, this is exactly what I need and want. And I went there instead, and I was every day I was grateful that I went there. But if I hadn't gone on the visit, I never would have learned that.

M

Moira McCullough 43:55

Looking back on it again, I'll reference the one other campus interview. I had was at a similar school. And as your experience with keeping in contact with your admissions representative, the admissions representative and I had such a great conversation. We exchanged handwritten notes for several years thereafter. And I remember at that point in time, I thought, okay, that smaller community for me, is a place for me to connect and engage. And that actually worked better for me, and it helps determine whether that's the school for me that size. So without that interview, I would have thought, Oh, I'm big. I'm going to a really big school. Far away. And that works for me. But it goes back to the importance of campus visits, the importance of talking with the current community, and every opportunity that you get. It's just one more that you can learn from just quickly, do you see any change with COVID and the lack of travel with some schools that have not offered interviews or stopped the interviewing process. Do you foresee maybe some of that opening up?

P

Patrick Meade 45:04

It's an it's an excellent question. I don't I don't envy my my friends and colleagues who are in admissions because I think that it's a really complicated time. But usually, that means, you know, people start getting creative. If I had to make a prediction, it would be that even some of these bigger, more highly name recognition schools that don't offer interviews in or are very standoffish, are going to start introducing programs that look a lot like the small liberal arts college, you know, intimate visit, because so much, there's so much of a budget and a network of admissions officers, you know, scattering to the all four corners of the earth to visit high schools and shake hands and go to college fairs. It's a whole industry. And if we can't, I don't know that we can or can't do that in the fall. I don't think anybody does yet. But if we can't, they're going to come up with something different, and it's probably going to be leveraging zoom technology and phone calls, and that those admissions officers and the students that work for them and their volunteer alumni are all going to feel extra pressure. Make you feel accommodated, which is a great

opportunity for the high school student applicant, because you're the product. I mean, they want to make you feel comfortable. And so all the more opportunity for you to get your questions answered and take advantage of those opportunities.

M Moira McCullough 46:14

So we need to keep checking back and making sure what opportunities will come up.

P Patrick Meade 46:18

That's the thing though, because there are communications offices, and they worry about tweets and releases and press releases and all that kind of stuff and website updates, but it only works if the applicants are checking regularly and stuff is changing. We know every 24 hours. Exactly.

M Moira McCullough 46:32

Perfect. What do you wish you knew before you attended college? Is there anything that you reflect backon and think, is there something I would have done differently?

P Patrick Meade 46:43

Yes, it's a that's a good question. I think everyone who's been to college kind of has a few of those things in their mind. For me, it's that it took me a lot longer than it should have, I think because of the kind of high school experience I had where I was just like a student at the school and you did your work and then you went home. colleges are structured with so many resources. And that you, they're there for you to take advantage of, they're not there to catch you, if you fall, it's something that you're supposed to proactively take advantage of things like the writing center center and the Career Center and all those places, you know, they're not, it's not remedial, like services for kids who are about to fail it, it's the thing that you're paying for. And the same goes for the for theater tickets, and the bus rides into the big city and all that, you know, the speakers that are coming to visit and the chances to have dinner with, with, you know, magazine editors and all the stuff that you get emails about all day long. It just took me a while to realize that I was the audience for that, but I was there and then I should be doing all those things. And then pretty quickly college is over and no one is offering free theater tickets. And if you want someone to look at your resume, you have to pay them 600 bucks and you know, it just gets harder and harder.

M

Moira McCullough 47:48

You and I have the same answer is that. I keep telling my kids are tired of hearing it but I think that's something that is worth repeating over and over again and actually is again, something that you have to think about each and every stage of your life. The moment is now life goes by fast take opportunity, you're in the driver's seat, and it's only yours to lose. So if you have that mindset and hit the ground running, and get as much as you can out of it, it will be that much more valuable and your friendships and the knowledge that you get is just to me that much more incredible, rich and lasting memories for you go into the line. We always end every segment with what is your favorite dessert dessert spot and I I know you like sweets, Patrick. So this might be another whole conversation and podcasts but I was gonna say any that stand out if you had one or two that you couldn't wait to get back to?

P

Patrick Meade 48:47

Yes, well, I will say that I love my rural college experience, but the only trade off is that we were 20 miles from the nearest Walmart let alone like an awesome off campus desert spot. But when I went to Baltimore and worked at Johns Hopkins, there's this diner called Paper Moon, which is right around the corner from the admissions office. Literally, it's a stone's throw from from Mason Hall. And Baltimore's a crazy town and it has a john waters and kitsch culture and the diner is filled with action figures and toys from the 50s. It's really fun. And they make this Captain Crunch french toast. Oh my gosh, it is so good. They roll it in crushed up Captain Crunch.

M

Moira McCullough 49:33

We might just have to stop by the Paper Moon for the captain crunch french toast.

P

Patrick Meade 49:41

Yes.

M

Moira McCullough 49:44

Thank you so much, Patrick, for joining us today. And I'm really appreciate you taking the time.



Patrick Meade 49:48

Absolutely. Thanks for having me.



Moira McCullough 49:52

Many thanks to Patrick for joining us today. Interviews are an opportunity for students not only to shine, but to also evaluate and learn more about that. Particular college, check out Patrick's blog post on our website for his top 13 questions to ask in an interview. You can find all of our show notes and links to the helpful resources mentioned throughout our conversation on our website at Collegescoops.com/podcast. Please take a couple 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 college.scoops.calm or follow us on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.