

Episode 87 - Dyllen Nellis

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SPEAKERS

Dyllen Nellis, Moira McCullough

M Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. I'm your host, Moira McCullough and today we are talking with Dyllen Nellis, a student entrepreneur at Stanford University and founder of College Essay Advice. Dyllen will share her entrepreneurial journey and her mission to help students of all socioeconomic backgrounds.

D Dyllen Nellis 00:15

And something I learned is that the college essay, or the college application process is not just about getting into college, you know, it's about understanding who you are as a person and being able to communicate that to other people. And that is a skill that is going to be so important for the rest of your life.

M Moira McCullough 00:40

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 round 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 and tasty college journeys. Whether it's your first or last child going to college, or you're just interested in going to a college town

for a game or meal, we've got you covered. If you haven't already, please subscribe to the College Scoops podcast to get the inside scoop and everything college related and leave us a review. Thanks to all of our sponsors partners in 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. Dyllen Nellis is a college application consultant and undergraduate at Stanford University. She empowers students to discover their sense of self and effectively communicate their personal values, experiences and potential in a well crafted college essay. Dyllen offers a range of services and resources including college essay editing, live consulting, educational videos, and most valuable a comprehensive online course to craft a successful college essay. Her system places emphasis on the necessary pre production work that will save time in the long run by implementing strategy, structure and storytelling into every essay. Her students come from across the globe and have been accepted to Stanford, you Penn, Cornell, UCLA, USC and many more. Dyllen aims to unlock a future of possibilities for students of all socio economic backgrounds. Thank you so much, Dyllen for joining the College Scoops podcast today.

D Dyllen Nellis 02:47
Of course, thank you for having me. I'm super excited.

M Moira McCullough 02:51
Well, I like to live through vicariously through you living over in sunny California. So tell me what is it like today? Is it another horrible sunny day?

D Dyllen Nellis 02:58
Horrible? It's beautiful. And yeah, sunny day, I don't really see a cloud in the sky.

M Moira McCullough 03:05
So nice. Over here on the East Coast is pouring rain. But we're thrilled to speak to you today for a couple different reasons. We always like to share student entrepreneur stories on College Scoops, we're all about helping students help other students, fellow entrepreneurs, explaining how they started the business, lessons learned, some tips for aspiring entrepreneurs, and also to share your story as well about how you got into

Stanford and how it inspired you to start your business. So, welcome.

D Dyllen Nellis 03:39
Thank you.

M Moira McCullough 03:41
So first and foremost, I mean, it's kind of hard. You're at Stanford, I would say, what was the deciding factor in choosing Stanford? But that's kind of a hard one. Right. But what was the driving force? Did you always know that you wanted to go to Stanford?

D Dyllen Nellis 03:55
Yeah, so that's a good question. I think it actually wasn't an easy decision. For me, I do have a story to tell.

M Moira McCullough 04:01
I love it.

D Dyllen Nellis 04:04
Okay, I'd always wanted to go to USC throughout high school. USC was like my dream school, because they had my dream program, which was the Jimmy Irvine and Andre Young Academy of Arts technology, and the business of innovation. It's a very long name, but it's such a unique program. It's super interdisciplinary. And it doesn't quite exist anywhere else. Now, I also applied to Stanford and Stanford was another like, reach dream school. But I still wasn't entirely sure, like how I would get that kind of education that I wanted, like that program out of Stanford. And so I actually ended up getting into both schools I got into every school that I applied to, and I was like, oh, shoot, what do I do? And the thing that that came down to at the end of the day was honestly financial aid was huge. Because Stanford gave me a lot more financial aid. I think that's something that's really important for especially people of lower income families to know that like these schools are willing to pay for you.

M Moira McCullough 05:12

Yeah, that might be something that students may not realize. And they may exactly needed and think there's no way that Stanford would ever provide the financial aid I need to, to attend. So I'm not going to even try.

D

Dyllen Nellis 05:22

Exactly, I've learned a lot about that recently. And the most prestigious "quote unquote" or like the top ranked schools, or whatever, they are usually the ones who are more willing to give me based aid. So that was nice. But also, I thought about it some more, and I was excited to live in a new town. You know, Stanford's in the Bay Area, and I've grown up in Los Angeles, all my life, USC is down the street. So I've been there so many times, it feels very like home already. So I wanted to get out. Plus, I did a lot more research on the academic programs at Stanford. And I found a lot of really interesting classes that would actually allow me to shape my own education. So one thing that was super awesome about Stanford is that unlike most schools, and unlike the program at USC, Stanford is incredibly flexible with their classes. So you aren't enrolled in like a strict program. And it's like, you have to take this in this class this year. And then this in the next year. There's no program laid out for you, you can literally enroll in whatever you want, across any department. And that's super nice. And so it's kind of up to you to like, take that responsibility and make sure you're fulfilling your major requirements. But I really like that. So I've now actually decided to create my own major at Stanford, which hopefully will be called human centered design and engineering. And so it would allow me to combine design, computer science, psychology and business into one.

M

Moira McCullough 06:55

And you're going to try to do that all in four years. Yes. As a parent, I have to ask that.

D

Dyllen Nellis 07:03

Yes, I mean, it my four year plan, a little bit overflowing, but we're gonna see how I like that.

M

Moira McCullough 07:10

So is that something that, as you said, you have to as a student advocate for, and really be in control and ask the questions and research the opportunities? At Stanford, do they have the advisors and the network to basically sit down with you and say, Okay, what is it that you want? And let's together kind of create and map that out?

D

Dyllen Nellis 07:31

Oh, yeah, totally. There's a lot of resources at Stanford, you know, every student has an academic advisor, we also have, oh, gosh, so keep in mind, I have not been at Stanford for a year. So I might not remember everything. But there is another sort of advisor who watches over us for the four years, I don't remember what they're called. But we have that person as well, that you can contact anytime. And, you know, teachers are more than willing to talk with you. And there's also different, like, there's certain classes, there's a class called, like, designing, designing your Stanford or something like that, where you can literally take it and, and figure out what's going on, like what you're going to do with these four years, like they have those resources. There's also a class specifically for freshmen that they can enroll in, I think, called Frosh 101, that really supports the freshmen and lets them talk about their experiences and just kind of get their footing when they first come to the school. I wasn't enrolled in that, but I know that other people were.

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Moira McCullough 08:35

So you alluded to the fact that in terms of as a freshman, you are a rising sophomore, but you attended Stanford for one semester in the Fall and then took a gap year?

D

Dyllen Nellis 08:48

Yes, so I attended Stanford for two quarters, because we're on the quarter system, and two quarters, third quarter was online. And then I took the entire year off from 2020 to 2021. And now I will be enrolling again, as a Sophomore. I would have been a Junior for 2021 to 2022.

M

Moira McCullough 09:08

Okay, so when you were looking again, if I look back to any student that's listening to this, who's in the process of applying and looking and putting together their college list, I love the fact that you were specific on a program at first and looking at schools, and then kind of totally didn't discover that but allowed other schools to move up the list because you were more open to other possibilities and those schools that you were looking at, like Stanford had the flexibility to create your own type of programs. So for students that are fixated on one, don't be so fixated that you'd miss out on other schools.

D

Dyllen Nellis 09:46

Oh, absolutely. A lot of people, you know, I mean, mine was kind of opposite situation. But

a lot of people put the prestige first. A lot of people care so much about the rankings, that they're don't actually consider One is this financially, like feasible for my situation for my family? And then two, is this actually the school that's going to make me the happiest that's going to achieve? or help me achieve my educational goals? Like so many students don't think about it. They just like brand name, oh my god, I want that. Do you want that? Like if you really want, you know, like, do the research, go online and search their entire website figure out if they have exactly what you are looking for in a college.

M

Moira McCullough 10:31

So if you have advice for students that are looking at colleges right now, and you had it, think of top three. One, really, the financial fit definitely has to be a conversation that you have with your network to make sure that there's a financial fit to the programs, but be open to researching and seeing if other schools have the ability to create the programs that you're looking at. Any other tips?

D

Dyllen Nellis 10:56

Yes. So okay, for those who don't know, I mainly work in the college essay space. I'm a college essay consultant, I help students, write their essays, edit their essays, structure, their essays, organize them, brainstorm their ideas. And so I have quite a lot of advice when it comes to college essays. But the the big overarching, main thing that I need to share with everyone is that strategy matters. Strategy matters, you cannot just go into the college application process all willy nilly saying, I'm gonna wing it, I'm just gonna answer the prompt like, right? That's, it's easy, right? They're just asking me to answer those prompts. I'll do it No. Like, it takes a lot of strategy and a lot of understanding these storytelling techniques, because another thing is that the college essay is not just an essay, it's it's really a piece of creative writing, and creative writing through stories and through experiences in your life, that convey these personal values and qualities about yourself, which will then make the college go, Oh, I want that type of student at my school. And so I know a lot of students don't have access to that strategy. They don't understand that strategy. And that's exactly where I was, when I applied to college, I didn't have a private college consultant, and then the college counselor, my title one high school, like didn't provide enough guidance. And so that's what I'm really working to help students have access to, whether it's creating videos on YouTube, or, you know, selling my ultimate guide to craft your story, which is my college essay course. And I walk students through a very strategic step by step project process on how to craft your ideas and write a stellar college admissions essay for every type of essay, not just the common app.

M Moira McCullough 12:53

So I'm going to step back in high school where you always really very comfortable confident writer?

D Dyllen Nellis 12:59

Yeah, not super, super confident. But I was okay.

M Moira McCullough 13:03

Okay, so when you went through the process yourself, because I think it's great, you basically went through it, yourself, you found a need in terms of, you didn't have the outside resources that would write that many students now have, and other students are fearful of the fact if I don't have that I cannot tell my story in a way that will convince a admissions reader to take a chance and exactly an accepted. So you were a good writer, but your focus is on the pain points that you saw or the struggles that you had, were telling that story in a way that was meaningful, that would get somebody to stop react and question or, yeah, okay, well,

D Dyllen Nellis 13:48

It was really about structure college essay structure, which is something I preach, structure outline, same thing, you know, like, what are you going to talk about in every single paragraph? How are you going to break apart your ideas? What does the beginning need to be? What does the end need to be? How are you getting from point A to point B? How are you making connections between your ideas? There's just so much nuance to it. I love it.

M Moira McCullough 14:13

So did that come? I mean, when you say that you went through that and you found structure and strategy matters? So was it after sitting there on a blank page and writing and then just being so frustrated and figuring out like, there must be a better way? How do I do this? When did you start doing this? There's so much in what you said. To say, I know it's strategic, the structure, but where do you

D Dyllen Nellis 14:36

Oh, yeah, I got the whole story.

M

Moira McCullough 14:39

Well, we like stories,

D

Dyllen Nellis 14:40

Yes. Let's see. I. So during the summer before my senior year, that to every student watching, that is when you should start doing your college applications. The summer before your senior senior year, start writing your essays, but you have to do it once again in a strategic way. So I didn't have the strategy at that time. And I was doing a lot of research on, you know, the college application process and my schools and trying to build my list. And I tried drafting some essays. And I was like, these are horrible. You know, like this, this doesn't sound good. It sounds like I was telling, rather than showing, you know, there's a college essay technique, everyone says, show don't tell, which is so important. And that comes down to the storytelling techniques. So I was like, why does this sound so bland, you know, like, I know that this story from my life was really impactful and is actually a really engaging story. But for some reason, when I read it on paper, it doesn't sound good. And so I had to like scrap a million drafts rewrite them. And a lot of times do I had to like change the topic, because then I realized that topics I were choosing, I was choosing weren't even the best ones. And so I did a lot of research on college essay strategy, I looked at a lot of different articles, a lot of different videos, I read several books. And I learned so much through that process, and it was really, really enlightening. And, something I learned is that the college essay, or the college application process is not just about getting into college, you know, it's about understanding who you are as a person, and being able to communicate that to other people. And that is a skill that is going to be so important for the rest of your life. Or like every job that you apply to just the way you interact. And you talk with people, having that understanding and feeling grounded with yourself is so important. And that is something that will increase your self awareness, boost your confidence. And so you can really evaluate, you know, the things that are, are struggling you're struggling with and be able to go, Okay, well, I'm struggling with this, because it stemmed from this previous experience in my life are this preconceived notion, or this societal norm that has caused me to think this way. But now I'm changing my mindset. And, you know, it's all about self growth, that personal growth, which is my favorite part of it?

M

Moira McCullough 17:04

Well, it's a game changer, I think, because once it happens, it's probably like, I think what you're describing, is, all of a sudden, you went through all those drafts and drafts. And then on some, when you got to that final piece, it was like night and day, you were like, Oh my gosh, this jumps, I would want to read this, I would want to talk to me at a cafe, or bring me into a class and have me interact with, you know, fellow students. So So you got to that point, was it something where all of a sudden it's December or when you were going through it, starting it in, you know, the summer workout on the drops, knowing that it doesn't come easy first, but also being open to changing your topic? Because you said you went through that? And how do I tell it in a way that is engaging that people want to ask me questions?

D

Dyllen Nellis 17:48

Yeah, so my timeline was that I remember I was like, looking through my journal recently. And I was like, Oh, my God, I was writing my common app essay in October, like that is late. If you're going through a lot of school sites, you're gonna have to do a lot of work. So I found myself very stressed and very pressed for time, I made a whole schedule, because I was like, Okay, wait a minute, I'm stressed, I need to reevaluate what's going on here and figure out how much time I actually have. And what I actually need to do in that time. And I figured out that I would have to write an essay a week. So every single week, I was writing a new college essay, and revising all the previous ones. And that was really tough on top of four AP classes, eight classes, total extracurriculars, you know, there's a lot going on in my life. And I don't want other people to have to go through that kind of stress. Because I know that most people do. Most people associate the college application process, with stress with nerves with, you know, the world's ending, I don't know, if I'm good enough, as a person like that those worries can be avoided, it can be done in a way that is calm, that is fun, and easy. You know, my students who go through my college essay course have told me that have told me that it's reduced their stress significantly. And so I have a lot of time saving strategies that I now teach, from my process of going through it, you know, like how to actually write the essay is so important. It's not just I have an idea, put it on paper, and then know, there are steps. And these steps will make sure that you don't have to rewrite the whole thing all over again, it's all about saving time, because I wasted so much of it.

M

Moira McCullough 19:35

And when you talk about the essays, just to be clear for everyone, it's the it's the you know, personal statement. And then it's all those supplementals that you have to write as well.

D Dyllen Nellis 19:44
Exactly. And if you're applying to the UCS, the for you UC PIQ's personal insight questions as well.

M Moira McCullough 19:49
Okay, there you go. So for anyone who's applying there, so you went through the whole process and you realize, okay, I want to share because if I had to do it again, lessons learned, you would I've done it so differently. And when did that all of a sudden prompt you or to start your company in? Or where people just all of a sudden saying, Oh my gosh, can you help me and review this for me? And then the next person asks you the same question. And then it was like, she told two friends and they told five friends.

D Dyllen Nellis 20:17
Yeah, sort of. So after I went through the whole college process, I was like, really inspired, you know, I was like, Oh, my God, I learned so much stuff. Why does no one else know this, or not no one else. But like, so many other people, a lot of people at my school didn't know this information. And that struck me and I was like, That's not fair, that we aren't being taught this, you know, other schools have these like, college programs, prep readiness, whatever. And so I wanted other people to be able to attain this information easily. And so I then decided to put out some videos on YouTube. And I, because I watched a lot of those videos as well. And I was like, wow, they're they helped me so much. I want to make my own. And I didn't intend, I literally never intended on being a college YouTuber. I just wanted to make three videos maximum, I was like, I only have three videos worth of information to share, then I'm done. I don't want to do this. This is not what happened. So I made those three videos talking about how I got into Stanford, you know, my stats, extracurriculars, my essays. And then I also made a general college application advice video.

M Moira McCullough 21:28
So you produced all these YouTube videos, just as like, here's some helpful tools and tricks for other other students going through the process and as just a helpful tool.

D Dyllen Nellis 21:38
And then people started asking me to review their essays. And so I was actually going into my freshman year of college. So at that point, I was like, no, sorry, I literally cannot I have

no time. I was also stressed in college, because, you know, adjusting to everything was very new. So I didn't edit any essays that entire year. But I did continue to put out some videos here and there. But then once COVID hit, I was like, Okay, well, I have this free time, what am I going to do with it? Well, I want to make more videos, this is something I really enjoyed doing. So I kept making more videos, because I realized I had so much more information to share. And then I once again, it was now free. So I was like, Okay, I can edit essays totally, I can get on consulting calls, I can work with these students. And through doing that, I learned so much more about college essays and college applications in general. And the strategy behind it, that I, I was so inspired again, I kept making more videos, I kept putting out more content, I kept researching the college app process even more. So I wasn't just you know, sticking with a little bit of knowledge I learned when I was 17. I kept learning that stuff, and kept working with the students. And then that's when I decided, Okay, I'm going to make a course because I have all this information. And I think I have figured out a process that works, where you literally just have to follow it. And and there you go, you're able to craft your essay in a way, that's easy.

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Moira McCullough 23:12

So when you say you learned so much more from talking with those students that you were helping, was it just the pain points that they were experiencing the the lack of structure or direction, or what was just such an eye opening experience for your common themes that you saw that students struggled with?

D

Dyllen Nellis 23:32

The storytelling and structure aspects of it, of course, but I think was really inspiring and like, what I learned was that, you know, sometimes I would read, like really good essays, or I would see some essays and get a new idea, you know, something that I didn't necessarily do in my essays, because obviously, the way I did it is not the only way. There are so many other ways of writing a great essay and getting into the schools. So I, I was able to go, Oh, wait, that's really interesting, okay, and then look across several different people's essays and find patterns. And that was really helpful. I found patterns between the structure and I was like, okay, everyone's doing the same things. And these strategies. And so then I, that's how I made the process and put it into a course.

M

Moira McCullough 24:19

Okay, the fact that even you went through it, and it was still so new. I mean, it wasn't as if years past, most people would never want to write an essay for several years after going

through the college application process. That's the last thing that they want to do, or like, I want to forget, forever. That was the worst experience that was a bad, you know, ride and I never want to go back to it. The fact that you're like no, I'm actually more inspired because there's so much more I can do. I've learned so much more I can help others and reduce the the stress level. And I love the fact that you're making it accessible because as you said, you didn't have the opportunity to go out and hire Educational consultants for a package hourly rate or whatever, 1000s of dollars 1000s of dollars 1000s of dollars later, and that's just the essay not even like the test prep or the going reviewing the activities. So So here you are, you're working with students, you've made it into online programming. So do you have online classes and workshops? Do you work one on one? How does that work?

D

Dyllen Nellis 25:26

Yes, so I offer three services slash resources. The first one is college essay editing, and that is done totally online. It is not live. It's where students submit their essays via this form I have on my website, which by the way, is college essay advice, calm, and they fill out the form, they enter their essay, and they submit the payment. And then the essay will be edited within five days, or one day if they paid for a rush fee. And it will be edited by one of the people on my team. So I now have a team of eight editors, my myself included. And so we are all super committed and ready to edit those essays, and help them with you know, the storytelling, the structure, the cohesiveness, the words, the grammar, all of it everything.

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Moira McCullough 26:18

So you get that essay online, and you're looking at it. And that's what you're reviewing it for, from everything from providing tips and guidance and examples of what they can

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Dyllen Nellis 26:30

Exactly like we go through the entire essay and add suggestions, comments, and an overall note of feedback. So that's the first the first thing. The second thing is college essay consulting, or just college consulting in general, where I will meet with students one on one over zoom. And they can just book a time slot on my calendly, once against on my website. So it's not like a package thing. I didn't want to do a package thing where people, you don't have to pay a huge amount for like several meetings. My thing is just like you, you can meet with me however many times you think is needed for you, you know, if you if you do one meeting, they're like I don't want anymore, then that's fine, exactly. But if

you want to continue working with me throughout the whole process, for sure. And literally just see what I'm available and book a time. So that's the second. And the third is the college essay course, which I think is the most valuable resource that I offer, as I've been mentioning it many times. And that is asynchronous students enroll, and they have access to everything they'll ever need to know about college essays. And so they can work through it throughout their entire college application process. It's not like a program with certain time limits. Like they get to have all that information for the whole time.

M Moira McCullough 27:52

The duration that they're in the college journey, search.

D Dyllen Nellis 27:56

Right. Well, the course is available for students for up to two years.

M Moira McCullough 28:00

Okay. And then in terms of you started launching this and putting it all together in a formal business structure website. And then obviously, scaling it you brought on people. So how did you how did you go out and in and recruit?

D Dyllen Nellis 28:17

I had several people that I had already worked with throughout the process, you know, students who I've edited many of their essays, I've met with them resume, I loved what they had to say I love their stories, I love their way of writing. And I was like, I want you.

M Moira McCullough 28:32

So I was just gonna say that's a different type of interview, submit your submit an essay, submit your college essay, and then you'll decide if it's good enough. And we can be part of a team together.

D Dyllen Nellis 28:43

Oh, sort of made me didn't have to write up a little thing about like, why they wanted to be a part of it. So that was only for a couple people, though. For the for everyone else. I

literally just sent out a notice on my YouTube. And on my email list. I was like, Hey, I'm building the team, if you want to apply for this job, here's the forum. Here's the application. And so I had a lot of really high, high quality applicants apply. And I wish I could have admitted everybody, but I don't have enough slots for that. And so I was able to find some students from there and create a diverse team, which was really my goal. So we could serve to multiple students needs. Where are some of your team members? Everywhere. Oh, yeah. I'm at Stanford as someone else's at Stanford, we have a Harvard, Duke, CMU, Dartmouth.

M Moira McCullough 29:39

I'm going to preface it all students, young students, okay.

D Dyllen Nellis 29:43

Yes, I wanted people who were fresh out of the process, because their minds are still very much in it. And they know, they know everything. Because I know just from taking, like one year, you know, by the end of my freshman year, you kind of forget about the college application process and all the intricacies That that are involved. So I had to refresh and like do that research again. So yeah, I wanted people who were who were in that mindset.

M Moira McCullough 30:09

Are you enrolled in an incubator program? They're like one of those entrepreneurial iLab programs that help you from the business side of it scaling, building it out from a network and an infrastructure perspective,

D Dyllen Nellis 30:22

Right? Yeah, No. I'm not, I'm literally doing all my own.

M Moira McCullough 30:28

You're winging it with all these entrepreneurs, all of us, we just go in there, and we crush it just doing anything.

D Dyllen Nellis 30:35

Figuring it out on my own is a humongous learning curve, having no real previous business experience, or like the people in my family don't know a whole lot about like making your own business and stuff. Because I come from a family of artists, okay, like, artists, we will express ourselves in very different things. So I've had to learn a lot online and just meeting people and talking with people has been really helpful. Yeah, is a humongous learning curve,

M

Moira McCullough 31:03

I'm going to take a step back and looking from the website and structuring it, that you can accept applications and paywall and all those other things that go into running a business that people don't forget about their creatives or their business people, but to meld the two as an entrepreneur and be able to do it all, you make a lot of mistakes, you learn a lot, and you work a lot.

D

Dyllen Nellis 31:26

Totally, I could explain that, like different services and the different parts of the business that I didn't understand before, if you aren't

M

Moira McCullough 31:34

Sure,

D

Dyllen Nellis 31:35

Okay, well, in terms of like starting a business, I had to learn that running, you know, running a business is so much more than just offering the services and products that you offer, you know, there's, there's so much managing that is involved. And so first, like, you got to be able to market it. And so, I'll also tell you, like all the platforms that I use, cuz I think this is really interesting. This is something I've had to learn, like, okay, marketing, you know, tick tock, YouTube, Instagram, that kind of stuff. And then you have to, like log your expenses and log your income. And I do that on Google Sheets, any, like, Excel, whatever. building and maintaining your website is a huge thing. I that takes so much time. But I also love doing that, because I love design. So I use WordPress for that. I did have previous experience in that I have been building websites, since I was young, not like coding or anything, but using other services to do that. So WordPress is what I use for that. And then like figuring out what platforms to host your products, you know, for the digital product. I use teachable, that's a course platform. So you had to like I had to go through all the

different correspondences and figure out like, Okay, which one has the best pricing plan, which one has the attributes, or like the things that I need, you know, for my course. And then you have to create an email list to be able to contact your students. And so I use flow desk for that I used to use MailChimp, but I don't like MailChimp, very much Flowdesk.

M Moira McCullough 33:04

So tell me about it.

D Dyllen Nellis 33:06

Yeah, Flowdesk is beautiful. It just it makes my heart warm. I think it's just the aesthetics of it and the message behind it. I don't know, it's very empowering. And I think they were pricing. Yeah, their pricing is a lot less, like it's less expensive. But MailChimp cuz MailChimp only lets you have like 2000 subscribers. I think. Flowdesk is like infinite. It does not. You can literally have as many as you want. But and then it's like a 1919 a month with with some coupon code, which you can easily like find online if you just started it.

M Moira McCullough 33:47

My friend told me it. Entrepreneurs- it's sharing those tips and tricks. And then the payment the whole payment system. Right? There's payment. Yeah.

D Dyllen Nellis 33:57

Yeah. So I mean, I use Venmo and PayPal and square. Right now, I know other people use more sophisticated things on their website, or like stripe and stuff. But I like having multiple payment options. It. It gives people the ability to use what works for them.

M Moira McCullough 34:16

And would you just share in terms of we talked about kind of, if a student wanted to come to you? Do you have the pricing packet pricing online, that students would know. So it's so everything's online? Everything's so what do you what is that essay if I'm sending in an essay to you?

D Dyllen Nellis 34:31

Well, that depends. It depends on the word count. So I can actually go onto my website right now and tell you because yeah, we charged based on word count. Okay, so for less than 199 words, it's \$20 for 200 to 299 words it's \$35 for 300 to 399 words \$40 for 400 words to 409 Nine words, it's \$45 for 500 to 699 words, which is usually like what the common app is. It's \$50.

M

Moira McCullough 35:09

So you know, it's amazing. So it's like, yeah, \$50 if you want to get help for your common app essay and supplementals are like \$35. So I mean, something that's exactly, exactly more manageable. And I think would be so great in terms of when you're talking about the access and trying to get people who may have a high school college counselor who has 400 students that they're trying to work with and may not have the home environment where the parents are able or the family is able to help them with that type of review. So So how do you get the word out? You said you use YouTube tik tok? And what was the other Instagram? Instagram?

D

Dyllen Nellis 35:48

Perfect. I feel like it's mostly YouTube and Tiktok. Like, pretty much everybody who knows me or knows about what I do is because of YouTube, because I've been putting out so much content. But Tick Tock also works wonders. I think Tick Tock is an amazing marketing platform. It's free marketing, healers put out a video, it's kind of hit or miss whether you know, the video pops off or not. But that's okay. It's all part of the game. And it's fun. I love connecting with other other people all over.

M

Moira McCullough 36:17

I think that's the one great thing about social media, it's, first of all, it's a ton of work, the products that you put out, it's not easiest for all those people who think, Oh, I might want to get involved in this. Like, I've been thinking about Tick tock, and I'm like, oh, once I commit, I'm all in. So you really have to dedicate the time and resources for that and make sure it's quality work, because it's just, you know, what, 60 seconds or so or something like that. So, now you're going back to school or home or full time, you're starting in mid to end of September. And you're going to carry on and try to continue on with the business and continue to help students. Yes, okay. It's gonna be hard. I know, with with school and all. That's why I hired the team. I was gonna say you have it, you knew it, and you scaled it appropriately. So yeah, if you had any advice for a student entrepreneur, what would it be?

D

Dyllen Nellis 37:09

So definitely define your brand, and make it cohesive. So when I went into this, I didn't, I didn't know everything that happened, I didn't know it was going to happen. It just kind of happened. Like I didn't know I was gonna end up being a call a YouTuber, or whatever. I didn't know I was going to end up making this business. So I kind of had to figure things out along the way. And at one point, I was like, wait a minute, I need a color theme. Like I need a color scheme. I have no color scheme. I'm, I'm using blues and purples. What What is my color scheme. So I had to, like define that and be like, this specific color with this specific hex code, and use it across all of my resources in my website and everything. So that is one thing. But like, when it comes back to ultimately is what is your mission? What is your mission? How do you want your clients to feel? Or what do you want them to take away from your product, or your service. And so that's the specific feeling that you want to give off. And then make sure that everything in your business radiates that feeling, whether it's, you know, your colors and design of the website and your marketing materials, or the attitude that you present yourself with, and the relationship that you have with your team members. Like everything, all of that has to has to be tied together. And so for me, I feel like I'm grounding myself in that, like, confidence, fun. You like, I think confidence and fun are pretty much my main, my main ones that I want to radiate that like it is possible, you can do this. And it's fun, and it's engaging. And I have fun colors, because I just love bright colors. I mean, look at me, you know.

M

Moira McCullough 38:41

So I'm the same way. I'm all about like the color scheme. And I think it has to be fun because I would, I would just say being an entrepreneur is probably the hardest job ever, and it's so much easier to go get a job, then then launching your own just because you do have to do everything at the beginning. And as you said, it could come down to all of a sudden, you never thought I need to talk about hex colors for a certain image for the brand kit. You know, it's for every every decision that comes across anything that comes across your desk, you are making decisions and something that as you said is going to convey your your mission, your message, your voice, and that in itself. It's a story. So it's it's great advice. It's not for people who think that it's going to be easy, and that they're going to hit the jackpot. After a year of putting in hard work. I tell people I work 48 hours every day. It's exhausting, but it's so. So what would you share a little bit about your award that you just won that you were going to be providing the program to a whole host of schools? I think you alluded to it in the beginning, but if you would just tell us a little bit about that as well.

D

Dyllen Nellis 39:51

Totally. So this year, I am so honored to have won the Ozzie Genius Award. And so the Ozzie Genius Award it is so odd to use a media company. And they are awarding \$10,000 to, to 10 students across the United States. And I was lucky to be one of them for a project that can hopefully change the world, or like make a big impact. And so my project is that I'm going to donate 10,000 of my courses to 10,000 students across Title One high schools in the United States. Though giving these donating these courses, to students who needed the most, like I've been talking about, you know that the lack of access to these educational resources is so important. And so we need to help more low income students have that opportunity, and especially low income students of color as well. And so I am, I've been reaching out to a lot of superintendents of different school districts across the United States, and college counselors and principals. And it's been kind of slow right now during the summer, but I understand because the summer, not everyone's responding to my emails, because they're on vacation, but that is okay, I'm going to do another humongous push, probably in like late August, early September, because I know that's when schools are starting. And so they'll be more responsive. And but luckily, some superintendents have responded to me and spread it with more people like the maybe you're the assistant superintendent, or the college and career readiness person for their district are just like other contacts who can then spread the information. So I'm doing both like a top down and a bottom up approach in terms of contacting the superintendent, so then spread it to their schools, and contacting the college counselors themselves at specific schools.

M

Moira McCullough 41:49

Isn't it amazing how hard you have to work to give something away? I know help so many people that it's like, is anyone listening? There's no of course work to help your students reduce the stress and anxiety and really allowed somebody to flourish and find a place that they can call home. It's great work. So I usually ask my guests, what do you wish you knew before attending college? And that's hard, because you just haven't been in.

D

Dyllen Nellis 42:18

But I do have some advice. So one thing I'm going to talk about that the two different syndromes that it's very common, especially at Stanford, but pretty much at every school, and every college, duck syndrome, and imposter syndrome. So first of all, duck syndrome, duck syndrome is this idea that like, like a duck here, you seem so calm on the surface of the water, like, Oh, I'm just a duck, I'm sitting here, whatever. But underneath the water, they're like paddling super, super hard. And so it's this idea that, like, everyone seems so

Okay, and so normal and so fine. But really, everyone is struggling. And so one thing I had to learn when in my freshman year, Stanford, mostly my freshman fall, was that not everyone has their stuff together, I'll say stuff instead of Yes, word. But, um, not everyone has it together, it may seem like everyone is perfect. But the truth is, everyone is struggling, everyone, like everyone is in the same boat. And so I learned, I learned this in a clot in this specific class where like, certain multiple classes, where, you know, I was scrambling to finish all my work, and I was scrambling to even understand some of the class material, you know, I would read something and be like, I, I literally do not understand what I just read. And so everyone, you know, would chime in, and like, give these really in depth thoughts. And I was like, what, like, I don't I don't understand what's going on. Or like, I haven't even started my essay. You know, it's due tomorrow. After class, though, I would talk with students, and through that, I figured out that people were feeling the same way. Like, there were multiple of us who hadn't started an essay the day before the first draft was due, or there were several, several of us who didn't understand the reading, or the class material. And I don't know if this is just a thing at Stanford, but like, people are really good at BSE at pretending that they have their stuff together in class. And I, I don't think I have the greatest deal at that. I think I'm very obvious when I when I'm kind of scattered, but but they do. And so that's something that I had to realize for myself that it's not that they're all everyone's all perfect and dandy and fine. Like we're all struggling. And that's just part of it. And another thing about imposter syndrome is you know, it's easy to experience a posture, posture syndrome in which you feel like you don't belong or that you're less than other students. And this is one thing that I had to learn is that no one is an expert at everything. You know, we all have our unique niches and passions, and that's literally like how they select In the college application process, the college admission process, like they want people who have their own unique niches and passions in certain things, not necessarily someone who's the best, or who's excellent at everything. And so while someone else may know about, like, for example, like artificial intelligence or computer science, they're super knowledgeable, they've been coding since the day they were born. Like, I don't need to put myself down for not being that same way. Like, I know that I, you know, at the time had my own niche in Visual and Performing Arts, like that was my thing. Other people didn't have that. And so, like, they had something that I didn't have, but I had something that they didn't have. And that's what makes some really awesome conversations, because then you can get together and have these really interesting, you know, like I said, conversations where you're learning, learning new things outside of our own fields. And from that our passions can grow and our passions can change. You don't have to be stuck in what you're interested in the beginning. And we're continuing to learn new things from each other from the classes. And so there's no real need to beat yourself up for not knowing everything right now.

M Moira McCullough 46:12

I think that's so important as people get ready in August. I have my youngest is just getting ready to launch and start his freshman year. And I, I love it when you say those people who are very vocal and confident from the outside, who are in class, and then I just remember, you know, listen, looking at those people and thinking, Oh, my gosh, I couldn't possibly have said that so eloquently. But then you, again, you walk outside, and you delve into that, and maybe they don't have the confidence others have and that as you said, everyone was accepted for a reason. And you're there because they know that you are the right person that sort of fill a particular niche at that particular school. So have the confidence to take risks and go out there and engage and just don't sit in your room because everyone's feeling the same thing, which is great advice. Do you have we're all about food here at college, Scripps. Do you have a favorite food spot?

D Dyllen Nellis 47:08

Okay. So for Stanford, I will be honest, I haven't tried all that there is to try because I have only been there for two quarters. In terms of desserts that I like at Stanford, other students at Stanford are probably going to hate me for saying this. But in all honesty, like I love the dining hall food.

M Moira McCullough 47:28

Yeah, I think some of the dining hall food is some of the best and I my son was at one school University of Richmond. His dessert bar he swears was like the best dinner ever. So there you go.

D Dyllen Nellis 47:39

Yeah. So there are dessert bars. And each dining hall has their own theme, or like their special nights where they serve like desserts or something. And so I remember having like crepes like those are on crepes or like ice cream sundaes, or banana Foster's.

M Moira McCullough 47:53

Is that what they call it? Yes, they do. Yes. Wonderful.

D Dyllen Nellis 47:55

Like all of those things. Were really cool. So I enjoyed that. But I also know that there is a sweet spot that I've been meaning to try on Stanford's campus called decadence. Okay, and they serve Italian gelato and other pastries and stuff. So it looks pretty fancy. sounds really good. I have yet to try it. So I'll be sure to do that.

M Moira McCullough 48:17

I know what we want a picture on Instagram about that with you at Decadence with your favorite gelato. Dyllen, thank you so much for joining us today.

D Dyllen Nellis 48:26

Thank you for having me. I'm This is such a fun conversation that well.

M Moira McCullough 48:32

Keep on doing what you're doing helping all those students and good luck with returning to Stanford crushing your sophomore year. Thank you, Dyllen for joining us today as a student who went through the college application process just two years ago, you took what you learn from the application and essay writing process, and finally college essay advice with a goal to help other high school applicants through the college applications process, strategy and structure matter when writing the college essay. The entire college application process is about understanding who you are as a person and communicating that to other people in an authentic and meaningful way. It is a period of self growth and personal development, which takes time. Dylan also shared why Stanford was the right choice for her and tips for fellow entrepreneurs looking to start a business. You can find all of our show notes and links to the helpful resources mentioned throughout our conversation on our website at [College Scoops.com/podcast](https://Collegescoops.com/podcast). You can learn more about Dylan and College Essay Advice at collegeessayadvice.com. 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 collegescoop.com or follow us on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook