

Episode 97-Eleanora Ferrante

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SPEAKERS

Moira McCullough, Eleanora Ferrante

M Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops podcast! I'm your host, Moira McCullough and today we're talking with Eleanora Ferrante on how to tell your story in five minutes or less.

E Eleanora Ferrante 00:09

And that's what I think is really important about the whole application process. It's your story. It needs to be authentic, it needs to be real to who you are. Like if you can't get in based on who you are. Do you really want to be there?

M Moira McCullough 00:31

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 scoops 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 at patreon.com/collegescoops and sign up as a sustaining listener, insider or Deluxe sponsor. We have exclusive benefits for our members even a College Scoops care package. Eleanora Ferrante has a modest goal: she wants to help you find your path in life. In her work as a college admissions coach she's driven by guiding clients to that 'aha' moment - the one in which they will find their passion, get into a college they love or land their dream job. Eleanora's volunteer experience as an admissions liaison for Cornell University, her alma mater, gave her initial exposure to the college admissions process and begin building her credibility as a well informed resource. By the time Eleanora successfully shepherded her own children, and many of the children of friends and acquaintances through the admissions process to brilliant results her reputation as a subject matter expert was solidified. Square Peg Square Hole coaching is a

combination of Eleanora's many years of professional work experience in consumer oriented roles and decades of volunteer work in civic and cultural organizations. A natural networker, Eleanora's many professional relationships among college administrators, and within various industry sectors across the region are a boon to both her college coaching services and the career coaching she offers for taking that next step post-college. Though her work as a college admissions counselor, Eleanora balances big picture vision with a narrow, obsessive grasp of the small details. She consistently delivers winning results with a lot of heart and a commitment to guiding each student's journey with a personalized approach to the many students she's helped get admission to their "perfect fit" college. Eleanora is a calming presence in an unsettled time. Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. Eleanora, thank you so much for joining us today.

E

Eleanora Ferrante 03:13

Thanks, Moira. I'm always happy to spend time with you.

M

Moira McCullough 03:15

I love reading bios, because I've learned so much about people. And I knew a lot about you beforehand, but reading your bio, and I thought, oh my gosh, you worked in admissions for your alma mater. And I would love to hear a little bit about that any stories that you might share advice and lessons learned that you had from that experience?

E

Eleanora Ferrante 03:32

You know, it was a really interesting period of time, I was a volunteer there. Cornell doesn't call them interviews, because they're not evaluated their contact informational sessions, which I just love that term is really the whole idea for the sessions is to give the students an opportunity to ask questions, right? So and I find that my students are often afraid to bring notes to them. I'm like, No, this is a great time. You can have notes, you can ask me the questions, anything you want is free game. It was an interesting time to listen to them and what was most important to the students. So I learned a lot, which I thought was really helpful for me now doing what I do, and working with students and helping them get into school start to understand what were their fears, what were their concerns?

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Moira McCullough 04:12

What was on students minds? What were some of the questions, common questions that you would get?

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Eleanora Ferrante 04:16

They wanted to know if I had fun, which I thought was really interesting, because I think going to an Ivy League school, there's a certain expectation that it's going to be all work, right? That everybody there is going to be so focused on the academic side. And they were really shocked to hear that I enjoyed myself at college. I met a lot of people. I experienced a lot of things. I was able to have friends come visit on weekends, we could go hiking, but it wasn't just that I was focused 100% on academics we clearly school was important to me and I got there because of a lot of work in high school to get myself there and I knew

there'd be a lot of work in college, but it was a really wonderful experience and I'm still in close contact with them. My roommates are a number of my good friends from there. So I really think that it was important time to building bonds with other people. But the students are so afraid they're so used to being on the whole academic pathway, that they're not sure they're going to have time to experience other things. And it was a great time to do that.

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Moira McCullough 05:17

I love that question because at College Scoops we always say that there's the academic fit. And there's financial fit. And you and I have talked about that. But what they're really concerned about is, it's a first time living away from home, and am I going to find fun? And am I going to have friends to go out with and what do we do when we're not in classroom?

E

Eleanora Ferrante 05:36

Right. And what's interesting is that a lot of times you hear the nightmare roommate story. So I lived in a suite my freshman year, back in those days, there was a faculty room in our suite. And we actually had a male professor and our female suite, you would never see that any longer. It was fine. But we were real mix. Mono bus was an artist, and I never understood I come home and like, I don't know what you're doing. But I see chalk all over the place. And to my other roommates were in industrial labor relations of like, I don't even know what that means when I first got there. But my one roommate from the suite, I mean, I lived with her for four years, I was just texting with her this morning, right? I mean, our kids have grown up together. And I think that's a lot of what college is really meant to be is finding the right community. So it's not just about the alumni network. That's one thing like a lot of schools will talk about, we have a great alumni network. Well, that's not really useful if you haven't made friends. And so finding that social fit, which is what I love about College Scoops as it gives you a little bit more of that sense of will I fit in, I can do the academics, but will I fit in?

M

Moira McCullough 06:36

You mentioned something too, about your roommates, and how different you all are. And I sometimes think if you had the roommate questionnaire that many students have today, if you actually would have picked those roommates, if I had had that questionnaire, I had the same experience as you minus the male professor, I had a triple. And we were so different, and we are still the best of friends. So I think that's another opportunity for students. If they haven't a chance to go in and alumni interview, it's so important to ask those questions that they probably wouldn't ask of an admissions, formal admissions representative,

E

Eleanora Ferrante 07:16

Right? Because it's nice to get a feel for a student who's graduated from there, right? And which is why I encourage that all the time. Because you want to really find out what it's like to be there, you know, and given that it's one person story, but it's still will give you a sense of what the school is like. Yeah, some other things with the interviews I've had students tell me the only reason I'm applying here is because my parents want me to, Oh, interesting piece of information. Thank you very much. Guess who does not get into that school? Right. But I mean, things you shouldn't say, and it's nice that you're free, feel comfortable with me. But I've also had one student lie to me outright and never expecting that I would be able to catch

it. So my kids participate in a particular sport. It's a very unique sport. They are fencers. Right, there's not a lot of them around. And I had a student he was like, Oh, he came and talked to me. He was talking to all about fencing. I was like, Oh, wow, that's really cool. And I said, my kids are fencers. He was like, what? Oh, yeah, they will captain of the team here. And knowing the high school that he went to, I knew those guys. And I said to him, oh, and that's really great. What weapon do you fence with because fencing comes in three, and he tells me at EPI. That's my son's like, that's great. So you have so and so as your as your captain. He's like, Yeah, like, Isn't he a great guy? Don't you really love that he's, oh, my God, he's, you know, he's on and on. I looked at him. I said, he's not the captain there. He was what? I was like, there's nobody by that name on your team. And he just looked at me. And I said, I'm impressed that you knew EPI, able to pull that out. I said, You just lied to me about everything else. Have you ever actually fenced? Now, so okay,

M Moira McCullough 08:54

What happened? I'm so intrigued like at that, at that point in the interview, wrap it up. Right away,

E Eleanora Ferrante 08:59

Right - and that was the thing for him. I said, Why did you think it was so important to exaggerate who you are? We want you for who you are not for somebody you think we want. Because you're going to get here and you're not going to fit. You have to be natural and authentic on these things. And because you want to be at the place that makes the most sense. He was stunned. Nobody had ever called him out on a lie like that before. And I use it as a moment for learning. Because given what I do with students, I want them to understand, say, Look, you go off to Princeton, or Harvard, you're dead in the water with a moment like this, right? Because that will get reported up, said, I'm going to use this as a learning moment for you.

M Moira McCullough 09:40

I think it's absolutely wonderful. That's a way to do it. And you would hope that it would be interesting to follow up where that student ended up. But you would hope that that was a teachable moment where hopefully that was the first alumni interview opportunity he had because then he could quickly kind of reflect and think if I'm lying in this point of the application process. Everything else is up for grabs.

E Eleanora Ferrante 10:04

Right you and that's what I think is really important about the whole application process. It's your story. It needs to be authentic, it needs to be real to who you are. I have students who will tell me that they don't want to put down that they worked at a bible camp over the summer. Well, why like, well, because it's, you know, what, if they don't like people who are, you know, religious? Or are Catholic or whatever will? Do you want to go to that school? Like, if you can't get in based on who you are? Do you really want to be there?

M Moira McCullough 10:34

I think that's so important, because so many times the students are working so hard to get to that moment, where it's more of a chess game, like, will I get in? But the point is, Do I even want to be considered like, Will I thrive once I get there, so it's the game of getting accepted, but then knowing that

that actually is a place where you will thrive?

E

Eleanora Ferrante 10:55

Right. And that's really what I focus on with my students is where's the place you're going to be most engaged, what's going to be the school that gets you to where you want to be in four years. And that could be at grad school, that could be in the military, that could be at the Peace Corps that could be working, you know, on Wall Street or in a hospital, whatever that place is? Like, how do we get you there and find that right space? And how do we get the schools to know who you are? So and this is the interesting piece to me, right? When I look at these students, he said, like they're spending years prepping, right, you're working. And some students are very focused on getting themselves into college, and others are just making their way through high school. But in either case, you've spent at least three, maybe four or five years doing all this work, so that somebody can spend five to 10 minutes reading a piece of paper about you. And I don't know about you, but I don't know a lot of adults who can convey who they are in a piece of paper that somebody will scan through and read environments. And now we're asking 16 and 17 year olds to do this. And to me, oh,

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Moira McCullough 11:59

It's so hard, at any age, it is the elevator pitch and within moments you have to be able to convey something that would make you as the reader or the interviewer, or the hiring manager, stop and say, Okay, I can't wait to continue this conversation.

E

Eleanora Ferrante 12:19

And the interesting part too, for the kids is they are not used to communicating on piece of paper. It's not how they function. They're used to pictures, they're used to text messages, they used to voice an audio, but actually having to write down and describe themselves. Even my creative writers have a hard time describing themselves. Right. And they, they don't understand, you know, elevator pitch is a great word, because your application is a marketing tool. Right? It's so you are marketing yourself to these colleges, and you are trying to sell yourself, right, but in a way that the school has, this is the perfect person for us, like they have all these great criteria, they're going to add so much value here, and we can add value to them. Right? That it's this mutual symbiotic relationship, we are both helping each other to grow into the better, right? So hoping that you're going to come here and you started that club in high school, maybe you'll start something here, or you created that great artwork there. Maybe in high school, you'll create it here you will grade in math, whatever that something is about you and you don't have to have the answer to cancer, right? You don't have to have created something amazing and have your own artwork that's at MoMA, right? You have to be you. But that is what they're looking for.

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Moira McCullough 13:39

So how do you do that? Like, how do you help those students kind of do that impossible task.

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Eleanora Ferrante 13:44

So I'm a big believer in leave no whitespace behind on the application. Right. So the application gives you

a lot of places to talk about who you are. And obviously you know, you're putting in your GPA, it is what it is. And hopefully it's what you want. Ranking is not really a thing any longer. Many schools have walked away from that even some schools don't want to give out GPAs I'm working with one student right now, school doesn't want to give out GPAs. Like, you're going to give a transcript, I don't understand, but they don't want you to put it on your application. But the courses that you've taken tell a lot about who you are as a student, right? So if you've taken higher level classes in the subjects you love, that could be art. That could be math, that could be English, whatever that is, but it's something you clearly love. So they see that progression. They look at your activities to see not that you're well rounded. But you that you're well developed is a big difference. So I don't need you to be doing 30 different things because you've probably spent 10 minutes on each and you haven't slept in weeks. But I would love to see that you really have honed in on a couple of key places. You know, maybe like in my own son's space. He was a fencer he fenced off a lot. He loved it but he was a leader there. He helped others you could really see a growing friend for him. Other kids are musicians, right? So they spend a lot of time whether it be in jazz or choir or whatever. Right. So honing into that. My creative writers, I have somebody right now he is the editor for his newspaper, he's helping out our yearbook. And he has written articles for a couple of companies, like small businesses like ours that just need some help. So he's interned and done some really great work on the outside. So he's like, Well, I have this stuff around writing, like, because you're a writer,

M Moira McCullough 15:31

That's authentic, like that is showing the story makes sense. And there's a flow to it. And it's not a jigsaw puzzle with no connections,

E Eleanora Ferrante 15:41

Right. So all the pieces are together. And a lot of my students don't have the capacity to do a lot in school because they are responsible for things at home. So I had one student on his activities, he actually wrote that he was a vegan chef, because he cooked at home for his family, his mom, the single mom working long hours, his sister was little. So he was in charge of making sure there was food on the table every night. So those kinds of things are really important. So I tell them, it's not just that what you do in school, or after school is outside of school as well. Who are you as a person, you know, and your essays play a big role in this because once you list all your activities, and you tell them that you want to major in x, well, then what else is there? So I really think the essays are a great space for you to tell the rest of your story. Right to let them in on something different about yourself. Yeah, and I love a lot of times you get parents like, oh, I read my kids essay. It's terrible. And I read it go, No, it's just not his sister's essay. I had this last year, sister was really artistic creative. So the essay was very artistic and creative. Her brother, on the other hand, was a numbers guy, right. And so it was very straightforward. His essay, it was perfect.

M Moira McCullough 16:49

And I think that if he had done anything different, that would have been a flag almost because it wouldn't have come from him. That's not part of his story. And it would have shown that maybe somebody else was so involved in writing it that it's just, it doesn't make sense. You already have an expectation of what they may produce, the voice comes out will be that students but you kind of already have an idea of that. So if something comes through that is so far fetched, and in a different voice in a different written capacity. It just is a flag, I think, do you agree?

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Eleanora Ferrante 17:22

Or? Absolutely I tell parents when I first meet with them, I'm not writing your kids essay. I am not inputting their information. Because then it sounds like me,

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Moira McCullough 17:33

My older two, they did share their essays with my youngest refused to which I don't know why I'm disappointed at that. I mean, that's what we kind of hope for, and we give them the confidence that they could write something at the point where it was rigged before he press send. And he shared it with me. I had one like suggestion. And he said, Well, that's not how I would say it at all. I was like, there you go. Hit Send.

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Eleanora Ferrante 17:56

Right. And I think to that point, though, a lot of students think that admissions wants to hear x. And so they try to write that essay. So I had one student last year I took her on in September, a little on the late side, she's like, oh, good news is I wrote my essay. Okay, so I read her essay, it was a canned essay, it was about being a camp counselor. Now, for some kids write about being a camp counselor. It's somebody who just did that this year. And it was great because she wants to work with children in child development. She worked with autistic kids and kids with behavioral issues. It was a great essay, it fit her. But the student from last year I was like, Oh, it was very blah. It didn't tell me much. I read it. I thought I know nothing new about you. And I said to look what you're gonna have to rewrite this. And so we're going to spend some time today talking about other ideas. And then you had three ratios. Oh, I don't have time to do that. What do you mean your time today? I'm not home this weekend. Why aren't you home this week? I'm going away. Where are we going? And there was dead silence. Where are you going that you can't share that with me. She's like, I'm going to go on to NASCAR. Like, excuse me. She's like, I'm going to watch NASCAR races. I NASCAR races detail. And so it turns out that her boyfriend was really into NASCAR. And she was really into NASCAR. And that they were going because he was trialing so to speak and watching what was going on. And then as I kept asking her questions, she's been going to racist for ages. And oh, and by the way, she had a Ford Mustang that one of her mechanic, adult friends was helping her put back together, took the whole thing apart, put it back together. And as I'm listening to her, I'm like, wait a second. What was the major? You told me once again, she's like mechanical engineering. Well, hello. So I had her on her way home from doing the NASCAR races. Why her whole essay and it was phenomenal because it was about the whole experience of being there and listening and just the excitement of watching the cars and following her favorite racer and you know, watching them in the pit and doing all this. Guess what? She got it everywhere she wanted to get into for mechanical engineering, right. And it was such a great essay, and she just looked at me, I didn't think I could write about that.

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Moira McCullough 20:03

Even as you were questioning and having that conversation with her, I could just picture the person to and that, to me listening to your story, I wanted to hear more, and it probably took her far less time. But the voice came out in a way that would make that person one of page turner, I wish it didn't have a word count.



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Eleanora Ferrante 20:24

Exactly. And that's the thing. When I read essays for the first time I read without a pen, right? I just read through, I learned that trick from one of my peers, I read without a pen, and what I can't read fast enough to get to the bottom. Like, that's how I know it's a good essay, because I'm so excited want to know what comes back. And that's the way it was with hers. Right? I was just so excited to hear what came next. And to your point, like, if it's a story that's really authentic to who you are, it just flows. Right? It is not a big deal to write. And it just comes pouring right out. And so that's what I look for, you know, when you're trying to tell your story on paper, without the visuals without that audio, me to be able to say that this is who I am. This is what I love to do, you know, and to think about the whole picture. So those schools that allow you to write supplementals, I think those are a great opportunity to talk about something new and different that you might not see somewhere else. I'm always looking for, what's that activity that you didn't really get to hone in on. Or tell me about the things you do outside of school that we might not hear? You know, I get kids, I have this one boy, he's very creative, but he's wants to be an architect, and he wasn't really sure what else you know how to convey that. And in some of his essays, and it turns out, he loves to crochet, right, which is not something you hear from a lot of guys. But as I got into it with him, it's like, Oh, I love to crochet and I create hats that I give away to people. Okay, here we go. So when they asked me for, you know, a place where you made an impact, well, that's just it, you took this hobby, and you found a way to make it into something that was impactful for others.

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Moira McCullough 22:02

So you're not afraid to take risks, and a college may look at that and say, Oh, my gosh, that's somebody who we want in the classroom, or in our community to help us give back.

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Eleanora Ferrante 22:12

Exactly, you know, and so that's really important, it's being willing to share, you hear this term, a lot of times from admissions to be vulnerable. And to give this other side of you, it's a place that students are often afraid to go, it's not easy to be vulnerable, right? Especially when so many times when you put yourself out on social media, the negative impact that comes from that, right, we see that constantly in the news, you know, people having to retract what they said or apologize for everything. And, you know, a lot of times it's justified. But it's then scary to allow others into who you are. And to be willing to share that and you're sharing with complete strangers, you don't know how they're going to take it.

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Moira McCullough 22:55

You just pointed out something which if you think about it, students are being vulnerable, but they don't view it that way. They're throwing out all these pictures, or these sound bites on social media. But to take it to another level and actually write and compose something that would go deeper than that photo, or that text bite is really hard for them, because that's the way they operate. Now, I think that's a different generation. Where I think I don't know, for me, personally, I'm not going to put you in the same category. But for me, personally, I would have been afraid to put a photo on any type of social media, I would have been fine writing that shows the generational kind of differences, what they considered to be vulnerable and taking a risk by writing something that is their thoughts, their views.

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Eleanora Ferrante 23:43

And they aren't asked to do it a lot.

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Moira McCullough 23:47

They are given a framework and school write about this in this particular way. But to have an unscripted or a creative aspect of it. That's not, that's not something they do.

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Eleanora Ferrante 23:58

Right. And I think that's where they struggle the most with the essay. English teachers are really good at what they do. But they don't always know how to convey how to write a college essay, because it's so different from the typical essay that the students are used to in school, you have an intro body conclusion, you need these points to support your thesis, it has to come in this many words, it has to have this structure to it. And when I explain to students that you don't have to have that, then we then one, you know, they don't know what to do with that. And I try and give them the structure to be free with it. And they have a hard time. It's interesting because I have to give you structure when you don't want structure, right? But um, don't give me an intro paragraph. Like, start with a story and I will tell them all the time just grab your phone and just start talking and just let it all come out. And whatever Siri or your Android takes that and turns that into it's fine because we can turn that into written word, May, it's allowing them just to come out of your head through the heart and out. And then we'll make it into something useful. But I've had students that, you know, every paragraph starts with the same line, I had a girl two years ago. She loves art, right? That's really her space. And she's off doing marketing, like graphic artists, work and marketing, every paragraph she started with, I love art. And then she wrote why. And she was I can do that, of course, she couldn't do that I had somebody else, every paragraph started with a date. And then she taken pictures of herself. And for everyday, she talked about the sequence and where she went with it, right, and how she developed as a person. You know, so it's just that, that freedom,

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Moira McCullough 25:44

There's very few things that are unique in this world anymore. So you know, in terms of coming up with a, an activity that no one's heard of a position that no one has heard of. But you just described how students have been able to convey their passion, their activity, their love of a particular hobby, but the delivery of it has been what's been the differentiator in this story.

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Eleanora Ferrante 26:09

And that tells me a lot, I have a student this year, she's going for a STEM major. So you would expect, you know, if you put a stereotype around that certain kind of person, well, she's very creative. And she's very interesting. And so I have a lot of kids who love Dungeons and Dragons, and my own children are into it as well. And my kids are much older, but you know, it's still a thing. So they're always shocked when I can hold a conversation with them about DNA. And so this one girl, she was trying out what to write about for her extracurricular activity, right about d&d She was that's not academic like, doesn't need today. Like what, like, it doesn't need to be academic. It needs to be who you are. And so she wrote it as a story doing DNA. And so you know, I get the text message. Cool. A new campaign is about to start. And then she wrote it as like what would happen as she's bound to embark on a new campaign for d&d. And then she took a

paragraph to write about what that meant in terms of her social interactions, and how they work together. So she talks about collaboration, and it talks about strategic and you know, how she had to think through problem solving with other people.

M

Moira McCullough 27:18

Supplementals are a way as you're saying, to kind of take something that obviously is not seen anywhere else in that application to give another lens into you as a person, how that may play out in your position in your role in your opportunity to be a student there live, learn and grow on a particular college campus.

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Eleanora Ferrante 27:39

Right. So now you're talking about us, some of you expecting to be one way because she stem, she's just written a story for you, and giving you insight into how she interacts with others. You now know one of her loves his DNA. Well, if you have a d&d club on campus, you know something about what she's going to do. And she put together a portfolio now, portfolios are great for visual and performing artists, it is a time where you have one more way of explaining who you are in a way that makes sense for you, right? So if you're going for that major, obviously, you have no choice but to provide an audition tape or your portfolio. But in her case, I had her put together some of her d&d portfolio work, some of her sketches and things, as well as some things that tied to her stem. And she's sending it off to the schools who are willing to accept it, you know, there's some schools that like, unless you're really good at it, don't send and it's fine. But, again, this ties nicely into this is a love that carries across, right, so here, you can see my photos of the things that I want to study. These are my sketches that I do. So it's the portfolio becomes another piece of who you are.

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Moira McCullough 28:46

And the portfolio, as you said, Only will work right for certain majors for certain schools. And it's not something that you would have to think about as a freshman. Because if you think about it, you're doing that as a student, because that is something that you love. So you're building up that portfolio. So it would be very easy, quote, unquote, to pull that together, and use it as another opportunity to submit information about yourself, right?

E

Eleanora Ferrante 29:16

And that's what this girl did. She went around her room and took like, it's so what was in her room? Right, you know, and no school wanted to see my pictures of the Eiffel tower that people thought were cows, right. So clearly, that was not getting sent anywhere. I don't have the artistic ability, just not my space. But for my students where it is, it's a great way to talk about it. You know, so when I think about telling your whole story, you have all these different aspects of the application that tell a lot about you. But then you have some spaces that you don't control, but you can ask for help to tell your story. So you have opportunity to select your recommenders right so the people who can tell another side of you, and when I look for teacher recommenders I tell Because don't necessarily think about the class where you got the 100 or the A, but where's that class where you really worked hard. And the teacher saw that, they saw that you came for extra help, maybe we're struggling a lot, but you came in, you did what you needed to you ask you ask your friends for help you do whatever it took to get there. And maybe your end grade was an 80. But you worked so hard there.

M**Moira McCullough 30:21**

And that recommender will actually be able to talk to an admissions representative about that story of that journey that that student took throughout the year in their class.

E**Eleanora Ferrante 30:32**

Right? And that's what they're looking for. When you think about outside recommenders. Who are the people on the baseball softball fields on the fencing strip, who know who you are your coaches, whether it be vocal, musical, artistic, the people, you work for your managers, right? So a woman you babysat for, right? Who are those people who know who you are, and can talk about your character side. And then you also have your guidance counselor, you can talk a lot about that. So I have a lot of students this year, in particular, I have a lot of students who have a backstory, and the backstories range, from, you know, simple, call them simple LD, nd, you know, diagnoses, mental health issues, some of them have physical illnesses, or have backstories, because of their parents. And I don't necessarily want to take up the whitespace on their application to talk about that, I want to give the student an opportunity to talk about other things. But that's backstory is why they got 70s, potentially all throughout high school, or why their grades fell off, for those that one year, whatever it might be. And so the guidance counselor has a letter that they provide to the schools, and that's a great space for them to help support the student. And to tell that story, this is what was going on. And this is what they did to overcome.

M**Moira McCullough 31:55**

That's such great advice that you don't normally hear, I don't think students would normally think that there's that other opportunity. And that's how you can use that, again, have an ally, a mentor, somebody in your corner, who can say, you know, here's an explanation, here's what they, as you said, had to overcome. And the student doesn't have to write about it, because that doesn't define them. But somebody else can give some semblance of understanding as to what happened,

E**Eleanora Ferrante 32:22**

Because context is tell us a lot. It's not an excuse. It's just what's going on. You know, most of my students don't talk about it, they don't have their friends don't always know the backstory. There are times when even their teachers may not know the backstory, because they're not comfortable with that. But I think it's important to give context, especially if the admissions person might wonder, well, why are those grades the way they are? What happened here?

M**Moira McCullough 32:49**

And I think it actually shows the student is a strong student for basically saying, you know, I can overcome this, I can do this on my own, but to your point, the context, allows that admissions reader to put it in perspective and see, okay, wow, it's amazing that they got to where they are, given what they had to overcome, or given all the other issues that they were dealing with more jobs that they had to do outside of, you know, their academic,

E

Eleanora Ferrante 33:18

You know, I have parents who sometimes are afraid to let that story be told, like, it's not going to get in because of it. And then again, it goes back to, well, maybe that's not the right space for your child. Because if that school is not prepared to handle that, your kids not going to thrive. Right. But if the school says, We've got this, then you know, they have the support in place to help. And that's really important, as I look at all the students that I've worked with over the years, and even my own kids see, when they needed help, they needed to be in a place that could provide that. And, you know, I think my kids were lucky that I didn't know that going into the process with them. You know, my kids are much older. Right. So I didn't think about that back then. And I think we just got lucky that the schools that they ended up in, have that support and how critical that has been to success of both my kids.

M

Moirra McCullough 34:13

Well, I always love asking our guests who are parents, like take off that professional, you know, hat and as a parent, any advice that you would have for parents going through this the first time having been there and done that? What would you impart for those parents?

E

Eleanora Ferrante 34:30

Yes, I think a couple of things. One is something you already have talked about. It's not your process, right? I work with the students and I tell them I will copy the parents on everything we do because one, you're underage and two, they pay the bills, right? But this is your process, I expect you to step up and do the work. I have them sign the contract. It's the first moment many of them adult, right. And I use it as a verb with them. It's time to learn to adult, but the parent needs to step back and allow that to happen. And Trust that I'm going to make sure that they will, they won't fall apart, right. And that will happen. But trust your kin, to do that as well. Because learning to do it now will save some of the bumps that you're going to encounter in college. Right? So being able to step back, and to know that they're going to end up in the place they were meant today. And it's not necessarily the place you think they're meant to be. Right, but that works for them. My kids ended up wanting to go to schools that I was surprised by to be perfectly honest, given what I thought I knew about my own kids. Wait, what? That doesn't make sense. You know, but it does, I saw how they both flourished where they are.

M

Moirra McCullough 35:42

I had the same experience. And at the end of the day, too, you have an you are paying for it. Everyone's sacrificing so much to send their kids to college. And actually, I said it said to our kids, like, you're lucky now everyone has this opportunity. So you know, let's come to agreement, I gave you the wings, you know, I gotta let you go. But you'll have to convince me to that. And that's through everything that you've just described, the interviews that they do the essays that they write, that this is a place that's worth the investment where you will thrive, and it's your choice. So and I always say I make mistakes every day. I remember my parents always saying everything always works out. And I used to hate that phrase. And here we are, again, it's probably one of the best phrases that parents can use as a reminder to their kids as well.



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Eleanora Ferrante 36:32

And I think you need to trust in your kids intuition. You know, I have a lot of parents who think that their their student has to go away, they can't live at home can't go to school nearby, you know, the only way they can really experience colleges away. And I'm here to tell you, that's not the case, you have to know your own kid and trust them. My daughter decided to stay home. But the day she started college, I flipped the switch and like you're officially an adult, and you need to take care of the things that you would have been taking care of at school. And in some ways, I think she became more of an adult more quickly. For living in Hong Kong. I don't know how many other college freshmen were our food shopping and cooking for a family. Right? Because she was taking part in that just so she didn't have a dining hall to go to. Right. Yeah. And she had to manage doing laundry in a house where there were other people doing laundry, and she had to manage getting to school on time. So it wasn't just rolling out of bed down the hall and down the hill to get to class. She had a 45 minute drive. Right. So making sure she was on campus, enough time allowing for traffic and so forth. And so for her, you know, not having the transition of dorm life was really helpful. And she did all the other transition that many students don't do until much later. So I think you really need to trust where makes the most sense for your your child. And, you know, depending on where you live, there are a lot of great schools nearby. You don't have to go.

M

Moira McCullough 37:59

Exactly. I used to say I wanted to go so far away, and I ended up going 35 minutes from home. But as my parents said, we still would like a call once a week. And if not, we can drive up there. We will. I'll never forget my dad I had. And we didn't have cell phones at the time of I one of my friends ran out of the library found me in the nursing building, because that was a quieter place that night to study saying Your dad has walking the halls of the library. And they actually got the intercom system to work and I'm like I missed the Sunday call. So I would have done the same thing. It's great. You have shared so many great points and so much information for both students and for parents. I love that. What do you wish you knew, before attending college,

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Eleanora Ferrante 38:51

That it's okay to not know what I want to study. And it's okay to change my mind. And it's my journey. So just because everybody else has a certain expectation for me. That doesn't have to be what I do.

M

Moira McCullough 39:08

Oh, for all those students out there that are going undecided and nervous about that that is the best piece of advice from somebody like yourself. So that is wonderful. Well, you know us at college, Scripps, we love food, so any food recommendations that you would have on a college campus that brings you back?

E

Eleanora Ferrante 39:26

So you know, it's funny you say that because I was thinking long and hard about that. And I was up at my alma mater earlier this summer. And the one thing that I always loved Cornell has one student union on campus where they have the IV room so it's down in the basement. And if you go down the basement and all the way into the back you find the ice cream box for lack of a better word and in there are chocolate ice cream sandwiches like chocolate ice cream, which you could never find anywhere. So my all time favorite moment was That to always get my ice cream sandwiches on campus.

M Moira McCullough 40:03

Oh boy, you and I need a road trip. And you're good mom. I'm gonna follow you. Follow you to that IVY room

E Eleanora Ferrante 40:11

I was thinking about this one too as my husband is a Penn State alum and he loved his old college diner with the sticky buns that they griddle. Nothing like griddling a sticky bun in butter to make it terrible for my cholesterol but they are so good.

M Moira McCullough 40:31

Wow, I thought you were going to mention the ice cream. But the competition with the ice cream I think grilled sticky buns wins.

E Eleanora Ferrante 40:39

They are honestly, don't tell my doctor, they are the best things ever.

M Moira McCullough 40:43

You only live once. That's what I always say we only live once and we work out to get to enjoy that sticky bun. I&r, thank you so much for joining us today. That was a great conversation and so much wonderful advice for both students and parents.

E Eleanora Ferrante 40:57

My pleasure where I love having the chance to talk with you about this and I wish the best for all the students.

M Moira McCullough 41:05

Thank you Eleanora, for joining us today to share how students can tell their story in a way that will stand out with an admissions reader. Being vulnerable is key. Being able to convey why you're a good fit for that school and why that school is a good fit for you will set you apart from other applicants. being thoughtful about your recommenders and asking your college counselor to share any backstory will again provide a complete picture of who you are and how you will contribute and engage in that particular college campus. If you do have any opportunity to interview do it. But do not embellish or lie about who you are and what you do. You never know who's on the other side of the table and who they know. You can find all of the show notes and links to the helpful resources mentioned throughout our conversation on our website at CollegeScoops.com/podcast, you can learn more about Eleonora and Square Peg Square Hole coaching at

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