

Top of the Stack

How independent counselors can give students a leg up in college application process

What strikes fear into the hearts of the most confident high school students and their equally confused parents? The college application process. Whether an early bird or late arrival the summer of senior year, there is help available to assure a student's applications will be competitive in the highly selective college market.

Students from all over the country work hard to earn a place at the college of their choice. The process is daunting but with the help of their school guidance counselors, they can get through the application. Thomas County seniors have access to their school guidance counselors to answer the many questions and handle the maze of information needed to barrel through an application, but these busy counselors work with all the seniors applying to college in their school.

To have a competitive edge with admission committees, seniors (and sometimes sophomores and juniors) around the country have found there is additional help available to stand out from the crowded pack. They have learned the inside game to college acceptance. When a student finds they need more one-on-one help, especially when confused about their options or they need an edge in the competitive process, it is then an independent counselor can make the difference.

Anna Lee Jackson, a freshman at the University of Virginia and graduate of Thomasville Scholars Academy, started her process late and didn't tour campuses until her senior year.

"I did my SAT prep in the summer and it was more stressful cramming all into my senior year," she said. "Seeing all the colleges in my senior year kept them fresh in my mind but it was too much to process."

Her goal was to major in graphic design. She was a highly competitive student but had no clear idea about where to apply or what to do.

"I needed someone to keep me on track [with applications] while I was in school," she added.

Jackson turned to Cynthia Hancock, an independent counselor, to help her maneuver through the application process. Hancock had 13 years of experience working with high school students in Louisiana and California before moving to Thomasville. She offers her students a broad understanding of the many different college options available that many may not know about.

Hancock provides a platform to help college hopefuls learn who they are, what they want and how to achieve their goals through attending a college that fits their needs.

"One of the most important things college bound students need to remember is cumulative GPA (Grade Point Average) means 9th - 12th grades," she explains. "It's hard to start in the 12th grade worrying about raising your grades. You can't really change things at that point."

Hancock says the junior year is "the most important" but she likes to meet with students in ninth grade to "plant seeds and let them germinate."

"Each child needs to be proactive and by starting early it helps ease the stress," she said. "It is very rewarding to go all the way through the process with them."

Hancock likes to meet with sophomores monthly to get to know each other. It makes things much easier when there is a relationship before the application needs to be written. She helps them understand the coursework that will help them meet their goals and provides SAT and ACT preparation, an important task that makes a difference in scores.

"I can't recommend colleges to them that are a correct fit if I don't know the student," Hancock explains.

Hollin LeGette, a senior at Brookwood School who will be attending Samford in the fall, was accepted at all the schools she applied which gave her a real opportunity to select the one she felt best met her needs. Because LeGette's sister was getting married in the fall of her senior year, her mother hired Hancock to give her daughter the needed attention to the college application process, knowing she did not have the time to devote to both.

"She [Hancock] knew how competitive the colleges were. I was overthinking and she settled me down and convinced me to take a chance on my reach schools," LeGette explained. "I started late, at the end of my junior year. She was very helpful, and taught me how to do the application on my own, but she was always available. She made sure everything was in my own words and because each college

