

Finding the right college fit

By Lee Stephens

Just 57 percent of students graduate after six years of college. That's a statistic from the U.S. Department of Education that's hard to believe, yet all too true. And the attrition rates are dramatically higher for nontraditional learners, those with learning disabilities and special academic needs.

By law, postsecondary institutions must accommodate students with learning challenges. Because schools provide varying degrees of educational support, the vast number of educational options can overwhelm even the best intentioned parent.

Robin Wolfe, of Wolfe Educational Consulting, helps take the mystery out of the school selection process. With 20 years in the communications field, a Master's Degree in Education from New York University and a Post Master's Certification in Student Life and Development from the University of Miami, Wolfe says her mission is to help find the right educational fit for each student.



Killian High School senior Erin Veingrad works on a college application with advisor Robin Wolfe of Wolfe Educational Consulting

"If you believe it is crucial for your son or daughter to make a successful transition from high school to college," Wolfe said, "then write an excellent college application and essay and choose a school that makes the best fit for your student."

"The optimal post secondary choice, one where a student can find social and academic achievement, will help a young person develop and reach their potential and beyond. A good college choice will enable your student to feel good about themselves, develop a sense of self efficacy, a feeling that they can do it, build their career skills and ultimately function as an independent, productive citizen."

Wolfe is no stranger to the challenges of college selection. Dealing with her three sons — the eldest at Tufts University, another at the University of Arizona and the third a junior in high school — has helped her develop insight into the way education can affect a child's self esteem, interactions, academic expectations and family dynamics.

"Two of my sons were diagnosed with learning disabilities at an early age," said Wolfe. "Since disabilities are frequently genetic, I was on the lookout after my first son was diagnosed. We were fortunate to develop an excellent cache of professionals — child neurologists, psychiatrists and psychologists — we could turn to for advice."

Finding the right medicines and optimal academic environments was a challenge; the stress affected every family member." When it came for college, Wolfe, like many parents, and her son were not satisfied with the guidance they received in high school.

"My son wanted to go out of state, experience a whole new environment and start fresh," Wolfe said. "It became a mission and we focused on college application and selection over Christmas break of the senior year."

They researched schools, chose seven possibilities, visited three and ended up selecting the University of Arizona and their SALT (Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques) center because of the one-on-one tutoring, learning technology and total academic support it provided.

Wolfe learned first hand about how to research schools with the right support, how to apply with LD, and the importance of self-advocating in college. "The most successful student is one that can verbalize their disabilities, knows their learning style and can communicate this to teachers in order to get the assistance necessary to achieve," Wolfe said.

"All college retention research points to three critical factors for success in college: Finding one good friend, developing a relationship with a faculty member and being involved in school activities."

At UA, Wolfe's son took a smaller, more manageable course load, became involved with a fraternity, used the SALT center for tutoring and thrived. He worked part time at his Tucson apartment complex in marketing and is currently engaged in a summer internship in the sales and marketing department of a New York hotel chain.

"My heart swells when I hear the happiness in his voice," Wolfe said. "To quote my grandmother, 'Nothing succeeds like success.'"

Wolfe says she finds it personally motivating to experience a young person's achievements and witness the happiness it brings.

"Nothing is more gratifying than seeing someone find their passion and feel good about who they are and what they do in life."

For more information about Wolfe Educational Consulting, call 305-704- 8131 or email < rkcpom@aol.com >.



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