

3 College Admissions Trends to Look For in 2017

By Patrick O'Connor Ph.D



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Most schools have only been in session for about a month, but many high school seniors are already experiencing Hump Day in their college applications. The first few days of the school year were filled with excitement about the prospect of going to college, and filling out a college application even seemed kind of fun. But now that homework is starting to build up, and students are on their twelfth draft of their college essay, it's getting a little harder to be excited about college — especially since right now, just graduating from high school seems like a pretty remote idea.

Addressing this issue from a counseling perspective is important. Completing a college application is a lot like the work students will do in college; it offers the chance to be introspective, but it also requires students to move forward. It might be tempting—and easier—to try and motivate students with a pep talk, but students will be better off learning how to work through these challenges by motivating themselves. You can facilitate this important skill acquisition with one of these approaches:

Same time next year I had a student a couple of years ago who came into my office with a major case of application block—no matter what they did, or what they thought about, they just couldn't motivate themselves to complete a college application. "This is pretty awful" he said, "at this point, I'll be waiting tables after high school." "No" I responded, "you'll be in college a year from now. It's just a question of which one."

That somehow broke the trance. Realizing that he was going to be sitting behind a desk at some college—any college—was enough of a motivator for him to realize things were going to be OK. In fact, knowing that inspired him, and many other students, to look at the college application process and think, "Well, OK, if I'm going to some college, it might as well be a good one." Many of these students went on to become college application ninjas, and ended up at places perfect for them, once they could see themselves there.

Tours do it too. This same approach to self-motivation can occur when students step away from the college application process to visit a campus. Filling in an application can seem like a pretty abstract exercise to some students, especially if they have never visited the campus of the college they're applying to. Once they breathe some college air and sit it on a class, the impression can be enough to get them through the application process, writing essays that have greater authority and voice.

What's really interesting about this approach is that it can also work if the student visits a campus they have no intention of attending. By simply being reminded of what it's like to "go to college", students see the application process as more real. Yes, it's a little weird, but it works.

Write on the weekends Students who go to school all day, have sports practice, eat dinner, do homework, and then start writing college essays at 11:00 on a weeknight all have one thing in common—the essays they write are terrible. Scheduling 1-2 hours on Saturday or Sunday for college apps makes completing them something special, and allows students time away from the process to bring fresh energy to their writing. It also means that most students can complete one application a weekend, finish all of them by Halloween, and still enjoy senior year. Now there's a plan.