The Novel: Comprehensive Narrative Advising and Application Support
8th - 11th Grade Start

Every student brings a unique constellation of interests, strengths, challenges, and goals to the college application journey. In consultation with each student and family, I provide support where I believe it provides the greatest value, adjusting as the throughline of the application takes shape, guiding students through meaningful choices. Some benefit from regular meetings; others make greater progress through concentrated periods of work. Regardless of the advising cadence, I emphasize calm, clear task lists, academic persistence and resilience, and the early exploration and development of a passion project with a quantifiable impact. This project may eventually dovetail with a required capstone, CAS project, or extended essay requirement. As the student's transcript, test scores, activities, experiences and passion project evolve, I create a balanced, innovative college list in partnership with the family.

Helping young people understand and share their stories is the heart of my advising practice. I support my students through brainstorming, writing and revising their personal, supplemental and honors college essays, teaching them old-school craft techniques. We pay close attention to tone, diction, use of concrete imagery, effective structure and pacing, moving beyond familiar word packages into strong, authentic voices. As part of my advising, I model appropriate and responsible use of AI, one of many college-readiness skills my students learn, along with critical thinking, independent learning, how to ask for help, and time management.

Most of my seniors complete their Common Apps by early September and, when relevant, UCs by October. That means they can experience and savor senior year with the bulk of their application work completed. It also means apps get submitted ahead of scholarship deadlines. My support for admissions correspondence, interviews, waitlist LOCIs, offer negotiations and final decision continues through May 1.

Sample Advising Pathway

9th Grade (4 meetings, research, asynchronous support)

My approach is exploratory. I meet with the student once or twice each semester. At this stage, I am getting to know the student and taking note of potential narrative connections, helping the student make thoughtful choices, pursue genuine interests, and plan their high school experience. Meetings may be 1:1 or with a family member. We may focus on summer enrichments, academic or extracurricular guidance, or supporting a developing interest.

10th Grade (6 meetings, research, asynchronous support)

My advising becomes more focused as the student's interests, strengths, and priorities begin to take shape, though I continue to encourage self-study and exploration. We might meet twice during the fall and three times in spring, with additional meeting clusters for newly onboarded students. I begin to consider what the "throughline" will look like, and we explore ideas for a passion project with quantifiable impact. Sometimes I connect students with academic support and other resources. I may present specific colleges and programs, or assign virtual visits or other research tasks. Summer planning and passion projects become a focus during the second semester.

11th Grade (8 meetings, research, asynchronous support)

During 11th grade, I meet with students more frequently. (If onboarding, we will meet intensively for the first 6 weeks.) Some students prefer regular meetings and/or short check-ins as they complete assigned task lists. Others work more productively through clustered intensives surrounding a particular goal or passion project milestones. College and program exploration becomes increasingly substantive, and I draw on campus visits to over 90 colleges and universities to help my students understand the differences in institutional priorities and values. Together we develop a college list based on admissions probability, academic opportunities, institutional culture, affordability, and overall fit. A list based on need-based aid will look different than a list based on merit scholarship opportunities. I pride myself on educating families about the differences and positioning students to receive aid packages from great-fit institutions.

At the end of 11th grade, we have a family meeting to finalize a list of 8-12 colleges and universities and sign off on the summer timeline.

Rising Senior Summer (10 meetings, asynchronous support)

The summer before senior year is typically the most concentrated phase of my work with a

student. We may meet regularly through the summer, or else schedule writing and application intensives to accommodate internships and vacations, depending on the student's commitments and the family's preferences. I present/review the full Common Application, making sure the student understands each section, and together we finalize the alignment of the application with top college choices. At that point, we turn to brainstorming, writing, and revising. I review and evaluate drafts, provide written or video feedback, and assess how application pieces fit within a larger story or "throughline". The balance between live meetings and asynchronous feedback during this stage of application preparation will be different for every student.

12th grade/Senior Year (8 meetings, asynchronous support)

At the beginning of senior fall, the student completes remaining supplemental essays and submits Early Decision and/or Early Action applications, unless it is determined that a Regular Decision timeline (later submission) will result in a stronger application. When relevant, we turn to University of California applications in October. Some students split applications between Early Action and Regular Decision. Others require interview preparation and support. The amount and type of work required during this period varies substantially according to the student's final college list and application strategy. I remain available to support agreed-upon RD applications, review Letters of Continued Interest (LOCI) and Waitlist responses, and advise on negotiations and final decisions. I invite every family to an exit interview which includes a celebration of student success along with college success tips based on my experience as an English professor and undergraduate advisor at Vanderbilt, Marquette, and the University of Miami.