

IECA⁺ INSIGHTS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATION

Spring 2024

Unlocking the Psyche

Understanding Generation Z's
Mindset and Motivations

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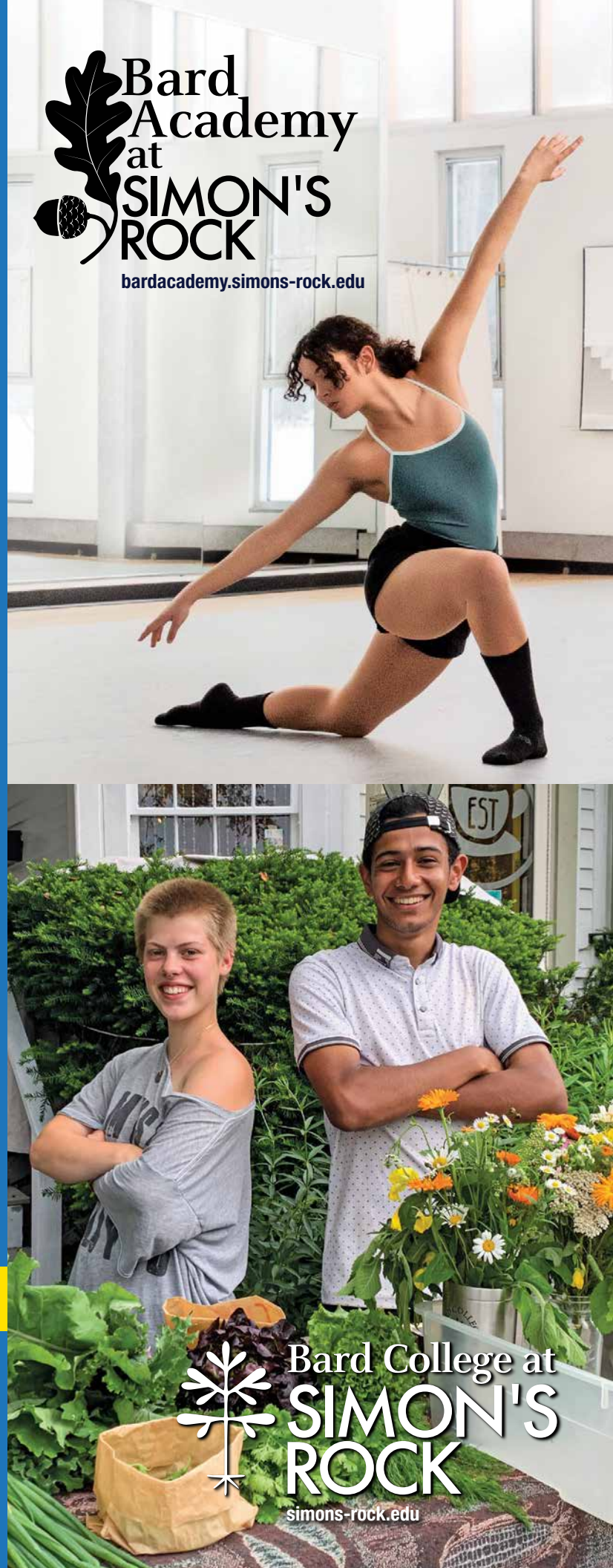


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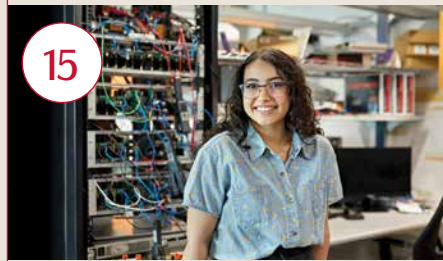
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President's Letter

Promises Made, Promises Delivered: A Reflection on IECA's 2022-25 Strategic Plan



Ibrahim Firat

As my term as President of IECA comes to a close, I am thrilled to reflect on the significant progress we have made together in fulfilling the promises outlined in our IECA 2022-25 Strategic Plan.

Advocacy & Awareness

Since the Varsity Blues scandal in 2019, our profession has faced continuous scrutiny in the media, popular culture, and through various legislative efforts at local and state levels. In response, our Government Relations Committee has worked tirelessly to address these challenges with timely and tenacious efforts. Despite this, we have often found ourselves reacting to news and legislation rather than proactively shaping the narrative. In a significant shift toward proactive advocacy, we organized two Advocacy Days, in March 2023 and March 2024. During these events, we engaged with over 100 legislators in the US House of Representatives and Senate, advocating for issues critical to the students and families we serve, as well as those we don't directly work with. Our focus has

been on promoting transparency in college outcomes and costs, financial aid, and addressing adolescent mental health. These efforts have successfully positioned IECA as the premier resource for independent educational consulting. Legislators and legislative committees now seek our expertise for hearings and formal support for bills. This achievement is a testament to our strategic planning, resource allocation, and execution, underscoring the importance of our continued commitment to advocacy.

Education

Education is at the core of IECA, representing the epitome and pinnacle of our organization. In response to evolving needs, we have embarked on a journey of reinvention, reshaping our educational programming to ensure it remains relevant and impactful. Our approach is tailored to meet the diverse needs of all our stakeholders while maintaining the highest quality of content delivery. In the past few years, we have:

- Rebranded the Professional Member Business Retreat as the virtual Business Forum.
- Hosted three global in-person outreach events/symposia (Istanbul, Turkey in 2022; Milan, Italy in 2023; and Madrid, Spain in 2024) to serve our members worldwide.
- Delivered virtual and in-person roundtables focusing on specific areas, specialties, or the life cycles of independent educational consultants (IECs).
- Facilitated virtual College Conversations; College Conversations Engineering/CS, Global, and LD/ND In Focus; and School and Online School Conversations with admission reps worldwide.
- Introduced Wellness Wednesdays to prioritize the mental and physical well-being of our members, enhancing their ability to serve students and families effectively.

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In Focus

This year marks the 25th anniversary of IECA's *Insights*!
We thought you would enjoy seeing its progression over the years.



1994



1995



1997



2006



2014



2018

Featured IECA Upcoming Events

Summer Training Institute July 22–26 | Virtual Event



This five-day training is designed for those who are in the early stages of working as an IEC and for those who are considering joining the profession. **Both IECA members and non-members are welcome!** The week includes both large group sessions and small group discussions on managing and promoting a business, working effectively with students and families, ethics, and building a knowledge base about the wide range of options available to students. We also offer deep dives into specialty areas along with many opportunities to network with other participants and the faculty, including time to informally meet and chat with those living close to you. All sessions are recorded and available to registrants through August 31, 2024.



Registration is now open! For more information and to apply, visit our website: link.IECAonline.com/STI

Annual Town Hall August 20 | Virtual Event

Join us live on Zoom this summer for the virtual IECA Town Hall. You'll hear from CEO Mark Sklarow, our 2024-25 President of the Board of Directors, and a number of IECA officers on the state of the association, how we have come through the 2023-2024 year, and what's ahead for the coming months. The Zoom link will be shared in 5 Minute News and available on the IECA Member Network calendar closer to the event date.

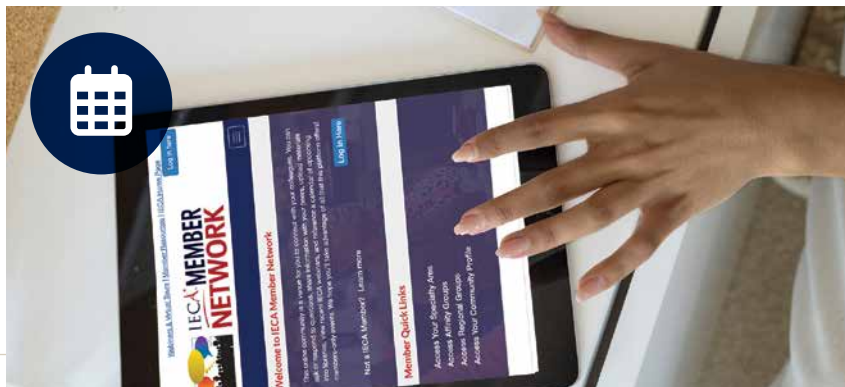
Fall College Tour: Heartland to the Twin Cities

September 16-20 | Des Moines, IA to Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN

IECA's College Committee and IECA staff are excited to offer a five-day tour fall tour of Midwest colleges, available to current IECA Professional and Associate members. Colleges on the tour will include Iowa State University, the University of Iowa, Cornell College, St. Olaf College, Carleton College, Macalester College, and more! Registration will open in July.

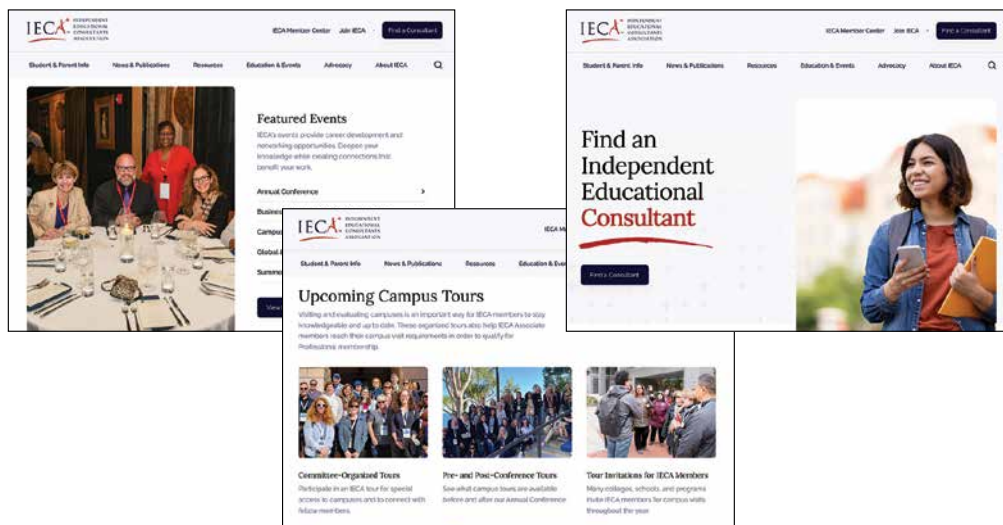
IECA Events Calendar

For the most up-to-date calendar of upcoming events, visit the IECA Member Network: network.IECAonline.com



New Website

We are excited to launch a redesigned IECA website this summer, with new enhancements and features that will make your online experience even more seamless and enjoyable. These include a new, modern design; an enhanced online "Find an Independent Educational Consultant" directory for students and families as well as an improved members-only directory; intuitive site organization; enhanced member account functionality; and more! We will share further information as the launch approaches to ensure a smooth transition.



President's Letter, from page 4

- Developed programs on major topics and emerging trends impacting our membership, aimed at educating members on critical issues such as student mental health, AI, and educational challenges.
- Created resources for conference presenters.
- Begun exploring and developing various educational offerings, including one-day and half-day symposia; education intensives; leadership training programs; a new Business Growth Institute; and professional development workshops.
- Conducted consistent monitoring and evaluation of current offerings, relying on member feedback to inform the development of new programs.

Through these initiatives, IECA continues to adapt and thrive, ensuring that our members are equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate the ever-changing education landscape.

Professional Excellence

In 2022, we made a commitment to elevate professional excellence and standards by engaging in original research, publishing white papers, and collaborating with various educational institutions and organizations. Our goal was to enhance the value of your membership, the reputation of IECA, and the prestige of the profession as a whole. As we approach the midpoint of 2024, I am proud to report that we have already achieved the following milestones:

- Expanded our collaboration and partnership with the University of California certificate program to facilitate continued education and the integration of graduates into IECA and the IEC profession.
- Developed and released comprehensive *State of the Profession* surveys, gathering insights from over 1,000 IECA members to inform governments and the media about our profession.
- Created a detailed *Boarding School Directory*, in collaboration with School Connections, to assist families and students in making informed decisions.
- Developed relationships with the offices of nearly 100 legislators over the last two years through our advocacy efforts.
- Initiated the integration of the American Institute of Certified Educational Planners (AICEP) into IECA.

Membership & Engagement

In this ever-evolving environment, we promised in 2022 that IECA would adapt and reimagine membership levels and categories to engage any and all of those who contribute to our profession with one purpose in mind: ELEVATE IECA, IECs, and the profession. In 2024, we have:

- Formed standards and structured our Regional Groups for more effective collaboration.
- Expanded our Affinity Groups to cater to the diverse interests and needs of our members.

- Enhanced outreach efforts to non-affiliated IECs and school counselors, providing pathways to membership.
- Created leadership pathways for our members to get involved in various committees and volunteer roles.
- Established systems and processes to track member volunteer efforts and recognize their involvement within IECA.
- Improved the diversification of our members, reflecting the evolving landscape of our profession.
- Enhanced standards for and professional development of our members through the Member Network.
- Restructured membership requirements for members with disabilities and/or challenges, creating pathways for them to maintain their membership.
- Assigned committees to examine Student and Retired/Emeritus categories for more engagement with our membership.
- Maintained membership dues while continually adding more benefits and value to each membership category.
- Explored various opportunities to expand membership categories, with finalization pending in 2025.

We have achieved remarkable success by integrating the principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) across all four strategic drivers, rather than treating DEIA as a standalone focus. This intentional and impactful approach to DEIA is unprecedented in our organization's history.

Realizing these accomplishments within just two years is a testament to our dedication and hard work. During this period, I have had the privilege of forming over a dozen task forces or working groups, consisting of volunteers from our committees and membership at large, to explore various avenues for achieving our strategic plan goals.

With one more year to go for our strategic plan to be fully realized, I am proud to say that our team of officers, board members, our CEO, staff, and all of you have already accomplished the majority of our goals. **Promises made, and promises delivered.**

As I transition from my role as President to Chair of the CEO Hiring Committee and Past President, I am excited to embark on a new professional challenge: searching for, developing, hiring, and integrating our future CEO to succeed our longtime CEO, Mark Sklarow. So, this is not a farewell, but rather a "See you soon," as we tackle this new challenge and opportunity for our association.

With heartfelt thanks,



Ibrahim Firat, MBA
IECA President



Unlocking the Psyche

Understanding Generation Z's Mindset and Motivations

By Karen W. Long, MA, IECA (MA)

As a former advertising executive, I lived this mantra daily: know your audience. That same directive holds today for independent educational consultants (IECs) and the population we support and guide—our Generation Z students.

They Are “Digital Natives”

As the newest cohort entering adulthood, Gen Z stands on the precipice of shaping our future. Born roughly between 1997 and 2012, this generation has been raised in a world replete with digital technology. Gen Zers are also called “Zoomers,” and rightly so, because they helped typify online education via the Zoom platform.

Within the intricate tapestry that defines Gen Z, their identity as “digital natives” stands prominently. Their lives, seamlessly intertwined with the internet, smartphones, and social media, have fostered unique skills and expectations that have permeated our roles helping them manage the college application experience. The College Board’s recent shift to a digital model is the latest addition to the online college admissions landscape. In a recent *Boston Globe* article, New York City public school English teacher

Ariel Sacks was quoted as saying, “It seems to me like they [the College Board] are maybe trying to cater to this generation.”

For Gen Z, information acquisition is rapid and streamlined, mirroring the immediacy of digital searches to which they are accustomed. This intrinsic characteristic challenges traditional educational paradigms, necessitating an evolution toward more interactive and digitally integrated learning environments. When we visit campuses, we see firsthand how colleges and universities have responded to change by implementing robust technology for students to learn, research, and communicate. Libraries have evolved to support students’ digital preferences. Hybrid learning, borne out of necessity during COVID-19, is here to stay. Summer pre-college programs previously available only as on-campus offerings are a thing of the past; online summer sessions enable students to explore academics and maintain summer jobs and athletic commitments. The digital implications for education are profound, pointing to a need for technologically-advanced learning spaces that foster a sense of participation and inclusivity. The digital realm is more

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Karen W. Long, Long College Admissions Advising, can be reached at Karen@LongAdmissions.com.



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than a backdrop for Gen Z; it is a fundamental part of their identity and how they interact with the world around them.

They Are Committed to Authenticity and Social Justice

Gen Z's acute inclination toward authenticity and social justice is not just a preference but a pronounced characteristic of their collective identity. Raised in an era where the digital world has provided unprecedented access to information, this generation possesses an enhanced ability to discern authenticity from fabrication and values transparency above all. Their upbringing amidst global conversations on climate change, racial inequality, and gender rights has imbued them with a profound sense of responsibility and activism, and the pursuit of social justice influences their expectations from educational institutions. They are drawn to environments where the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is stated and actively demonstrated through tangible actions and policies on campuses. Educational establishments that authentically engage in these practices, from reducing their environmental impact to ensuring a varied and inclusive faculty and student body, resonate deeply with Gen Z's core values. Students' demand for authenticity and a proactive stance on social justice issues by educational institutions reflects Gen Z's broader aspirations to foster a more equitable and sustainable world.

Fortunately, Gen Z has broken down many of the stigmas associated with discussing mental health, championing openness, and advocating for substantial support systems. They understand the critical role mental wellness plays in overall success and satisfaction, both academically and personally.

They Fear Rising Costs, Including Higher Education's

The ethos of Gen Z reflects a distinct financial pragmatism shaped by economic uncertainty and an escalating student debt crisis. Their acute awareness of the financial burdens associated with higher education sometimes drives them to seek alternatives that promise a more tangible return on investment. This includes exploring vocational training, certification programs, and colleges offering substantial financial aid, scholarships, and pathways to employment. This financial discernment extends to their expectations from educational institutions, favoring those that not only provide theoretical knowledge but also emphasize practical experience through internships and industry partnerships. We know that co-op programs, which were not long ago considered a "blue-collar" path, are soaring in popularity. The financial savvy of Gen Z compels colleges and universities to adapt, highlighting the necessity for educational models that align closely with the realities of the modern economy and the aspirations of a generation keenly aware of the value of their educational choices. Admissions officers, aware of this inclination, are tasked with stemming the tide. "There are too many students who are anti-college and anti-student loans, and we have to sell the value and

admit as many students as we can," maintains Jason Cloutier, Regional Director of Admission for Xavier University.

They Are on a Quest for Mental Health and Well-Being


Gen Z students have never known life without religious and political turmoil, worldwide armed conflict, school and mass shootings, an opioid crisis, climate change concerns, and more, all amplified through digital media. Not surprisingly, mental health is not a peripheral issue but a central aspect of their lives. "They are stressed, depressed, anxious, and less happy; at any given time, two percent of high school students are considering harming themselves," says John Della Volpe, author of *Fight: How Gen Z is Channeling Their Fear and Passion to Save America*. Adding to this depressive and anxious state is "being overwhelmed (academically) and feeling unprepared to graduate (high school), ready to be adults," says Della Volpe, who, as Director of Polling at the Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics, has conducted focus groups with scores of Gen Zers.

Fortunately, Gen Z has broken down many of the stigmas associated with discussing mental health, championing openness and advocating for substantial support systems. They understand the critical role mental wellness plays in overall success and satisfaction, both academically and personally. In response to the escalating instances of mental health challenges among their peers, Gen Z seeks educational environments that prioritize psychological well-being. This expectation goes beyond basic counseling services. Stress management workshops, peer support groups, and initiatives to foster a balanced lifestyle are integral to a supportive educational framework. Gen Z's approach to mental health reflects a broader desire for an educational experience that nurtures all facets of their development, recognizing that mental well-being is foundational to achieving their full potential. Institutions that respond to this need by embedding comprehensive mental health support into their campus culture are more likely to resonate with and effectively serve this new generation of students.

They Seek Personalization in the College (and Application) Experience

For Generation Z, individuality is paramount. This generation, accustomed to the bespoke nature of digital services, seeks an educational path that aligns with their personal and career aspirations. This approach to education, centered on personalization, acknowledges and harnesses their diverse talents and aspirations.

Most IECs embrace a personalized approach to helping students navigate the college search and application experience, and according to our students, it's more important than ever to offer Gen Zers an experience as unique as their digital footprint. Understanding the motivations driving Gen Z is a crucial endeavor for IECs, as we are supporting a demographic with markedly different priorities and worldviews from their predecessors—and ours.

How can we ensure that we provide the best guidance? Listen well. Acknowledge the Gen Z mindset and anxiety that may impact decision-making. Recognize when the application experience is overwhelming and provide tools to mitigate stress. Ask questions. Reassure. Assume nothing. We may not always understand our audience, but we should endeavor to know, and always empathize. 



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Navigating College Majors and Careers in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

By Joan Casey, EdM, CEP, IECA (MA)

All eyes are on artificial intelligence (AI) tools ever since ChatGPT took the world by storm last year. Higher education, like most industries, is grappling with what role AI should play and the ethical issues it presents. Discussions are moving from fears of students using AI tools to cheat to how it can be deployed to increase efficiencies, solve real-world problems, provide better access to education, and prepare students for a world where, as Forrester Research predicts, AI will reshape more than 11 million jobs. Higher education is notoriously slow to adapt to change, and AI is developing faster than lightning. This poses a challenge for advising professionals such as college and career advisors, and independent educational consultants (IECs). How should students prepare for this changing landscape once they are in college? How do we advise our clients about college majors and careers?

According to the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, one of the fastest growing industries will continue to be healthcare. With a rapidly aging

population, AI tools could play an essential role in serving this population. Through analysis of data from wearable devices, and electronic health records, AI can provide real-time information, detect early signs of disease, and generate personalized treatment protocols and recommendations. However, HIPAA laws will need to be considered, as will the ethics of using AI in these ways. As IECs advise aspiring nurses and doctors, it will be important to stress that AI is a tool that they will need to learn about in addition to their domain knowledge in their respective medical fields.

One big question is which fields will be in less demand due to AI and which will thrive. According to the World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2023*, data analytics, climate change and environmental management technologies, and encryption and cybersecurity are predicted to be the largest drivers of job growth in the next five years. AI, along with digital apps, e-commerce, and digital trade are expected to disrupt companies and result in a shedding of jobs;

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however, companies expect new roles to emerge for a net positive in the number of positions available. See figure 1 for fastest growth and declining jobs through 2027.

What about the skills that workers will need? Analytical, critical, and creative thinking were the top skills employers sought in 2023. These ranked just ahead of resiliency and agility, motivation, and curiosity and lifelong learning. All these skills are seen as essential to workers adapting to disruption. Higher cognitive skills are growing in importance, whereas jobs that require lower cognitive skills such as basic math and reading will likely be replaced by AI tools. Figure 2 shows the core skills for their workforce as cited by surveyed organizations.

"If the lower half of cognitive work gets taken over by genAI, it implies that you've got to learn critical thinking. That means critical thinking, regardless of which domain you're in, becomes the skill that is far, far more needed," said Arvind Krishna, Chairman and CEO of IBM Corporation, at the 2023 World Economic Forum annual meeting.

With colleges being all about critical thinking, they are well positioned to lead on AI. While most colleges have been slow to embrace AI's potential, there are some early adopters. The University of Florida (ai.ufl.edu) is leading the way in building an AI university. They have hired more than 100 instructors across their 16 colleges to infuse AI and AI ethics across the curriculum in all disciplines. They offer more than 200 AI courses, as well as certificate programs. Their Artificial Intelligence Academic Initiative Center (ai.ufl.edu/about/ai2-center) coordinates all programming and integrates with the career development center. The goal is to produce an AI-ready workforce.

At Northeastern University, the AI4Impact Co-op Program, through the Burnes Center for Social Change, combines social sciences, technology, data, and project management to help students learn how to solve real-world problems, such as helping community members engage with Congress and assisting families of special-needs students. Students take skills-based classes simultaneously with the six-month paid co-op. Through its Institute for Experiential AI (ai.northeastern.edu), Northeastern transcends the headline-grabbing ChatGPT-type tools to integrate research with business to discover solutions to real challenges.

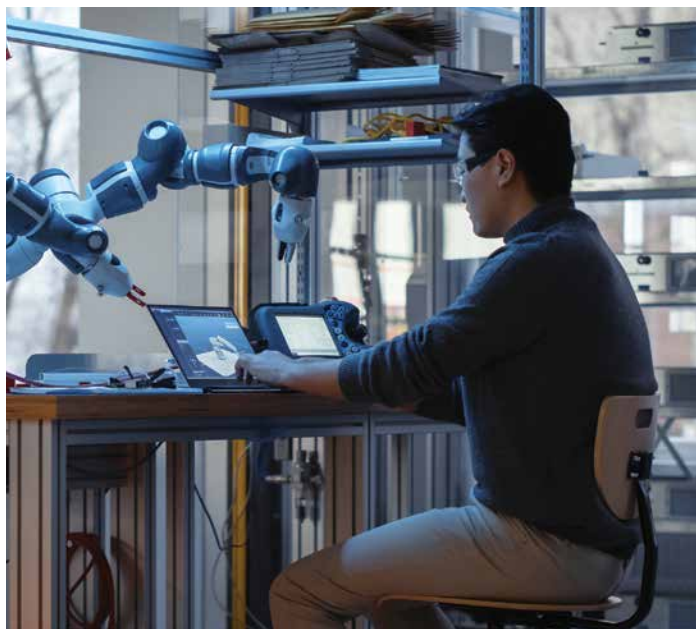


Figure 1



Clemson University offers the Watt AI program (clemons.edu/centers-institutes/watt/resources/instructors-and-researchers/watt-ai.html), which brings students, faculty, researchers, and AI technology together to work on initiatives. Projects to date include using natural language processing to understand Shakespeare's plays, identifying and analyzing disinformation campaigns on social media, and improving career readiness by analyzing feedback from interns and mentors.

When helping students think about college majors and their future careers, they will be best served by attending a college that is actively engaging in the world of AI and thinking about how to provide its students with the skills of the future. This may be more important than choice of major...

These initiatives clearly show that AI can be applied across disciplines. When helping students think about college majors and their future careers, they will be best served by attending a college that is actively engaging in the world of AI and thinking about how to provide its students with the skills of the future. This may be more important than choice of major, and, given the skills that employers seek, a grounding in liberal arts and sciences, in addition to chosen major, will continue to be critical, perhaps even more so in the coming decades.

If IECs or their clients are interested in engaging with college staff,

such as career center professionals, about their plans for AI, here are some questions to ask:

- What kinds of discussions do you have with students who may be seeking careers that will face decline in the near future?
- How are you helping students build the skills and competencies they will need in a work world that will use AI tools?
- Has the college considered how AI can enhance the student experience?
- What courses and certificate programs are offered or planned related to AI and AI ethics?
- Are there plans to incorporate AI knowledge across the curriculum in all disciplines?
- Are faculty members engaging in AI-related research? Does this research occur across disciplines? Can students get involved?


AI is a tool. It will never replace specific domain knowledge or skills that employers seek, such as creative and analytical thinking, and curiosity and agility, that humans are so good at. Employers will continue to demand such skills and an interdisciplinary college education will still best equip people with this knowledge. AI will not kill the liberal arts. However, to be successful in the future, workers from the C-suite to the manufacturing floor will need to know how to use these tools. The real threat to future jobs is not AI itself but the resistance to embracing it. 

Figure 2



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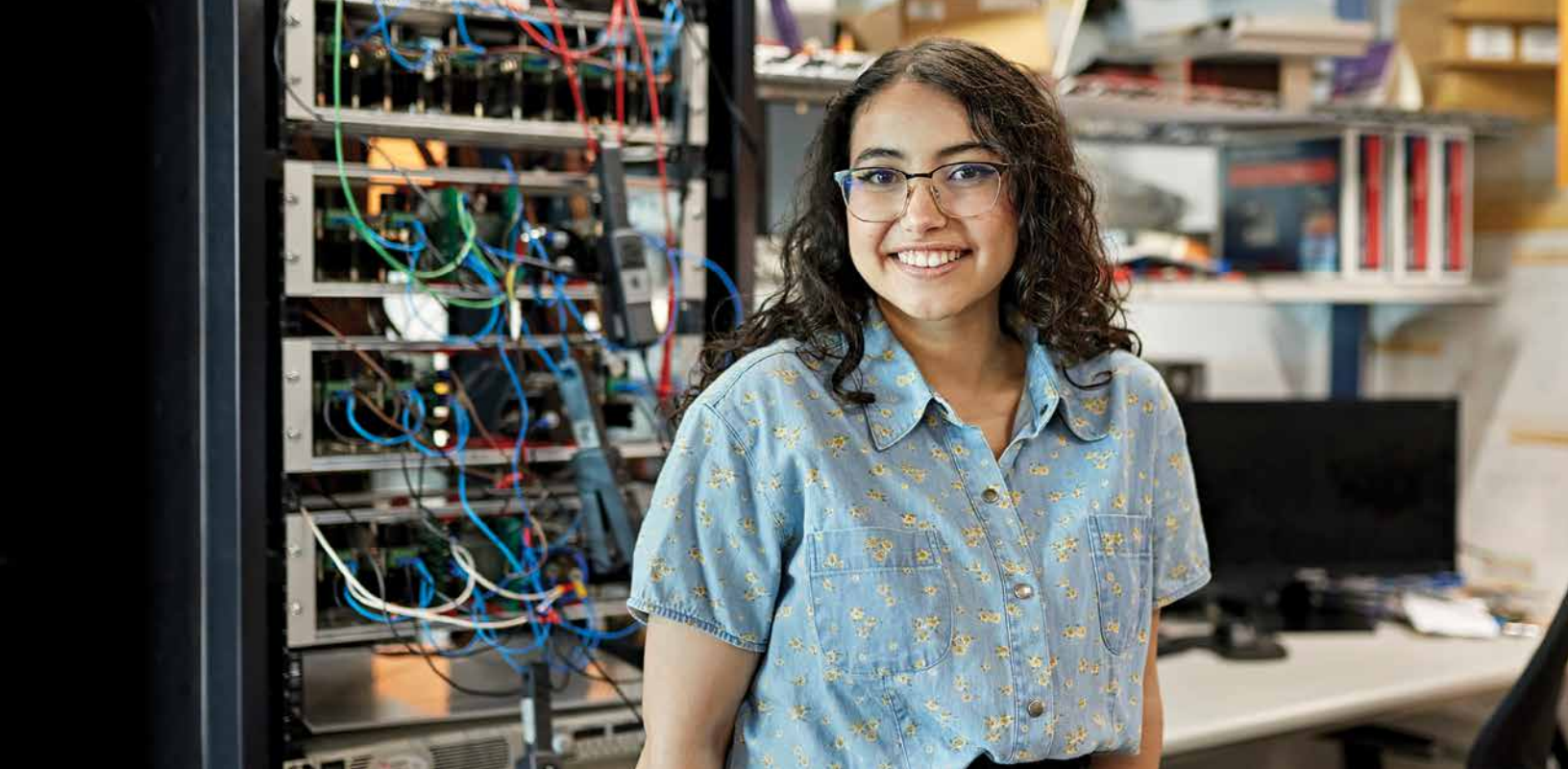
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Evaluating Criteria for Good-Fit Colleges for Women in STEM

By Vita Cohen, MA, MAT, CEP, IECA (IL) and Jyoti Jain, MBA, IECA (CA)

Gender inequities in STEM-related fields are a thing of the long past, right? Ever so regrettably, despite making important strides toward gender inclusion, engineering, math, and computer science remain largely male-dominated fields. According to the National Science Foundation's 2023 report, *Diversity and STEM: Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities*, women made up 51 percent of the total US population (ages 18 to 74) but only one-third of those employed in STEM occupations, with their wages consistently lower than those of men in the same positions. As a result, it should come as no surprise that female students often feel intimidated, excluded, or even unwelcome in their STEM classes as compared to their male counterparts. In addition to looking at the retention and graduation rates of institutions, it is important to consider the percentage of students who find employment within two years of graduating. As independent educational consultants (IECs), here are specific criteria to consider when evaluating "good-fit" colleges for our female students who want to pursue STEM majors.

Ratio of Male to Female

A good starting point is to look at the enrollment ratio between male and female applicants and consider a college that is balanced. The College Factual website (CollegeFactual.com) is an excellent resource, as it

provides a breakdown of a college's female to male diversity numbers. Olin College of Engineering, Harvey Mudd, and the University of Michigan are examples of colleges that have balanced 50:50 male to female ratios. Many institutions have prioritized bringing more women into their STEM programs, so it is a good idea to check with a college's admissions representative about any institutional priorities that may impact young women enrolling in STEM programs. Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology is one such institution with goals related to increasing female diversity in STEM.

Faculty or Staff Women Role Models and Mentors

It is critical for women to have role models to guide them in their journey to STEM careers. Checking to be sure the college has a number of women faculty and staff members who teach classes and conduct research helps set female students up for success. Asking if the college has mentorship programs geared toward women students is something important to consider. The Women@MIT mentorship program, the Women in STEM mentorship program at Stanford, and the UC Davis Center for the Advancement of Multicultural Perspectives on Science (CAMPOS) initiative specifically provide mentorship, networking, and research opportunities for their women students.

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Professional Organizations and Clubs for Women in STEM

Your female students should explore whether the colleges they are considering have STEM-focused professional organizations and student-run clubs that they could join to attend events and network with peers and professionals. The Society of Women Engineers, the Association for Women in Computing, the Association for Women in Mathematics, the Association for Women Geoscientists, and the Women Chemists Committee are some examples of professional organizations. Additionally, Stanford Women in Computer Science and Stanford Sisters in STEM are some examples of student-run clubs exclusively for female students.

Living Learning Communities Focused on Women

Besides making a large school feel a lot smaller, having a residential community focused on providing women support and resources sets them up for success. Women in Science and Engineering is one such Living Learning Community at the University of Michigan that seeks to support women in STEM.

Women's Colleges with a Focus on STEM


Women's-only colleges with a STEM focus provide opportunities for technical, leadership, and professional development. Spelman and

Wellesley are two such liberal arts institutions with strong STEM programs and active alumni networks. Smith College is another example, with 40 percent of students majoring in STEM and a campus equipped with a state-of-the-art research facility and eight research centers.

Scholarships, Fellowships, and Internship Opportunities

Colleges might offer scholarships for women to pursue research in the STEM fields. One such example is the College of Saint Mary's Marie Curie Scholarship, funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation. The scholarship is specifically for women seeking bachelor's degrees in biology, chemistry, mathematics, or human biology. The NASA Pennsylvania Space Grant Consortium Internship Program at Penn State offers the opportunity for women interested in science and engineering research to work with a faculty mentor in a research lab.

Colleges might offer scholarships for women to pursue research in the STEM fields.

In addition to scholarships and grants offered by institutions, there are outside scholarships available to women pursuing STEM majors in college. For example, the American Physical Society and IBM co-sponsor a research internship for undergraduate women in physics and related fields, matching students with an IBM mentor to work on research projects. One of the goals of this internship is to encourage women and minorities to pursue graduate studies in science and engineering. 



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IECA Returns to Capitol Hill for Our Second Annual Advocacy Day

By Linda Daley, MBA, IECA (NH), Chair, Government Relations Committee

On March 4-5, 2024, 15 IECA members descended on Capitol Hill for the second annual IECA Advocacy Day. We held 33 meetings with elected officials and their legislative aides from the US House of Representatives and Senate, introducing (or re-introducing) IECA to offices representing California, Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Vermont. The event kicked off with a meeting with Bernie Sander's (VT) office, who is the Chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP).

The purpose of Advocacy Day is to advocate for issues important to our profession and the students and families with whom we work. The issues we addressed this year included the following.

Introduction of IECA

We introduced IECA as the premier association within our profession, requiring our members to adhere to the highest standards of expertise and ethical integrity. We encouraged the offices to look

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"It was a great opportunity to learn more about the Understanding the True Cost of College Act and the College Transparency Act. Not many people get a chance to do this, as it's rare for committee staff to meet with constituents. However, IECA has a close relationship with this committee since [CEO] Mark Sklarow was recently invited to give congressional testimony. This has allowed us to continue building close relationships with policymakers in Washington DC, which ultimately benefits the students, families we work with, and members of IECA."

—**Steven Mercer**, Chair, Advocacy Day Committee



Linda Daley, Linda Daley Educational Consulting, can be reached at Linda@DaleyEducationalConsulting.com.

Second Annual Advocacy Day, from page 17

to us for our expertise in education and adolescent development, and to partner with us in the development of legislation and policymaking to support and protect students and families in their educational journey.

Transparency in Higher Education

Understanding the True Cost of College Act

This act requires standard terminology and a universal format to assist students and their families, colleges and universities, and secondary school and postsecondary counselors to make informed decisions about the real cost of college and reverse the trend of taking on staggering student debt. Financial aid transparency is a step toward greater access and opportunity for all students.

College Transparency Act

This bipartisan bill ensures greater transparency regarding student outcomes at postsecondary institutions, providing information for evaluating which school to attend. The current system is overly burdensome; the new system will give students a clear understanding of their return on investment. The data will include information on student outcomes, including enrollment, graduation rates, and post-college earnings across colleges and majors.

We thanked those senators and congressmen who have already co-sponsored these bills and asked for support from those who have not yet done so.

Adolescent Mental Health

Given the adolescent mental health crisis, IECA supports legislation to address the following:

- Increasing the availability of mental health support for adolescents within and beyond schools.
- Providing critical oversight and standards for residential therapeutic schools and programs.
- Ensuring parity of mental and physical health coverage by insurers.



While there is currently no legislation facing Congress on these issues, we positioned ourselves as experts and asked for a “seat at the table” in the development of future legislation.

We were joined by Kyle Matous, our new lobbyist from Advocacy Associates. As a previous Chief of Staff on the Hill, and most recently as the Director of Government Relations for Bono’s ONE Campaign, Matous is incredibly well-connected. Until our return next March, he will be our “boots on the ground” presence. He acknowledged that while we may not see any quick movement on the two transparency bills given the current state of Congress, the consistent emphasis on our issues is the best way to ensure change in the future.

Actions You Can Take

You may ask, “What can I do?” We encourage you to write to your elected representatives and ask them to co-sponsor the Understanding the True Cost of College Act (H.R. 1198, S. 528) and the College Transparency Act (H.R. 2957, S. 1349), both of which are bipartisan and bicameral.

You may ask, “What can I do?” We encourage you to write to your elected representatives and ask them to co-sponsor the Understanding the True Cost of College Act (H.R. 1198, S. 528) and the College Transparency Act (H.R. 2957, S. 1349), both of which are bipartisan and bicameral.



A huge thank you to Steven Mercer, Chair of the Advocacy Day Committee, and committee members Cheryl Chamberlain and Jeana Kawamura, for planning this event, which was filled with great conversation with congressional staff about our important work as champions for our students and their families. 🇺🇸



"I got to meet the same staffer from Senator John Cornyn's office that I met last year; she remembered my name, my title within IECA, and my business/location. We discussed the two bills and the adolescent mental health issues in much depth and how IECA can be involved in future legislation or hearings. It was like American Democracy 101 with my senator's office. We positioned ourselves as the expert in the field of educational consulting, advocating for the students and families we serve, as well as the interest of those who do not have access to our services."

—**Ibrahim Firat**, President, IECA



"Our conversations in legislators' offices were powerful and affirming. While we went there to advocate for issues that matter to us as we serve our clients, the power of the legislation we were discussing is in its benefit to those students and families who don't have the benefit of our expertise."

—**Whitney Bruce**, Vice Chair, Government Relations Committee

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Why Did God Make Me This Way?

By Katherine Martin

"Why did God make me this way?" This was the question that plagued most of my childhood. This was also the question I asked my dad through a stream of tears while sitting in the backseat of his 1990 Saab 900 on my way to a dyslexic tutoring center 45 minutes away from my home. It was at this center that I would have to spend four to six hours a week for the next seven years, attempting to relearn the English language by breaking down words, decoding sounds, and memorizing vowel groupings and Latin roots. Sounds like a lot of fun for a seven-year-old, right?

I was diagnosed with dyslexia in second grade. At the time, I believed I was cursed, because being diagnosed meant that I was branded with the label of a learning disability and the stigmas that came along with it. It was clear early on that the way I learned was different from the other kids. I became embarrassed ... I quickly became shyer in classrooms, isolating myself so as not to draw attention to my inadequacy; attempting to hide my struggle just so I wouldn't feel different from the other kids. But I was. And in all honesty, I hated myself for it. I didn't understand why it was so hard for me to do what seemed like such simple tasks. After all, the ability

to read is not only a prerequisite to all education after the third grade—it is an integral part of everyday life. I couldn't help but feel stupid when it took me hours of extra work and tutoring just to meet the standard.

Most people understand dyslexia to be a learning disability that affects a person's ability to read and write. From an outside perspective, dyslexics are made to look like they aren't as smart as their peers or that they simply aren't trying hard enough. What also often goes unnoticed is the shame, guilt, and frustration that many people with dyslexia experience because of these damaging views. But what many people don't seem to understand is that dyslexia has no effect on a person's intelligence.

I can't remember the exact day that I decided to change the narrative for myself, but around the time I reached the sixth grade I was fed up with the pitiful looks from my teachers and peers. I mustered up enough confidence and decided that I was not going to let my disability become an excuse for inadequacy. With the new start at a different middle school came a newfound drive to succeed in school. Although my reading was



Katherine Martin is a junior at Elon University in North Carolina, majoring in strategic communications and minoring in psychology, sports management, and photography.

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still choppy, and I struggled to transcribe my complex thoughts onto paper, I was slowly gaining the skills and confidence I needed to cope with my disability. I adapted the strategies I learned in my classes to fit my learning style and became an advocate for the extra time I needed on tests; I often went back after classes to ask about the concepts I couldn't grasp when classes moved too fast. I worked tirelessly not to be average but instead to be exceptional. Yet, this came at the expense of time. I spent hours upon hours laboring over my work. Homework assignments that should have taken me 20 minutes took 40 minutes to an hour. I slowly became obsessive and started validating my worth through grades. It wasn't as much about proving to other people that I was capable of success as it was proving to myself that I wasn't going to be defined by or underestimated because of my disability.

By the time I reached Brewster as a ninth grader, I had developed a killer work ethic that served me well in a more advanced curriculum. I was able to take all accelerated classes (except for foreign language) and maintain a 4.0 GPA throughout my four years. I worked closely with my teachers to understand concepts and get the extra help I needed. For the first time, I felt like I was surrounded by a community that was going to celebrate my successes and not look at me or think of me as "less than" because I was dyslexic. Teachers were kind and patient with me, but also challenged my strengths. They pushed me to think deeper and explore new topics of passion and interest. As a result, I took on new roles as a student leader, student-athlete, and artist. My ability to thrive in the classroom was no longer defined or limited by my atypical brain. That isn't to say that I didn't still have setbacks and struggles. There were still nights spent in tears, laboring over the introduction paragraph of an

essay for more than an hour, but I continued to push through the hard moments and overcome my self-doubt.

In retrospect, it was a blessing to have been diagnosed as early on as I was—and to have parents with shared experiences and strong backgrounds in education who knew what I needed to cope with my learning disability. Both my parents, having been diagnosed themselves, allowed me to feel seen and understood in the way my peers and teachers never did early on. Although I often felt alone in the classroom, I had the support and encouragement I desperately needed to get through those early days.

My journey with dyslexia has been one of resilience, determination, and personal growth. Despite the challenges I faced, I refused to be defined by my struggles. Through seeking support, embracing adaptive strategies, and nurturing my passions, I not only pushed through dyslexia's hurdles, but also discovered the strength it brings to my life.

Dyslexia is not a limitation, but rather a unique aspect of my identity that has shaped me into a strong, hardworking, empathetic, and resilient individual. As I continue my education and pursue my passions, I carry with me the invaluable lessons learned from my struggle with dyslexia; knowing that it has transformed me into a person capable of achieving greatness. My relentless pursuit of growth stands as a testament to the power of perseverance and the belief that one's determination can overcome any obstacle life presents. I was able to excel not in spite of dyslexia, but because of it. 

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Therapeutic Young Adult Case Studies

Compiled by Cynthia Cohen, MSPH, IECA (CO)

In order to further examine the relationship between therapeutic program staff and young adults (see our previous article in the Winter 2024 issue of *Insights* at link.IECAonline.com/Insights), we explore three cases. Tony Issenmann, Director of Family Programs at Blue Ridge Therapeutic Wilderness, discusses his staff's interaction with a family that initially and unsuccessfully tried to use structure and even pressure to push their son toward "success." John Tobias, founder of Red Cedar Transitions, describes the importance of accepting messiness in working with a complex young adult to establish his independent life. Chris Blankenship, Assistant Clinical Director and Senior Therapist, Open Sky Wilderness Therapy, describes the importance of allowing a client to evolve through their own messiness to reach a state of self-understanding and be able to approach the world with confidence.

Following are the three case studies. Names and some details have been altered to protect the clients' identities.

Tony Issenmann, PhD, LMFT

Blue Ridge Therapeutic Wilderness

There is often tension between our emotional and intellectual understanding of an experience. What

makes sense intellectually does not always resonate emotionally. The developmental stage of young adulthood is no different. While there is a desire for structure, routine, and a clear path toward a successful future orientation, the day-to-day experience is full of messiness. We understand the need for structure, control, and routine, and yet almost no one would describe adolescence and young adulthood as a neat and tidy developmental process. As with many other areas of life, this developmental stage is most successfully navigated when both experiences are accepted and tolerated.

Young adulthood is further complicated when considering that it is rarely experienced in isolation. Parents have their own desires for their children. And, while most parents can intellectually identify the reality that development is messy, most do not have the ability to tolerate being connected with their child during this messiness. This creates an interplay between the parental process and the young adult process. While most of the focus has been on the young adult, my experience has been that under typical developmental circumstances, the parent's ability to tolerate higher levels of emotional distress, or messiness, is directly correlated with the young adult's developmental trajectory.

This dynamic was present with the Rogers family. Daniel (19 years old) and his parents, Sarah and Matt,



Cynthia Cohen, Pathway Partners, can be reached at Cynthia@PathwayPartners.info.

sought coaching for their adult son who "lacked the motivation and drive to complete school or to keep a job." Daniel was open to coaching and stated his main goal was independence from his parents.

Like many parents (and programs), Sarah and Matt focused on providing structure as a way to help Daniel navigate the young adult developmental stage that, as an extension of adolescence, is full of identity exploration. The structure itself can have a limiting effect on the necessary exploration process. When not properly checked, the parental, or program, perspective can focus more on facilitating an approach that is tidy rather than one that leads to authentic exploration. Why might this be? I suggest it is not because parents or programs truly believe that tidiness is superior to authentic exploration, but rather because messiness is uncomfortable.

While Matt and Sarah did not name "messiness" as the main frustration they had with Daniel, when identifying their goals, they described wanting him to "go to college," or "keep a job and not bounce around from interest to interest." They described a sense of anxiety and fear that he would not learn to become successful. When projecting forward, they could only imagine scenarios of dependence. Their past efforts to "help" were based in providing structure: schedules, boundaries, timelines, and ultimatums. In their mind, these efforts were intended to guide Daniel to a successful and stable future. They had very limited insight about the role their own anxiety played.

When there is more room to explore because parents have a greater frustration tolerance, growth is more natural and authentic. This involves getting it wrong—which is often messy.

I do not believe Matt and Sarah are alone in their approach. It has been my observation that the underlying purpose of the structure parents wish to impose on their young adult child has more to do with the parents' inability to manage emotions than their child's absolute need for structure. Young adults often do need structure, and they want it. But they are also looking for independence. Structure imposed from the outside, especially from parents at this developmental stage, is often met with resistance. At best, this approach results in compliance-based success. At worst, it results in a refusal to mature. Both are reaction states to the parental unit. When there is more room to explore because parents have a greater frustration tolerance, growth is more natural and authentic. This involves getting it wrong—which is often messy. But in getting it wrong, the young adult learns over time to get it right. So, perhaps the greatest gift a parent can offer their young adult child is not structure, but rather a commitment to their own emotional growth (and perhaps access to a coach or therapist with whom the child can work as they experience all the messiness that accompanies true exploration).

This does not mean that parents need to accept anything and everything the young adult child wishes to do or explore. Guardrails are still required when behaviors are life-threatening. However, many parents see what is equivalent to an emotional or relational broken wrist but perceive it to be an emotional broken neck. It is the parental responsibility to learn to distinguish the two.

The focus of coaching with Matt and Sarah revolved around emotional awareness, increasing their distress tolerance and value-based

boundaries. Daniel and I worked on setting clear goals, taking practical steps toward exploring his independence with intention, and staying connected to his parents. Over time, his parents showed a significant increase in their ability to tolerate Daniel's exploration, and his efforts became less reactive.

This scenario is consistent among many families I've supported. I have found that the greatest success comes when parents work with a coach to increase their capacity to tolerate the emotional distress they experience, while the young adult child is supported as they independently work on hitting their next developmental milestones. Without support, it is natural to focus on solutions that are short-term and only related to symptom alleviation. However, with the support of a coach, parents and young adults can work toward systemic solutions that yield long-term developmental success.

John Tobias, Founder

Red Cedar Transitions

A 23-year-old male came to Red Cedar Transitions, an Asheville transitional living program for young adults. He had a long history of treatment, including two years elsewhere and wilderness therapy. He was adopted at age seven from another country and diagnosed with neurodiversity and extreme ADHD—meeting all criteria including inattention, difficulty staying on track, seeking stimuli, and extreme executive functioning challenges. (Keeping with his medications and appointments, however, he did succeed in going to work—arriving at 6 a.m., getting there on his own oftentimes by bicycle.)

Red Cedar is a program in which participants live on their own and have mentors averaging 12-15 hours a week and therapy with staff clinicians. The therapeutic work for this participant included interpersonal training and social pragmatics—developed to help him build awareness for how it is for others to be in relationship with him.



His goals in coming to the program were to build interpersonal awareness and get a job. He had held a job at a golf course, which he kept successfully until he had conflicts with coworkers and was fired following a physical altercation. While there, he had also ruined some equipment by not paying attention and using the wrong gas. Since then, he had held two other jobs—one for six to seven months—but he never got his driver's license, as one employer had requested, and had more conflicts. He is currently working in a store.

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Therapeutic Young Adult Case Studies, from page 23

We at Red Cedar consider him a success; he is in the world and learning from experience. His social training includes feedback from coworkers and bosses. He has demonstrated great resilience, never giving up. He is still working on growth with his interpersonal skills, as he would like to have friends and intimate relationships.

Executive function support includes helping him with cleanliness and orderliness. Mentors also work with him on learning social cues. Interpersonal work in therapy focuses on impulse control and mindfulness so he is not a slave to his emotions. He remains motivated as he continues to experience both negative and positive consequences of his behavior. We expect him to remain at Red Cedar for up to five years.

In a tighter container, he would lose motivation. Here, he gets to experience and learn to recognize healthy boundaries—he does not see staff as friends and has lost friends due to his inability to notice, understand, and respond to social cues. He has learned though mindfulness to see that his feelings will pass, and that these emotions are normal; a feeling or internal experience is not an enemy, but rather something to work with. Not allowing ourselves to experience feelings is the genesis of pathologizing—leading to anxiety about anxiety, panic about panic. Practice and repetition allow him to develop enhanced cognitive and psychological flexibility.

Chris Blankenship, LCSW

Open Sky Wilderness Therapy

Emily arrived at treatment by way of a small, conservative town in the American south. She was a 19-year-old, cisgender female who had just finished an up-and-down freshman year at a small college. She enjoyed tennis and reading, and had a history of problematic behavior that included self-harm, fighting with friends and family, and risky sexual encounters. She came to treatment willingly and was eager to learn how to better engage in the world.

Emily was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, level 1, ADHD, depression, and anxiety prior to her enrollment in treatment—diagnoses that were quickly confirmed. Emily had black-and-white thinking patterns, struggled with disruptions to her routine, and was consistently behind in most social interactions. It was easy to connect the dots between those autism symptoms and some of the externalizing behaviors she had been exhibiting during her freshman year. These issues formed the backbone of our initial treatment plan.

Emily formed strong bonds with her peers and was comfortable in the milieu by her third week. In her fourth week of treatment, she started our therapy session with an abrupt and surprising declaration. Emily wanted to be a man. She was ready to start a physical transition that very day and wanted to talk about hormone treatment and scheduling top surgery. Emily suddenly threw a huge wrench into our previously straightforward treatment plan.

Even though gender fluidity is considerably more common for people on the autism spectrum, it was not at all expected for Emily. She grew up in a place where transitioning was all but unheard of. Her church was

steadfastly against it, as were her parents. Emily had never once given an indication that she saw herself as a man—she had always leaned toward more stereotypically feminine pursuits, dressed very femininely, and seemingly embraced the idea of womanhood. Having worked with many people in the first stages of transition, I knew that all of that was understandable and that it was important to follow Emily's lead, no matter how potentially “messy” it may be with her and her family.

Executive function support includes helping him with cleanliness and orderliness. Mentors also work with him on learning social cues. Interpersonal work in therapy focuses on impulse control and mindfulness so he is not a slave to his emotions.

Emily's abrupt disclosure was messy for several reasons. Emily did not want her parents to know and did not think they would approve. Emily wanted to go by a new name and use he/him pronouns with all peers and staff without changing her therapeutic records. Emily wanted to start using a chest binder and wear all male clothing. I didn't blink in my support. I embraced the new pronouns and led a group where Emily introduced *himself* as John to *his* peers. I got all new clothing for John and requested that they be disbursed at no charge to avoid a bill for all new clothing. I purchased a binder for John myself, for the same reason. I instructed all staff to use male pronouns, and changed all internal documentation to reflect the change, while keeping external documentation as it was to support John's desire for privacy.

John spent the next three weeks navigating life as a man. He processed the difficulty of being misgendered and people using his dead name. John talked about the discomfort of the binder and the odd fit of his new clothes. John asked less and less about medical transition and seemed uninterested when I brought the information on hormone treatment that he had asked for.



By the fourth week as John, he completely broke down. He reported feeling more depressed than before and more anxious around people, and he had started to engage in self-harm for the first time since being in treatment. He looked at me in therapy and said, “I thought that being a man would make it go away.” “Make what go away?” I inquired. In

the hours that followed, John shared for the first time in his life about being sexually assaulted as a child. John felt weak in the eyes of men and was hypervigilant about being attacked again. John hoped that being a man would allow a semblance of safety, but it hadn't. Instead, it had caused confusion and deceit.

A few days later, John asked if she could go back to being called Emily, using female pronouns, and wearing female clothing. We sat down with her peers and Emily shared about being assaulted and about her fear of being a woman in the world. She apologized and was met with more kindness and support than I could have ever hoped for. In the weeks that followed, she talked openly with her parents about her gender "transition," and the reasons behind it. She told them about being assaulted, the impact that it had on her, and the ways that her problematic behavior connected to the trauma. We spent the remainder of Emily's stay working on her autism symptoms, depression, anxiety, and most importantly, her newly identified post-traumatic stress.

Emily came into treatment with years of fear built up inside of her and having done everything in her power to protect herself from that fear. Being in a safe treatment environment allowed her to attempt one last thing to make her fear go away, but she soon found that it too was ineffective. Emily needed to replicate "messy" patterns of avoidance, and withholding from her parents, to learn that her old behaviors weren't going to work. While my initial inclination was to question Emily's ideas about transitioning, I knew that it was important to attune to her and initially support her desires. Emily's messy divergence into gender identity treatment helped her to feel safe and cared for—it allowed her to finally admit what she was running from and to get the structure and treatment that she actually needed.

Today, Emily still goes by Emily. She is finishing college, in a long-term relationship, and has a strong connection with her parents. She still relishes beating guys on the tennis court—not because she's afraid of them—but because she loves herself. 🦋

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Visit link.IECAonline.com/A2P for information and member-to-member tips on how to make this transition. Contact IECA's Membership Manager Caitlin Myers (Caitlin@IECAonline.com) with any questions—we are here to help!



IECA's 2024 Regional Symposium– Madrid a Great Success!

In February, more than 100 IECA members, non-member IEC colleagues, and European university admission representatives convened in Madrid, Spain for the IECA 2024 Regional Symposium. This fantastic two-day event focused on university admissions in the European Union and included educational sessions, roundtable discussions, a fair featuring 25 universities, gap programs, and schools, and pre-symposium tours. The tapas and wine lunch hosted by a local restaurant was a wonderful

way to end the program! Many thanks to our IECA 2024 Regional Symposium-Madrid Planning Committee for coordinating this event.

Thank you as well to our host institution and sponsor, Saint Louis University-Madrid Campus, and these additional sponsors: IÉSEG School of Management, Lumiere Education, Marist College, Minerva University, Onsen Education, Pioneer Academics, and Polygence.



A stylized graphic of a city skyline with various skyscrapers in blue, orange, and yellow.

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Why I Belong

Learning Opportunities Abound

By Ethan Currie, IECA Associate (WI)

Introduction to IECA

It was the middle of winter, 2022, and I had just made the transition from working in admissions at a Big 10 university to working at a private college counseling firm, Galin Education. I was excited and a bit nervous—I was confident in what I knew about my Big 10 school, but I also knew I would shortly be meeting with families with a nationwide search in mind, and I had to quickly start learning. Thankfully, Galin introduced me to IECA and I applied (and was approved) to be an Associate member. It was incredible to begin to explore all the amazing resources available through my membership, from webinars of university-specific information sessions to virtual campus tours.



In addition to the sessions focused on particular subjects, the ability to network and connect with different IECs during conferences and campus tours has been invaluable in terms of learning about other practices and techniques. There's something very reassuring about being surrounded by seasoned professionals who "get" the challenges of college admissions, especially when so much of the year is spent trying to educate families and students about the ever-changing nature of this process.

Finally, the post-conference tours to Portland, Salem, and Corvallis were of enormous help in learning more about some campuses far from where I work, but that have strong pulls for many of my students, including Lewis & Clark, Reed, and Oregon State. The amazing organizers for our tour made everything super easy and enjoyable, allowing those of us attending the tour to really focus on learning from admissions reps and students.

The Importance of Continual Learning


If I had to pick out one specific thing that IECA has helped me with the most, it would have to be that learning. The online resources alone were, to say the least, comprehensive, and I still feel like I haven't taken full advantage of everything that's out there. But the real value in many ways has come through the conferences I've been able to attend and the pre- and post-conference campus tours I've participated on. From sessions on how artificial intelligence (AI) may impact admissions (a big theme in Seattle!) to breakout topics like "Managing the Parent Journey," focused on essay writing, it was amazing to be surrounded by years of experience and wisdom, gaining insights and tips on so many areas of our practice. Susan Knoppow and Amy McVeigh, who ran the college essay coaching session I mentioned above, were invaluable in helping me to clarify best practices when it comes to setting parent expectations early (though it can be a persisting challenge through the process, as we know!) and the importance of consistent check-ins and reassurances, particularly for those angsty parents.

As someone who works with students mostly based in the Midwest, I do occasionally have students with dreams of sunnier climes, and many turn to the UC system as options, so I was thrilled to be able to attend Janice Royal's session on UC admissions data. That information has proved useful in a major way when working with my seniors this past summer and fall and my juniors this year. Finally, the last session of the conference proved to be one of the best: Ethan Sawyer and Nelson Wynn's discussion of ChatGPT and its potential effect on the college essay. Between incorporating classical Indian poetry to modern mindfulness practices, Ethan and Nelson wove together a presentation that was at once challenging in terms of asking us to think about an uncertain future and comforting in that we were all facing these things together, and that, whatever happens, IECs will continue to be able to help students find their authentic voice in this often messy process.

If I had to pick out one specific thing that IECA has helped me with the most, it would have to be that learning.

Joining a Committee

After my first conference in Philadelphia in 2022, I was asked to join the IECA Outreach Committee, which has been a great way for me to try and pay back just a small part of what I've gained. You may have seen me or my fellow committee members in Seattle, warmly but robustly inviting the purple lanyard-wearing folks to join us for breakfast, an opportunity to talk to and answer questions from IECs who were considering making the jump into becoming official members. It was great to speak with a new IEC based on the East Coast who was making a career change to our field and asking questions about the value of the resources and community that come with being an IECA member; I was thrilled to hear that, after our conversation, they were seriously considering making the jump to joining IECA.

My decision to leave higher ed admissions was a difficult one, but it was driven by something I think many other IECs will resonate with: choosing a field with the best opportunities to help students achieve their dreams and goals. IECA, with its commitment to high standards of practice and ethics, continues to be a major supporter of that mission, and I look forward to many more years of continual learning. 

Ethan Currie, Galin Education, can be reached at Ethan@GalinEd.com.



A Call for Your Support

Our professional association has a unique and separate philanthropic arm, the IECA Foundation. Its mission (IECAFoundation.org/mission-statement) puts into action the principles and values of our association by supporting small nonprofits across the country. We vet and grant money to applicants, some of whom are referred by our association members and may even be organizations where our IECA colleagues volunteer. You may be aware of the Foundation, but most members don't know much about how it is funded, how to belong, or the meaningful depth of impact into our communities.

The Backstory

For 28 years, the IECA Foundation has funded small nonprofits in communities across the US. We support a wide range of organizations (IECAFoundation.org/grant-winners), including early childhood literacy programs, education in the arts, college application support, young adult vocational pursuits, and more. We generally grant \$35,000 to \$90,000 to organizations in increments of \$3,000 to \$5,000 each year.

Where Do We Get Our Funding?

Most of our funds currently come from family foundations, individual long-term donors, therapeutic programs and schools, and some members. In fact, only four percent of IECA Professional and Associate members are active donors to the Foundation, at ANY level. Some may think that a portion of your dues gets directed to the Foundation. Not so.

Why Is the Foundation Asking for Support?

Without wider participation from our IECA members, we cannot grow and certainly cannot fulfill our mission to the fullest. Our members are also instrumental in spreading the word to organizations in need of our

support, and we believe that our mission is likely to be aligned with your values.


What Kind of Commitment Are We Talking About?

Your donation can be as big or as small as you can manage. But consider the impact if each of us gave only \$25 annually! (Did you know there are nearly 3,000 members in our association?!) Some IECA members have made a more serious commitment, pledging funds over a period of years.

We support a wide range of organizations, including early childhood literacy programs, education in the arts, college application support, young adult vocational pursuits, and more.

How About Subscribing?!

Rather than a one-time donation, consider subscribing (<https://secure.givelively.org/donate/independent-educational-consultants-association-foundation-inc>). Most of us subscribe to Netflix, Apple News, Babbel, or other programs and services that are relevant in one way or another. We hope that our mission is relevant to you!

Should you decide to subscribe to or support the Foundation in some way, be assured that you will be instrumental in impacting organizations that serve communities in need. 

Why I Give

IECA Professional member Jesse Quam has been a loyal supporter of the Foundation through our monthly giving program. When we asked him why he makes the Foundation a priority, he shared the following:

"I believe in supporting the IECA Foundation because of the critical work they do in helping fund nonprofits around the country. There will always be a need for youth programs that develop self-esteem, mindfulness, and communication skills. The IECA Foundation is supporting organizations that do this crucial work."





In the News

Kristina Dooley (OH) and **Amy Jasper** (VA) were quoted in the March 1, 2024 "Your Money Advisor" column in the *New York Times*, "Report Helps Answer the Question: Is a College Degree Worth the Cost?"

Joan Koven (PA) and **Laurie Kopp Weingarten** (PA) were quoted in "The SAT is coming back at some colleges. It's stressing everyone out," in the *Washington Post* on March 18, 2024. Weingarten was also quoted in "Writing Skills You Should've Learned by Freshman Year of College," on *Medium.com* on December 25, 2023; "US Department of Education to investigate Penn legacy admissions policy," in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* on January 18, 2024; and "What to Know if Your Kid is Considering a College Transfer," on *SheKnows* on February 13, 2024. She was mentioned on a Fox News segment about the changing SAT requirements on March 19, 2024, and appeared on both WMAL News and NewsNation Live on March 20, 2024. On March 19, 2024, she was interviewed on *The Admissions Directors Lunchcast* podcast to discuss student procrastination.

Diane Barnett (NC) was quoted in "Big changes are coming to the SAT, and not everyone is happy. What students show know," in *USA Today* on February 7, 2024.

Jill Madenberg (NY) appeared on the ABC News program, *Good Morning America*, on March 9, 2024 to discuss the new digital SAT.

Ethan Sawyer (CA) and **Gina Wilner** (Associate, NC) were quoted in "International College Freshmen: Mistakes to Avoid," in *US News & World Report* on January 18, 2024.

Pierre Huguet (Associate, MA) was quoted in "How to Select an Online College or University," in *US News & World Report* on February 7, 2024.

Emily Haft Bloom (NY), **Jane Klemmer** (NY), **Alan Sheptin** (NY), and **Geoff Stearns** (NY) were featured in *Westchester* magazine's March

2024 cover story, offering their expert advice on how parents can help their students navigate the complex college application process.

Sue Luse (MN) was profiled in "Ex-Counselor Transforms Into a College Expert," in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* Business section on January 8, 2024.


Catherine Ganley (VA) and **Colleen Paparella** (VA) were interviewed for "College Decision Day Is Coming. Here's How to Make the Final Choice," in *Northern Virginia* magazine on March 11, 2024.

Christine Hall (NC) was interviewed for a segment about Saint Augustine's loss of accreditation on WRAL News on February 29, 2024.

Gina Gerrato-Greenhaus (CA) was interviewed on the iHeartRadio Podcast Network in January 2024.

Rebecca Cluster (DC) was referenced in "The Transition to High School," in the *Hill Rag* on January 23, 2024.

Jaime Smith (WA) was quoted in "A Second Chance," in the Winter 2024 issue of the *NACAC Journal of College Admission*. Also, her article "Three Things Parents Should NOT Say to College-Bound Teens" was published on *Grown and Flown* on February 16, 2024.

Laura French (Associate, CA) was quoted in "Marin college aspirants struggle with financial aid changes," in the *Marin Independent Journal* on March 10, 2024. 

IECA members: send us your media appearances to share in a future issue of *Insights*, on the IECA website, and on social media. Email details to Insights@IECAonline.com.



Regional Groups

IECA Regional Groups are a great way to connect with fellow members living close to you. Some groups meet in person and others meet virtually—and some do both! We currently have more than 40 Regional Groups and new members (and groups) are always welcome.

To get involved with an existing group, join their community on the Member Network: network.IECAonline.com/communities/RegionalGroups

To start a group in your area, contact IECA Member Experience Manager Tanesha Norman at Tanesha@IECAonline.com.

For Schools, Colleges, and Program Representatives

If you are interested in meeting with IECA members, either virtually or in person, we encourage you to reach out to our Regional Groups. You can find the full list of groups on our website: link.IECAonline.com/regional



Members of the College Consultants of Colorado Regional Group donned hairnets to enjoy a tour of Celestial Seasonings Tea House (and a happy hour) in February 2024.

Campus Visits

Thanks to everyone who participated in the five-day **IECA 2024 Spring College Tour: Nashville, Tennessee to St. Louis, Missouri**, and to the colleges and universities for being such gracious hosts.

Colleges on the tour included Sewanee, Middle Tennessee State University, Fisk University, Vanderbilt University, Belmont University, Southern Illinois University, the University of Missouri, Saint Louis University, and Washington University in St. Louis.

The IECA College Committee is now in the process of planning a fall 2024 tour of colleges in Iowa and Minnesota. More information can be found on page 5. Registration will open in July.





Introductions

Please Welcome IECA's New Professional Members



Jay Benanav (MN), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for 18 years. He served on the St. Paul City Council for 10 years and has experience in government relations at Augsburg

University and as the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Labor & Industry. Benanav earned a law degree from St. John's University Law School, an MPA from Harvard School of Government, and an MBA from Columbia University School of Business.

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CollegeInsideTrack.com
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Frances Carhart (WA) was an IECA Professional member from 2006 to 2010 and is rejoining after 10 years in private high school college counseling and administration.

Carhart holds an MEd from Harvard Graduate School of Education, a BA from Wellesley College, and earned the certificate of school management and leadership from Harvard Business School Online. She is a member of NACAC, PNACAC, and SACC (Seattle Area College Consultants).

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Frances-Carhart.com
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Jennifer Gallagher (MA), a former Associate member, is the Director of College Consulting at Vested Academics. Her 20-year career in college admissions includes positions at Northeastern

University, Salve Regina University, and Regis College. Working with students throughout the United States, Gallagher and her team offer their client families comprehensive guidance in all aspects of the college planning process. Gallagher holds an MA in higher education administration from Boston College and a BA in English from Providence College.

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Specialty: C



A former English teacher, **Karen Hott** (MD), who transitioned from Associate membership, finds college counseling includes the best aspects of teaching (minus grading): fostering

self-reflection, developing research to open discoveries, uncovering students' voices, revealing the rhetorical effects of written choices, thinking critically. She loves working one-to-one with teens as they contemplate and step into their future.

Karen Hott, MA
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Specialty: C



Katherine LeSage (NC), a former Associate member, has been an IEC for seven years, following a 25-year career in sales and human resources. An attendee of IECA's 2020 Summer Training Institute, LeSage

holds an MA from Marymount University, a BS from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a certificate in college counseling, with distinction, from UCLA Extension. She is a member of SACAC and a volunteer with Matchlighters.

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Specialty: C



Penny Linsenmayer (TX), a former Associate member, worked as a sole proprietor IEC before co-founding Pathway Admissions in 2021, and has served on the IECA Subcommittee on College

Affordability since 2022. Her niche areas of specialization include a focus on affordability and aviation admissions. She is also a corporate attorney and a novelist.

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Margaret Martin (NH), a former Associate member, combines over 30 years in education. She began her career as a middle school teacher and coach before transitioning to boarding school

admissions at Brewster Academy, serving for 20 years as Associate Director and Director of Financial Aid. She holds a BS from St. Lawrence University and an MEd from John Carroll University. Martin began a youth lacrosse program for girls and continues to be active on the board of a local middle school. She currently serves as Vice Chair of IECA's Schools Committee.

*Margaret Martin, MEd
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MartinEducationalConsulting.com
Specialty: S*



Betsy Pruitt (IN), a former Associate member, merged educational leadership, teaching, and academic coaching with college admissions expertise to establish an IEC business. She is

the current Chair of IECA's Graduate School Committee and a member of the Education & Training Committee. As an Instructor in UC Berkeley's College Admissions and Career Planning Certification Program, Pruitt mentors new IECs, drawing from her expertise to assist students and families globally. Based in Evansville, Indiana, she serves clients across the United States.

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Specialty: G*



Julia Mitchell Varriale (MA) holds a master's in higher education administration from Boston College, a certificate in college counseling from UCLA Extension, and is an AICEP Certified

Educational Planner. She is a former admission officer and has been a counselor educator with the UCLA College Counseling Certificate Program since 2008, where she was awarded the designation of Distinguished Instructor in 2015. She is mentor to a Facebook group containing over 350 former students, all working school, independent, access, military, and admission-side professionals.

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Spotlight on the Technology for IEC Practices Affinity Group

By Michele Evard, PhD, IECA (MA)

What do you do when you hear about a new tech tool that could be used in your business? Are you eager to try it for yourself and share what you learn? Do you have concerns about privacy or difficulty of use? Are you curious about whether your colleagues have used it? Your questions, experiences, and concerns are welcome in the Tech Affinity Group!

In February of 2021, a new social media option seemed to take over the College community of the IECA Member Network. IECs wondered if Clubhouse would be the next great communication tool, but we needed codes from colleagues to be able to try it out. Over two dozen messages went to the forum in two days, making it clear that there was a lot of interest in trying new technologies ... and that the College community wasn't the right place for discussing them. We needed a new forum that would allow discussion of tech tools and platforms.

Technology for IEC Practices is an Affinity Group that gives IECA members of all specialties a shared space to discuss best practices in use of technology. Topics we have discussed include emerging technologies, new social media sites, digital payment services, calendar services, digital course building tools, and digital records keeping. We've also had conversations about how to think about tech in the context of our business



practices (see "Technology—Tool or Toy?" in the Summer 2021 issue of *Insights* at link.IECAonline.com/Insights). While we primarily communicate in our the Member Network community, we have also held Zoom sessions where we try out or share information about new tools, and members have shared demo videos of technology we've used in our practices. All IECA members are welcome to join and share! 🙌

To join the Technology for IEC Practices Affinity Group, go to: network.IECAonline.com/communities/AffinityGroups



Michele Evard, Evard Educational Consulting, can be reached at Michele@EvardConsulting.com.

Connect with Your Colleagues in an Affinity Group

IECA Affinity Groups are run by IECA members with similar interests in a specific topic. We currently have more than 25 groups—and new members and groups are always welcome!

To join an existing group on the Member Network, go to: network.IECAonline.com/communities/AffinityGroups

To create a new Affinity Group, contact IECA Membership Experience Manager Tanesha Norman at Tanesha@IECAonline.com.



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July 22–26, 2024

Comprehensive Curriculum

Being successful as an independent educational consultant (IEC) requires knowledge in three core areas: counseling and communication skills, small business management, and knowledge within one's specialty. Whether one pursues the profession with a focus on colleges, K-12 schools, graduate schools, or programs for teens with behavioral, learning, or emotional issues, our faculty has extensive knowledge of what it takes to be successful. From intake and assessment to the structure of the consulting practice, all attendees will get the training they need.

Of course, being a successful independent educational consultant also demands skills that make professionals successful at managing a small business. Marketing, liability, use of social media, and ethical practices are explored in large group sessions as well as in activities, discussions, and small group work.

Interactive Discussions

The Institute is designed so each day provides a mixture of large group instruction and small group dialogue among those with similar interests so you can connect with other participants and faculty from around the world. In addition, experts will respond to questions raised within sessions and that arise in the give-and-take of discussion. The overall size of the Institute is limited to

This highly rated five-day virtual Institute is designed for newer independent educational consultants who want to learn more about: **managing and promoting a business, working effectively with students and families, building a knowledge of the wide range of options available to students, and establishing a professional, competent, and ethical practice.**

Register here: link.IECAonline.com/sti

maximize interaction among participants and between attendees and faculty. Small mentoring groups give ample opportunity for sharing.

Exceptional Faculty

Session leaders have been carefully picked from among the nation's most experienced and successful IECs. Each faculty member specializes in the topics they are scheduled to present, and most have served on past faculties. Other presenters and panelists will be drawn from national educational organizations, from school and college admission offices, and from IECA's own national office.

Resources

The extensive Institute Notebook has been developed from the faculty's many years of experience working with students and families. The material coordinates with the seminars and visual presentations throughout the Institute. Many of the sample documents are provided for reference purposes for attendees to use in their businesses.

Applications

The Summer Training Institute details and application are available on the IECA website at: link.IECAonline.com/sti. The cost of the Institute and all materials is \$1,195 (\$995 for IECA Professional and Associate members).



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