



Q&A with Sara Harberson, “America’s college counselor”

Sara Harberson (www.SaraHarberson.com) will be speaking to Bronx Science parents at our PA meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 18. To give you an idea of who she is and what she’ll be talking about, read on!

Tell us about yourself and what you do.

I am a proud graduate of a New Jersey public school. I didn't have a lot of guidance or polish when I applied to college. I had to figure things out on my own, but I fell in love with the idea of college. I was one of those kids who actually enjoyed applying to college. I've made it my life's work to help other kids get a leg up in the process. I began my career as a tour guide and a senior intern at my alma mater, Hamilton College. I spent 10 years moving up the ladder in the Undergraduate Admissions Office at the University of Pennsylvania, becoming second in command while getting my graduate degree at Penn's Graduate School of Education. I became the youngest Dean of Admissions in the country at age 32 when I went to work for Franklin & Marshall College. I also led the College Counseling Department at the Baldwin School, a private all-girls high school outside of Philadelphia.

My desire to help kids (who were like me) led me to create a groundbreaking, FREE site called AdmissionsRevolution.com in 2015. Anyone can subscribe and get access to videos and guides on getting into college. A year later, I created SaraHarberson.com to address the demand for families who wanted to work one-on-one with me as their child applied to college.

I now divide my time between private college counseling, writing for Huffington Post, TODAY Parents, and my own blog, and hosting monthly Facebook Live sessions to answer questions (for FREE) from families going through the process.

What will you be discussing at the Bronx Science PA Meeting on Oct. 18?

I will be speaking about the current trends in college admissions, specifically, trends at elite colleges and universities, and how the landscape has changed dramatically even over the past few years. I write and speak often about topics that few admissions professionals are willing to discuss: racial discrimination, gender bias, cultural stereotypes, and how a student's major can directly impact their chances of admission. I will give parents who attend the presentation concrete recommendations on how their child can navigate high school and the admissions process to increase their competitiveness to elite colleges.

Tell us about a student you worked with this past year.

Most of my private clients are highly ambitious, first, second, and third generation Americans. Parents reach out to me because they are worried about their child being pushed aside or biased in the admissions process. One of my students last year was a first generation American. She was the daughter

of scientists. She had a lot of interest in science, yet she was much more accomplished in and passionate about the study of Latin and Greek. It took me months to convince her that she could still end up pursuing science in college, even major in it once she got there, but that her strengths were in the ancient languages. Once I convinced her, I had to convince her parents. That took even longer. They finally gave her their blessing to approach her applications differently.

Then it came time to write her main college essay. She had this unbelievable story to tell about herself (and her family). She would write draft after draft that would dance around the story. She struggled with opening up in the essay. And once her parents found out the topic, they were furious with me. I told them that their daughter's story would be transformative to her application. Without it, she would just be another high-achieving first generation student with no one to fight for her. After numerous conversations I had with the student and many drafts to get her to open up, she delivered the most powerful essay I have ever read. She applied Early Decision to Dartmouth, got admitted, and is now a freshman there. Every week, I get an email from the girl's parents asking if I would work with another one of their friends' children. They have been the most appreciative family I have ever worked with. I will never forget the student's willingness to put her trust in me and her courage to open up in the application process. The latter is the secret to getting into college.

What else should we know about you?

I am a straight-talking Jewish girl from New Jersey who now lives in Lancaster, PA. My husband and I met in college when we were 19 years old. We have three decisively expressive kids: Sophie (11), Max (7), and Dotsie Bea (4).

You won't want to miss our Oct. 18 meeting! In the meantime, you can watch one of Sara's free Facebook Live sessions here: <https://www.facebook.com/saraharberson/videos/473384953007767/>