



College Connectors

Specializing in College Admissions Guidance

College Connectors Positioning and Key Messages

Positioning

College Connectors is a company that:

- Helps high school students find the best possible college fit.
- Packages the student for entrance into colleges of their choice.
- Maximizes the likelihood that the student will graduate in four years by finding the best campus match for each unique student.
- Helps parents and families simplify the college application and financial aid processes.

By working through a unique 3-step model, the student is much more likely to succeed while enjoying the college experience.

Key Messages

Focus on finding an environment where every child can be successful. Nationwide, 25% of first-year students fail to return for a second year. After six years, only 50% have earned at least an undergraduate degree. Through advanced planning and ongoing consulting, we set students up for a successful college experience and help families avoid a costly mistake.

Open doors to more opportunities. There are more than 3,600 colleges and universities to choose from in the United States. – and they are not all the same. Too often, students limit their choice of colleges to the ones their friends attend or those close to home. We help them realize opportunities that could be a good or even better fit than the colleges they originally considered. We have personally visited hundreds of campuses across the US to help students find the best fit.

Create more family time. Getting into the best suited college can be very time consuming. We handle the work involved with the college application requirements, financial aid options and deadlines. The attention to detail can be overwhelming – especially for kids and their families with demanding schedules.

Unmatched Knowledge and Skills. College Connectors uses a team approach when working with families. As each of us has unique specialized knowledge, we can each step in where necessary. As a member of the Independent Educational Consultants Association, we are required to visit more than 100 colleges before becoming a member. Because we are familiar with a multitude of colleges, we can present students with a wider selection of possibilities. We also know how to talk to students who may be afraid or confused about what direction they want to take. We will help the entire family feel confident about the college decision.

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Valerie Broughton, Ph.D. is a College Planning Consultant specializing in admissions counseling. As president and founder of College Connectors, she has assisted more than 100 families in Minnesota find the best possible college fit.

Although college admissions advisors is a growing field, Valerie is one of just six Minnesota members of the Independent Educational Consultants Association and the first educational consultant in Minnesota to earn the designation of Certified Educational Planner.

She has more than 30 years of experience in education at the junior high, senior high and college level. Added to her experiences as a former math teacher, admissions counselor, director of student activities and associate vice chancellor, Valerie has toured hundreds of campuses and can help narrow the search to the colleges that best fit a student's interests, background and abilities.

Her commitment to students and families deepened after she helped her own two sons enter college. A long-time educator, she was surprised to find how little she knew when one of her sons chose a music conservatory rather than a traditional college. Realizing how stressful and draining the selection process can be, she started College Connectors to help all students and families enjoy the process of choosing a college that fosters a successful transition to a career and adulthood.

An active participant in her community, Valerie is a member of the Duluth Superior Symphony Board of Directors. In addition, she volunteers regularly at Lady of Our Lourdes Church. Her professional affiliations include the Minnesota Association of College Admissions Counselors, the Higher Education Consultants Association and the Independent Educational Consultants Association.

In her spare time, Valerie enjoys reading, needlepoint and playing piano. She and her husband reside in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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Exploring Options

Before working with College Connectors, Dennis and Deb Lofald had no idea how to research and compare different colleges for their oldest daughter, Jennifer. Assuming they couldn't afford a private college or send their daughter to a school out of the state, they limited their search to large, local universities that offered a decent set of programs and seemingly affordable tuition.

Taking Action

College Connectors suggested a different approach. Valerie Broughton learned as much as possible about Jenn, and that became the driving force behind her family's search. Through a series of one-on-one interviews and questionnaires, she helped Jenn consider what type of city she wanted to live in, what kind of college life she was looking for, the importance of extra-curricular activities and other factors.

Valerie also helped Jenn think about where she wanted to be in 10 years. After much thought, Jenn changed her major from pre-med to nursing because she wanted more flexibility when she started a family.

Once College Connectors identified Jenn's goals, strengths and interests, they helped narrow her search down to the top five colleges that fit her ideal college profile. Jenn visited each of them. "Valerie really opened my eyes and showed me all the opportunities that were out there," Jenn said. "I had only looked at the colleges near me because I didn't know what else was around. I never even thought about living in Atlanta or Chicago."

The next step was helping Jenn and her family evaluate each college's financial aid package. College Connectors guided them through the entire financial aid process. Valerie helped Jenn identify and apply for a variety of scholarships and grants, including one worth \$4,300 for students in her city pursuing math or science related careers. "I had no idea what scholarships were available," Jenn said. "I never would've gotten as much financial aid as I did without Valerie."

The Result

Jenn recently graduated from St. Scholastica in Duluth with a Bachelor's degree in nursing. It only took her three years. Recently, she accepted her first job with Children's Hospital in Minneapolis working in the neonatal ICU.

Jenn said College Connectors helped with much more than finding the right college. "I think the biggest benefit to working with College Connectors was her understanding of what was important to me and then helping me to explore all my options," Jenn said. "Valerie was great to work with. She was so positive and helpful, showing me I could do anything I wanted, whether it was now or five years in the future."

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Making a Confident Decision

When Jim and Joan Halquist took time away from their small business to help their oldest son, Peter, plan for college, they realized a lot had changed in the 30 years since they were college students themselves. Competition is tighter, admission requirements are more stringent and financial aid is more complex. On top of it all, the cost of colleges quickly made them realize it is easy to make an expensive mistake.

With the intention of saving time and making the right decision, the Halquists turned to College Connectors to guide them through the entire college planning process.

"It became obvious that we couldn't afford to experiment with different colleges," Jim said. "Valerie's approach emphasized finding the right college fit from the start."

Taking Action

The first step with College Connectors is to really understand the student. Peter had always been interested in art, especially architecture. He also enjoyed playing the cello. He wasn't sure if he wanted to make a career out of those interests, but knew he wanted a college that offered them. A smaller learning environment was also important.

After learning more about Peter's needs, interests and goals, Valerie selected the top 15 schools across the country that fit Peter's "ideal college" profile. The Halquists visited several of those campuses and, with Valerie's help, evaluated each financial aid package. The college that made their final cut was St. Olaf in Northfield.

"Peter was confident he found the right college for him," Jim said. "Visiting other colleges really helped him identify what was important to him. He realized he was more comfortable attending a local college than going out of state, and he found the music program and pre-architecture courses he was looking for. I'm glad it was his decision rather than us saying, 'Why don't you go to this college?'"

Valerie also guided the Halquists through the financial aid process. She identified a little-known \$4,500 scholarship for musicians or pole vaulters, and Peter won it. She also explained how to apply for private school grants. "We started realizing that a private college was actually more affordable than we first thought," Jim said.

The result

Peter is now in his third year at St. Olaf and is majoring in studio arts. As part of the college's well-respected study abroad program, he will be traveling to Greece, Turkey, Morocco and Egypt this fall. "You could call us a success story," Jim said. "The whole college planning process is pretty baffling for most parents today. Working with Valerie was a small investment compared to the value of finding the right college."

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Fostering Student Involvement

Like many parents, Patty Fortier had difficulty getting her son, Zach, to open up about his hopes and dreams, making the college search that much harder. Though he wasn't sure which college would be right for him, Zach thought he'd be happiest out of state, away from cold Minnesota winters.

A friend recommended Patty and her son meet with College Connectors to make a confident decision on the right college for Zach. "I didn't know anything about out-of-state colleges and wasn't comfortable doing that research alone," Patty said. "The best thing for me to do was step aside and let Zach make his own decision with the help of college planning experts."

Taking Action

College Connectors started by learning as much as possible about Zach. Through a series of one-on-one interviews and questionnaires, Leah Holmberg helped Zach consider his strengths, interests and goals, as well as what type of college experience he was looking for. More importantly, the process taught Zach how to make calculated decisions about his future.

After months of consideration, Zach decided to prepare for a career in medicine, fulfilling a dream he's had since childhood. He also decided that he wanted to attend a private college with a good reputation. And he realized he didn't want to leave Minnesota after all.

"Leah really worked well with Zach, sometimes for hours at a time," Patty said. "He felt very comfortable talking with Leah and really opened up to her. I think sometimes kids have an easier time talking with people other than their parents."

Next Leah identified the top five colleges that fit Zach's "ideal college" profile. She arranged for Zach and Patty to visit each one and helped them evaluate each financial aid package. In addition, she guided them through the entire financial aid process and helped to identify sources of financial aid.

The Result

Zach chose to apply to the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. A few weeks later, he received an acceptance letter in the mail. He is now enrolled in the college's pre-med program.

"I highly recommend College Connectors because it takes a lot of pressure off parents," Patty said. "Leah and Valerie are very professional. They're experts at engaging students and helping them make the right choice about where to go to school."

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