

[Interview] Trevor Rusert - Director of College Counseling, Chadwick International

“Find a college that best fits student’s academic passion and strengths”

A few years ago, most students and parents simply wished to enter a high-ranking college with a certain level of recognition. This may still be the case for some students and parents, but it is clear that the reputation of a college no longer guarantees student’s individual success and well-being. One can also see how much has changed in recent years by looking at the CEOs of the top 10 companies in the Fortune 500. Most of them received a degree from universities that are not highly ranked.



“Students must select their next destination for education after self-examining their own interest and passion rather than blindly targeting the high-ranking colleges,” emphasized Trevor Rusert, Director of College Counseling at Chadwick International. Chadwick International is an international school in Yeonsu-gu, Songdo. He argued that students must be able to choose the “best-fit college” instead of the “best college” during the college selection process. This is why Rusert always reminds himself that college counseling helps each student on a path of self-examination. Below are excerpts from an interview with Mr. Rusert on Chadwick International’s college counseling program and what students should keep in mind in the process of choosing colleges.

Q. What is the college counseling process at Chadwick International?

A. Chadwick International begins offering information sessions for the parents of students in Grades 6 to 8, and conducts a four-year program primarily for students in Grades 9 to 12. The cornerstone of our counseling program is the small-group College Seminars. These 75-minute classes begin in December of Grade 11 and they meet every 8 days for one year. College Seminars consist of three different phases. The first phase is called “Guided Self-Reflection.” We guide students to realize their field of interests, strengths, capabilities, and passions. The

second phase is “Research.” We help students to seek information on admission requirements of different universities around the world. The final phase is “The College Application.” We help students to prepare resumes and to conduct mock admission interviews.

Q. What are some strengths of Chadwick International’s college counseling program?

A. We take pride in the fact that Chadwick International college counseling team has over eighty combined years of work experience in education. Having someone who has worked in highly selective university admissions is definitely a strength. In particular, we provide a customized strategy based on all of the things members of our community have observed over multiple years on each student. College Seminar mentioned earlier is a “core program,” which is held regularly during the school-day schedule. As a result, it leads to a high level of involvement and participation. Such a program puts each student on a path of self-examination and designing their future direction.

Q. More universities nowadays are moving away from requiring SAT scores.

A. As more universities are moving away from requiring SAT scores and toward a test-optional policy, applications and essays have become more important. Several years ago, I polled admission officers at several top ranked universities and asked them “What are the essential component of counselor recommendation letters?” The number one response was that they wanted the counselor recommendation letter to provide evidence of an applicant’s strength of character rather than applicant’s grades, classes or extracurricular activities. This changed the way we approached our letter and the information that we are collecting on students. Chadwick International’s curriculum provides various opportunities for students to demonstrate character traits both in and outside the school walls. Some representative examples include Outdoor Education and Service Learning. The Outdoor Education program consists of various activities for each student’s grade or development stage and provides students with an opportunity to develop strengths individually and collectively in small groups. In addition, the Service Learning programs help students analyze real-world problems from many angles, and put a plan in place to help people in need. These programs play an important role providing students with sources when writing their college essays.

Q. What should students keep in mind when writing application essays?

A. The most common mistake when writing an application essay is being overly formal or seeking too much assistance from parents or tutors. Students and parents often believe a success story to prove the applicant’s strength must be included in the essay, but this is not true. It is most important for students to match their areas of interest with their passion, when writing an essay. For example, one former student wrote about his personal experience of failure in his essay. This student went on stage for the first time ever in high school. He was so nervous that his voice was squeaky on stage and wasn’t able to deliver the lines properly. He was embarrassed. At first, the student’s parents wanted him to remove the experience from his essay. Instead, however, the student turned the essay into a personal story in which he took speech classes and participated in the debate club to overcome his weakness and gain confidence again. That student was admitted to Harvard University.

Q. What should students and parents keep in mind when searching for information on colleges?

A. There still are students and parents who simply rely on rankings of universities from unreliable sources when choosing a college. The second phase of Chadwick International's College Seminar helps students learn how to search for qualitative information on colleges that may be the best-fit for themselves. Students are able to make decisions on their future paths based on "a student's individual success" instead of "a ranking," asking questions like what kind of support they can receive at the college, how passionate the professors are, how often they may be able to meet mentors of their field of interests, etc.

Q. Could you share a case in which the student discovered the "best-fit" college instead of a "high-ranking" college?

A. For example, one of our students got accepted into multiple universities. Although his parents wished him to go to a more prestigious college with a high reputation, he chose a relatively smaller liberal arts college. Instead of simply focusing on the school's reputation, he made a wise decision for his future path based on the strengths of liberal arts colleges. In fact, the college he chose to attend was a place where students had a close relationship with faculty members due to the smaller number of students and provided the best program for those who wished to go on to top graduate schools. In other words, the student reached a decision on which college to attend while also considering graduate school in advance.

Q. Do you have any last comments?

A. It is important to remember that admission decisions do not determine a student's individual success or failure in life. We hope that students and parents are not too obsessed with reputation of colleges. For now, it may look like college determines everything, but life can change with students' decision and free will even after admitted to college. Their journey does not end with high school. Their journey is just beginning.