

For High Schoolers, Summer Is Time To Polish Résumés

Companies Pitch Classes, Trips As an Edge for College; A Wheat Harvest in Peru

Paying to Watch an Autopsy

By JUNE KRONHOLZ

Forget about the lazy, hazy days of summer.

As soon as classes are over for the year at John Jay High School in Cross River, N.Y., 16-year-old Jamie Cohen is off to Senegal where she'll work with AIDS victims for four weeks. Armed with her research, she'll then head to Yale University to present an AIDS "plan of action" to other teens, as part of a program put on by a travel company. When she applies to colleges 18 months from now, Ms. Cohen says the experience "will definitely help. I'll do an essay around it."

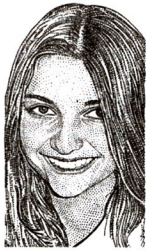
Amanda Baratz, 14, will head from Kehillah Jewish High School in San Jose, Calif., to Georgetown University this summer for a five-week course on medical careers, during which she hopes to watch open-heart surgery. She'll take an admissions-exam prep course, too, even though she won't take the SAT test for another year. That way, "I won't be pressured when the time comes," she says.

Getting into America's elite colleges has never been tougher, and now, in addition to grades and test scores, essays, recommendations and class rank, there's this for teens and their parents to worry about: summer.

"Summers are important, big time," says Lloyd Peterson, vice president of College Coach LLC, which charges \$3,499 for its college-counseling services. "The more prestigious the school, the more important the summers are."

Admissions officers dispute that. They say that how a youngster spends summers won't make or break a college application. "It doesn't matter as much as what they're doing in the school year," says Richard Nesbitt, admissions director at Williams College in Williamstown, Mass.

But as a record number of high schoolers heads for college, summer is taking on huge importance among super-achieving teens and their parents—and a whole



Amanda Baratz

signing up for such trips, says Julie Carey, who heads the company's programs in Peru, Bolivia and Central America. "It's what people are asking about."

For \$5,799, New York-based Musiker Discovery Programs Inc. sells summer courses on medical and law careers, aimed at high-school students. "We passed around a human heart," says Sam Pawliger, a junior at Miami's Palmetto High School who watched an autopsy during the medical course last year.

For youngsters who already have full résumés, Academic Study Associates of White Plains, N.Y., puts on \$2,895 camps where teens—many just finishing their sophomore year—will spend two weeks polishing their college-application essays, undergoing mock admissions interviews and prepping for SAT exams. Thirty kids came to the company's first course two years ago; this summer, it says it's expecting 150.

A record 16.7 million students are expected to enroll in college next fall, 1.2 million more than five years ago. The U.S. education department expects up to 18.8 million enrollees eight years from now. At the same time, ambitious high-school students are loading up on advanced-placement classes and taking prep courses to boost their scores on college-admissions tests, heightening the competition.

California's Pomona College says one-third of the students it accepted for next fall scored the maximum 800 on either the verbal or math part of the SAT admissions tests. North Carolina's Davidson College says one-quarter of its new class has a combined SAT score over 1500.

With the glut of high-scoring applicants, colleges are paying closer attention to factors such as community service, artistic talent, leadership—and summers. "There's more demand than we can accommodate at the selective institutions. What do you do? You need some tie-breakers," says Barmak Nassirian of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, a Washington, D.C., trade group.

"These days, just having perfect grades and perfect SAT scores does not guarantee anything," says Victoria Hsiao of IvySuccess Corp., which charges up to \$15,000 for its college-counseling services. "It's the complete package that colleges are looking at."

Admissions officers agree—although their view of a complete package doesn't always square with a consultant's. Christopher Gruber, acting dean of admissions at Davidson, says he's looking for students who round out the entering class—a cellist or soprano for the music program, kids with different "life experiences," and those who pursue their academic interests outside the classroom.

He gives high marks to community-service "entrepreneurs"—students who, say, "identified the need for teaching kids in the inner city and created a program." He also likes "creative follower-ship," he says—youngsters "who may not be on the cutting edge, but can make things better as they go."

That sounds like a terrifyingly high bar for many kids. At Cheyenne Mountain High School in Colorado Springs, Colo., Jessica Clayton scored 1540 out of 1600 on her SATs, aced five advanced-placement courses last semester, volunteers two days a month at a middle school, works after school at a smoothie shop, is on the varsity Lacrosse team and runs cross country.

But she worried that wasn't enough: An Ivy League recruiter told her about a rival applicant who composed harp music, recorded the compositions and sold the CDs for charity. "I don't even play the harp," says Ms. Clayton. "There are kids who have sent up satellites that have orbited the Earth. At my school, I'm pretty average."

So, with money she earned and a scholarship from the Where There Be Dragons tour company, Ms. Clayton signed up last summer for the company's trip to Peru where she painted a school, helped harvest wheat and organized a trash cleanup. "I guess I knew that it would kind of give me an edge," she says. Five colleges accepted her, she says, including Bowdoin, Vanderbilt and Colgate; she's wait-listed she says, at Pomona.

The Supreme Court's affirmative-action decision two years ago also seems to be fueling summer angst for students

from affluent families. The ruling freed universities to make decisions on factors other than grades and test scores, including family background and race, among other things.

Economist Tom Mortenson, who publishes a newsletter about college accessibility, calculates that blacks and Hispanics represent only 11% of undergrads at the country's top public universities, even though they make up a quarter of all U.S. undergraduates. Low-income kids, he says, account for 12% of students at the country's 51 top-ranked liberal-arts colleges, down from 13% a decade ago.

Still, ambitious students see fat résumés as a way to overcome a perceived handicap. "You're not a football star, you're not a minority, you're us—white, blue-eyed, private-school kids," says Will Daly, 18, a senior at Middlesex High School in Concord, Mass. "What do you do that will make you stick out?"

Last summer, he paid his way to Varanasi, India, where he spent three weeks writing English-language lesson plans for an ashram's school, then spent another three weeks traveling. "I did not do this for college," says Mr. Daly, who says he went for "the experience." Still, he wrote his college-application essay about the trip. He is going to George Washington University in the fall.

"I am the average white American, and colleges have their pick," says Daniel Germain, a senior at Madison High School in Madison, N.J. He joined an organized trip to India, where he taught English, built soccer goals and did other "little things that needed to be done" at an elementary school. "Yes, I met their academic requirements," he says of the six colleges that have offered him admission, "but I'm positive that all my extracurriculars are what got me in."

Many high schools now make community service part of their graduation requirements, fueling exotic summer programs that youngsters think will help them stand out in the crowd. Indeed, Ms. Hsiao of IvySuccess says she tells clients not to work in the local hospital because "it's something every single high-school student does."

Tour operators say teens are eager to pay for trips that include chances to volunteer. "It used to be you waited until graduation and joined the Peace Corps," says Peter Shumlin, director of Putney, the youth-travel company, which this summer offers trips to 13 countries, plus Alaska and Hawaii.

Sara Hubbard, a junior at Park Tudor School in Indianapolis, says she earned 150 community-service hours last summer teaching English and decorating a school in one of Putney's

trips to Rajasthan. Now, she's doing a two-year school research project on the life of Phoolan Devi, an Indian bandit, and hopes the two projects will "show a growing interest in something," she says.

Admissions officers say exotic summer programs don't give youngsters a leg-up in admissions. A fancy trip "is going to be looked at as an opportunity anyone with \$7,000 can get," says Pomona president David Oxtoby. He worries such pricey programs—just like prep courses that can boost SAT scores—will further tilt admissions in favor of privileged teens. His school, he adds, is "going to give an edge to kids who have overcome obstacles."

But if summer trekking in Mongolia (\$6,850) or bicycling the Alps (\$4,795 plus airfare) doesn't count with admissions directors, that's not a message kids say they're getting. "It's been so cutthroat ever since I've been in fourth grade—if I didn't have great grades and extracurriculars, I wouldn't stand out," says James Sacks, a junior at Wooster School in Danbury, Conn.

Last summer he joined a \$7,000 Musiker trip to Australia, where he spent three weeks working with dementia patients and restoring antique ships in Sydney before heading to the Great Barrier Reef and Ayers Rock. With that trip, and a moral philosophy course the summer before, "I think I have it all there, sum-

merwise," he says.

"I was 13 and already being told the importance of doing things" to build a résumé, says Mr. Daly, the Middlesex student, who biked cross-country after his freshman year and trekked in Peru after sophomore year, both with organized tours. "The pressure's on."

Some of that pressure is coming from the college-counseling industry. College Coach's Mr. Peterson says he tells clients to spend the summers after freshman and sophomore years "putting the polish on your extracurricular profile." For the final high-school summer, he urges teens to do "something intellectual. This isn't another break, this is it. This is the big banana."

Katherine Cohen—whose company Ivy-Wise LLC charges \$23,995 for two years of college-admissions advice and assistance—recommends an internship after the freshman year, a minimum 100 hours a year of volunteering, and a "real job" after the senior year at, say, a major investment bank or an internationally prominent museum, places she says she placed students last summer. If that's not enough, "I might put you in an art program in Mexico for 10 weeks in a little town where you can do pottery and learn Spanish," she says, or suggest a trip to Asia "where you study with Tibetan monks."

Even for teens without access to high-priced advice, the message is the same. "The 500 Best Ways for Teens to Spend the Summer," a new book by New York-based Princeton Review, the test-preparation company, advises teens that "summer programs are the ace up your sleeve. They are the true point of differentiation" for getting into college.

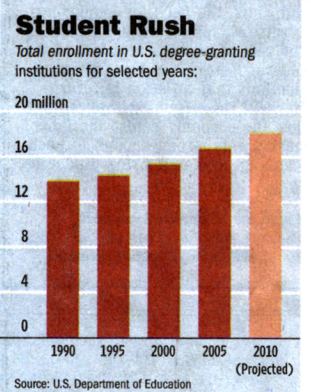
That's a message many kids believe. Liza Friedman, a senior at Columbia Grammar and Preparatory School in Manhattan, says she wrote her college-application essay about her trip to Vietnam, and also told college interviewers about previous community-service trips to Slovakia and Tanzania.

The trips helped her decide to focus on African studies in college, she says, but also "definitely gave me something to talk about in the interviews." She received admissions offers from three colleges, she says, including one that wrote that her summer tours showed she is "an active member of the global community." But during the interview with her first-choice school, which she is still waiting to hear from, there were more questions about her softball team and her work for Amnesty International, she says.

So then, what has come of the idea of summer as a time to relax and unwind? University of Chicago admissions director Theodore O'Neill says he would look kindly on an applicant who spent the summer "reading 50 books under a tree." Ivy-Wise's Ms. Cohen urges students to take a two-week vacation and make time for reflection. Either that, or "take a power nap," she says. "I'm all for power naps."



Jessica Clayton



industry is sprouting to serve them. This summer, Putney Student Travel in Putney, Vt., is offering new, month-long "global awareness" trips to El Salvador, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Senegal. For prices ranging from \$5,090 to \$6,290, students will study such issues as sustainable development, bio-diversity and the cultural survival of indigenous groups. A Boulder, Colo., company called Where There Be Dragons LLC is offering a \$6,700 six-week trip to Vietnam where teens will teach English, build houses and help volunteer doctors—in addition to kayaking in Halong Bay and snorkeling in the South China Sea. Community service is "the buzz word" among teens