

Piecing it all together!

I'm delighted to be here in Minnesota, where all students are well behaved and all counselors are above average. I've never lived in Minnesota, but I can see the hills of Duluth and the north shore from my office window in Old Main at UW-Superior.

I live in Bayfield County, Wisconsin. That's about an hour's drive east of here. We have a people to bear ratio of 14 to 1 (about the same as the student to faculty ratio at St. Scholastica), 9 marinas, four school districts, and dozens if not hundreds of resorts and restaurants, bars and other tourist destinations. We have no traffic light in a county that is 60 miles north to south and 35 miles east to west.

So for me, and to the many students from rural Wisconsin and Minnesota who choose to go to college in Duluth/Superior, this is the big time. The Twin Ports is a great place to go to college. With high-quality public & private, two-year and four-year colleges and universities, and nearly 20,000 college students, there's more going on than might be apparent to the casual visitor. There's one airport, one bus service, and you can make local calls across the state line.

But nevertheless, it's abundantly clear that one twin is bigger than the other. Those of you who have been long-time Minnesotans will recall that Rudy Perpich served three terms, a total of 10 years, as your governor. All my local TV news comes from Duluth. My part of the state is so inundated with Minnesota news that a poll of northwestern Wisconsin citizens taken during

Governor Perpich's last term revealed that nearly 40% of the respondents, when asked who was governor of their state, said "Rudy Perpich."

And I have to admit that in the local higher ed community, it's tough for University of Wisconsin-Superior to compete for attention with the visibility and dominance of the University of Minnesota-Duluth, especially if you throw-in Bulldog Hockey.

My Assignment for this morning was pretty open – to provide some insights to the college admission process and present some information on new developments that impact students' admission and subsequent success. And I'll try to do that. But as I look around the room, I see many of our colleagues who are equally qualified to do so. Indeed, this room is filled with first-rate professionals who can be great resources for all of us, as we go about our work of helping students and families make informed choices and prepare for success in college and beyond.

I believe that many high school students see the college admission process as a puzzling thing. That's especially true for students who are the first in their family to choose to go to college. The pieces of the puzzle include things like test scores, grades, applications, essays, fees, majors, sports, college costs, future earning prospects, leaving home, and the human elements like parents, teachers, admission officers, and high school counselors. I want to spend a little time considering the pieces of the puzzle.

First, let me tell you a little about my journey as an admission counselor and college administrator.

I remember when I started in college admissions. As an East Coast rep for my alma mater, Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin, I would boldly go into 300 high schools a year and tell them why my college was the best thing since sliced cheese. I know, in Minnesota it's sliced bread, but in Wisconsin, it's cheese. I was the product of a public school in Pennsylvania who had gone to college in the Midwest and was traveling between Boston and Washington, DC on behalf of my school. My perspective was very much a product of my own experience.

I well-remember a visit to Belvidere High School in western New Jersey during my first month on the job. Fred Kelly, the counselor at the school greeted me upon my arrival and said "we've been looking forward to your visit. You'll meet the senior class in our auditorium in about 10 minutes. As a small school with only 70 seniors, we don't get many visits from colleges that are a thousand miles away. I think our students will be very interested to hear about your school." I was flabbergasted. Here I was, 21 years old and still green as an admission counselor, and I was going to address 70 high school seniors who had never heard of my school. I gathered my courage and followed Mr. Kelly to the auditorium. That next fall 5 of those seniors enrolled at Northland. In those days, before student search and national college fairs and MEFs and the Web, the traveling admission counselor was a major source of information for students and students for colleges.

At a high school in Harlem, I had a police escort to and from the guidance office, as another security person watched my car and the others parked in

the visitor's lot. The young woman I talked with was bright and friendly. But she was just as amazed and intimidated by the prospects of going to college in the woods of northern Wisconsin as I would have been going to school in her neighborhood.

In spite of my sport coat and tie, I was once frisked for weapons at a high school in Newark, New Jersey.

My visits to inner city schools in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, and to rural schools in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and upstate New York revealed that not all students had the same opportunity. And that high school counselors didn't all have the time or resources to do everything they'd like for their kids

My work with low income students revealed the difficulty in helping them to accurately vision the promise of going to college, as well as to meet the financial challenges of funding college costs.

As I grew in the profession and was exposed to the other parts of the college transition puzzle, I gained a fuller appreciation of how important each of our pieces is to the whole picture.

Most of my career was spent at Northland, which then had students from 45 states and several countries. We had great kids, and the parents were pretty good. We were not highly selective, but we spent a lot of time considering AP and IB and all the other signs of excellence. Of course, we also had a reasonable number of applicants who were less-well prepared, too.

Now I'm at the UW-Superior which serves the mission of the regional public university for northwestern Wisconsin and is working to mature its relatively new role as Wisconsin's Public Liberal Arts College. We are blessed to be located in the Twin Ports of Duluth-Superior, with a metropolitan area population of 250,000 and home to three four-year and several two year colleges. We are also challenged to be located in the Twin Ports of Duluth-Superior, in a region that will see the number of annual high school graduates produced in northeastern Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin decline by 22.7% from 2005 to 2015.

We're pretty white, but we have a substantial Native American population and a few area high schools where students of color are in the majority. Nevertheless, the three Twin Ports four-year colleges each have only 6% American students of color. Projections suggest that by 2015, 19% of the students under age 15 will be non-white.

We get our share of valedictorians and other very good students. But we also spend a lot of time working with first-generation students for whom a rigorous curriculum is just making sure they have three solid years of math and science. And you know what. I find as much satisfaction in working with that local student who needs models and mentors as I do in helping the student from across the country who needs to adjust to a new experience but whose academic success is already more assured.

Down the street a few blocks is our local technical college. They do a great job in preparing students for careers that require mastery of skills and

understandings learned in programs between six months and two years in length.

And three more blocks down the street is Superior High School. With a graduating class of around 400, it's the biggest school in northwestern Wisconsin. The kids come from families of teachers and other professionals, as well as loggers and mill workers and Great Lakes sailors. And with one counselor per class, close to the national average, it's difficult for each student to get the time and attention they often need.

But at each college and school in my neighborhood, like yours, you'll find our colleagues helping students make informed choices.

This past few years has permitted me to grow in appreciation for the complexity and diversity among our students, our colleagues, and our institutions. And my role as a Director at NACAC has deepened my respect for the work you all do.

As I sit at my post near what some consider the northern edge of the civilized world - I wonder how the media, the public, and sometimes even we get so caught up in the feeding frenzy about what happens to those poor students with the 1300 SATs who only get into 4 of the 8 great, highly-competitive colleges to which they've applied. Given the tremendous diversity of cultures, communities, families and socio-economic backgrounds, I wonder why we would think that we can assess the success of all schools with the same measures. I wonder why we don't expect there

to be a “Best” flavor of ice cream, but we spend a lot of time and money talking about the “Best Colleges.”

What I don’t wonder about is our role. Each of us has an important part to play. If our children are to achieve their potential, if our communities are to realize their promise, and if our nation and world is to make progress toward a more successful, sustainable future, we must all play our parts well. And we need to fit our pieces together in ways that permit each of our work to complement and contribute to all of our work. And we need to make sure there are no lost pieces, as the picture can’t be complete without each of them.

The recruitment and admission process is far different than it was when I walked into Fred Kelly’s school back in my rookie year. The competition among colleges, as well as the competition among students, has increased exponentially. The costs of going to college, as well as the costs of making the decision not to go to college, have risen to previously unimaginable levels. And the pressure for students to enroll at the “best” college has risen to the level of irrationality.

The stakes for our country have risen, as well. With changing demographics and the economic competition that goes along with globalization, it is more important than ever for us to develop the potential in each of our students, for their benefit, and ours, as well.

In this much more complicated process, your role is all the more important. You are the professionals who can make sense out of confusion. You are the

caring resource who can help students to make good choices. You can help the high-end students achieve their dream of attending Ivy U, and you can guide and encourage the many more average students to chose a path that will help them prepare for a successful future.

I wish we could have all college professors and administrators, as well as political leaders, spend a week in your office. They would be amazed at the breadth and depth of the tasks you perform and services you render. Your work is incredibly important.

I'd like to spend some time on several items that are new or changing and review some new information that should be of interest to you. The items I'd like to discuss include:

- New data on the relationship between high school core curriculum and college success, mostly provided by ACT.
- The move away from “admission by the numbers” to “holistic admission.”
- New federal grant programs that can provide your needy students with extra funds – if they take the right program in high school
- How NACAC materials can help you with some of your college counseling challenges

Show PowerPoint presentation – with non-scripted narration

As professional counselors, you benefit from the camaraderie and professional sharing that comes with associating with the wonderful people in this room. Many of you, and we'd like to have more of you, also benefit

from your membership in National ACAC. Let me tell you a little about what's happening at NACAC.

With Offices in Alexandria, VA, NACAC now has more than 9,700 members, a staff of 40, and a \$9½ million budget.

Among the public, we are perhaps best known for our National College Fairs, which annually serve more than 700,000 students and parents.

NACAC's governance structure includes a Board of Directors, twelve standing committees, Presidents' Council, Assembly delegates and of course, the members who vote on association policies at the annual meeting, which will be held next week in Pittsburgh.

This year Minnesota's own Frank Sachs from The Blake School moves off the Board after serving three years in the Presidential sequence. Ann Kjorstad from Hamline University will join the Board next week, as she assumes her post as Coordinator of the State & Regional President's Council.

Six Strategic Priorities

NACAC is committed to supporting the profession with:

- Professional Development opportunities
- Research-based Body of Knowledge on trends and transition issues
- Increased Public-recognition of the value of the association and our members
- Public Advocacy that contributes to public policy development
- Ethical and Professional standards
- A commitment to inclusion of diverse perspectives and membership

NACAC is an increasingly important participant in the development of public policies that shape our work and the success of our students. Our Three Advocacy Priorities for the 2006, the same as for 2005, are to

1. Provide greater access to college information and counseling.

2. Develop and support access to a rigorous curriculum for all students.
 3. Offer more need-based financial aid for students to attend postsecondary education.
- The Political Environment in Washington, D.C. has been rough. In November we will elect all members of the House of Representatives and one-third of the members of the Senate. During the next month, elected officials and candidate hopefuls will pay close attention to your views as constituents. Please use your voice.

College Admission and Counseling

- We have some big challenges:
- The public seems preoccupied with the issue of how the “best” students get into the “best” colleges, at a time when we should be more concerned with how all students gain access to and success in postsecondary education.
- Legislatures across the country have squeezed the budgets of public schools and colleges, while expecting better outcomes.
- Congress and the Bush Administration have failed to fund promises made to make college a financial possibility for more students.
- At four year colleges, blacks and Hispanics constitute only 17 percent of the undergraduate population, even though together they constitute 31 percent of the national college-age population.
- The ramifications of the Supreme Court’s 2003 decisions regarding the consideration of race in undergraduate admissions continued to reverberate as those colleges and universities that had formulaic admission standards look to move to a holistic admission process.

The college counseling profession is ever more complex, with more players; heightened, even frenzied public and political interest; and confusing, sometimes conflicting missions and objectives. Our conference title of “The Insider’s Guide to College Admission” suggests that you are interested in unraveling the complex web that is the college admission puzzle.

Think of those times when you and your family or friends have gathered around a table to assemble a jigsaw puzzle. First we tend to categorize, by color or image. Then we try to figure-out how they fit together. We usually start with the ones with straight edges, as we know something about them that we don't know about the others. As we find other "fits", the table begins to fill and the image slowly takes shape. And heaven-forbid that we've lost any pieces! Their absence is so conspicuous, and it becomes apparent that the picture will never be complete.

So Get Involved

We want all our members to make their piece of the puzzle count. Each of us is important, and we can all make a difference. You transform lives every day in your schools. By becoming involved at the state and national level, your contributions can multiply.

So speak up, and act out your passion for kids and your commitment to this profession.

Please get involved if you are not already hooked! You'll get back more than you give.

Thanks for taking the time to meet with your colleagues today. I'm confident that you will leave here with more tools with which to serve your students. If I can be of assistance to you at any time, please feel free to contact me.