



# THE GREEN PAGES

News from Christ School's College Guidance Office

Spring 2014

On the Road with Liam:

## What Our Tour Taught Me

—by Emily Pulsifer

I've spent the past eleven years offering advice about the college admission process. Without fail, I've crowed about the virtues of visiting college campuses. "Get out there!" I've encouraged students. "You can research till your fingers cramp but you'll never know how you really feel about a school until you step on campus."

Well, suddenly (and it certainly feels sudden) my son Liam is one of those students. This past March, in the midst of one of the cruelest winters I can remember, Liam and I took a college roadtrip. Did we head south to balmy Florida or west to the sun-baked desert? No, we packed the car and headed northeast to see a collection of schools in Virginia, Washington, DC, New York and New England. I had visited most of the campuses before, either on trips arranged for college counselors or with Coco Parham and a group of Christ School students in 2012, but somehow, with my own son striding ahead of me in his striped Christ School hat, I felt as if I were seeing the colleges for the first time.

The campuses were what they had always been. School representatives spoke the familiar language of college admissions; we didn't go far without hearing about academic rigor, "super-scoring" standardized tests or authentic, original essays. We learned about fascinating undergraduate research, read glossy brochures about study abroad options, and peeked into dorm suites that make my house look like a shanty. Finally, at the end of every presentation, we received a crash course on scholarships and financial aid. Again, I wasn't surprised by any of it.

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Liam at Georgetown



Athena by Daniel Chester French outside Columbia's Low Memorial Library

***"Walking around those campuses, imagining him learning and growing in those vibrant communities, I felt ready – even eager – for this next stage of his life."***

What did surprise me, however, were the tides of emotion that moved through me as I watched Liam consider his future. Nostalgia flooded my system when we stopped in Lexington, Virginia, home to Washington & Lee and Stonewall Jackson Hospital, where Liam was born sixteen years ago. It swamped me again as I looked up – way up – at Liam as he introduced himself to a packed room at Georgetown. Memories of him as a tiny kid were butting up against the reality of today, and my eyes filled with tears at bizarre moments. Who, for example, gets weepy over a rack of UVA bobble heads, or stutters with emotion over a tuna melt at the Subway counter? Who? Well, this trip taught me that parents of juniors do.

But that tender sentimentality didn't last. At Brown, we heard about its open curriculum, did crosswords in the weekly student-produced newspaper and attended an intense lecture on the "Morality of Reading."

The next morning, we passed through Silliman, one of twelve "residential colleges" at Yale, and tip-toed, wide-eyed, through the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library where we felt like supplicants bowing before a Gutenberg Bible, letters by Jane Austen, and a first edition of John Jay Audubon's massive *The Birds of North America*. Despite the wind that tore through Manhattan and up our noses, our tour of Columbia's Morningside Campus was fascinating from start to finish. Liam was especially interested in Columbia's "Common Core," a series of freshman classes built around classic literature, music and art, and the physics laboratory where Enrico Fermi generated and harnessed the first atomic chain reaction.

By the time we blew out of the northeast, I'd forgotten my tears and remembered to celebrate what makes this time in Liam's life so exciting. College is a time of unbridled

exploration. He could get into and attend any of the schools we visited and find new ways of thinking, curious people, and unforgettable experiences—or he could discover another place altogether. No matter what, our tour was vital to Liam's outlook on the college application process. As he heads into the final weeks of his junior year at Christ School, he has been invigorated by the prospect of what waits beyond senior year. Our tour was worth it for that reason alone.

An additional benefit, however, the part I've overlooked in my advice all of these years, is the profound effect this tour had on me, the parent. Walking around those campuses, imagining him learning and growing in those vibrant communities, I felt ready – even eager – for this next stage of his life. Now, when I spout the virtues of touring schools, I'll include parents in the conversation. We need to get out there, too.

**Director of College Guidance,  
Kirk Blackard, catches up with:**

## **James Feng, University of California San Diego, Class of 2014**

### **What might you have done differently with regard to the college search and application process?**

When I researched the University of California at San Diego (UCSD), I learned that it had rigorous science requirements, its students are generally more studious than other UC campuses and the weather is awesome. I found all of the above true after attending UCSD, but what I didn't expect was meeting some of the greatest people in my life who shifted my perspectives in many ways. I feel that this is true for just about any college/university; you can only research so much, there is always something that will surprise you when you are actually in the environment.

### **What advice would you offer a high school senior about the collegiate experience?**

Since English isn't my native language, I feel like I was excluded from certain social conversations because of my limitation to understand/express ideas from some topics. But don't be discouraged and let that be the reason you only interact with people from your own country. Keep reaching out of your comfort zone, try different things and you will open up a whole new world.

I know academics are important for many international students, but this doesn't mean it should take over your life. True, you need to do well in school, but there are other skills that you won't be able to learn from classrooms. It's about managing your time and I think this is one of the most important things I learned from college. And if you can understand this before college, it will definitely make you stand out!

Research within your academic major/department and see what kind of opportunities they offer. They usually offer many great ways to make connections within your field of study. My second summer, I worked in an astrophysics lab at UCSD. I joined the lab during spring quarter after responding to a



James Feng with friends.

recruiting email sent out by the professor. I worked in the cleanroom and fabricated cooling devices for the telescope detectors.

### **How is college different from Christ School? How is it similar to Christ School?**

The major difference between Christ School and my college is probably the size. UCSD, with 20,000+ undergrads, is different from the 250 students at Christ School. I definitely enjoyed the simple lifestyle at Christ School with a close group of students and faculty nearby. The size of UCSD has simply allowed me opportunities to make more connections with more people.

### **Can you comment on time management and the jump you made from CS to UC San Diego?**

I found it more challenging to manage my time at UCSD since there are more things happening around you compared to one's time in high school. Although there are a lot of events happening at Christ School, they are sort of streamlined and I didn't really need to sacrifice one for another. But at a big university, like UCSD, multiple events happen at once and you need to choose. For example, you have to choose between going to that Friday night dance with your friends and going to a dinner party at your professor's house. I definitely spent way too much time on school work freshman year and missed out on a lot of chances to meet people and see places around San Diego. I have gotten better at that and have learned to balance the time I spend on school work and social events.

*"I appreciate Christ School's emphasis on public speaking (senior speech, class presentations, etc.). I didn't realize how important public speaking skills are until I came to college."*

### **What aspects of Christ School prepared you well for your time college?**

The fact that I was a boarding student at Christ School really helped me become independent in many aspects. I also think being away from home early and learning to live independently definitely gave me a head start when I first started off as a freshman.

### **Can you comment on the value of other specific aspects of Christ School?**

I think the Job Program is great because it gives you a sense of responsibility. I know the jobs can be small (sweeping the floor, cleaning the classroom), but they definitely get you to pay attention to details at a work setting. The after school program/activity is also a great resource since you can explore and try new things freely. You may not like something, but you will certainly find something you are passionate about. I also appreciate Christ School's emphasis on public speaking (senior speech, class presentations, etc.). I didn't realize how important public speaking skills are until I came to college. You literally need it everywhere: presenting your ideas in a large class, presenting your research project to lab members, becoming a student organization leader, etc.

### **What surprised you about your collegiate experience?**

I am surprised by how fast four years of college go by. People always told me that, but it wasn't until I experienced it myself that I believed it to be true. So, take advantage of every minute you are in college!

### **If someone from your home town were interested in Christ School as it relates to the school's ability to prepare you for college, what would you say?**

Christ School prepared me well for college. It is the type of school that not only gives you all the resources to succeed academically, but also prepares you in other aspects which I think is more important. Its unique principles definitely make you a unique individual.

## **"How Can We Help?" A College Tour Checklist for Parents**

**DO NOT:** Announce which schools you'll see and drag your son out the door.

**DO:** Talk with your son about the schools he'd like to visit.

**DO NOT:** Arrange ten tours and information sessions in two days.

**DO:** Let your son schedule your visits online, but encourage him to limit your visits to no more than two schools per day; remind him to schedule down time for exercise, relaxed meals and movies that are totally unrelated to the college application process.

**DO NOT:** Ask the admissions representative involved, personal or judgmental questions during an information session.

**DO:** After the information session, ask for the card of your region's admissions representative; email her/him with your specific questions.

**DO NOT:** Talk on your cell or tap your Smartphone during tours or information sessions.

**DO:** Pay attention and take notes/pictures so you'll be ready to help your son process what he saw, heard and felt during your visits.

# Testing 101: Get Ready, Get Set, Go!

**It's hard to find a student who is excited about taking standardized tests. In popularity rankings, they probably rank somewhere between Saturday classes and brussel sprouts. However, though more than 800 colleges and universities have decided to make these tests an optional part of their admission process (see full list at [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)), chances are good that students will be required to submit standardized test scores to at least one school. So, it's important for students to understand which tests they may take, when they should take them, and why.**

**PSAT** ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)) – Cosponsored by the College Board and the National Merit Scholarship Program, all Christ School freshman, sophomores and juniors take this SAT practice test during a school day in October; no special registration is required. This test gives students experience with the SAT format and serves as the initial screening for National Merit Scholarship programs. Students are assessed in Critical Reading, Math and Writing; each section's maximum score is 80. Test time: just over 2 hours. This test is not sent to colleges but results can affect students' placement in Advanced Placement courses at Christ School.

**PLAN** – ([www.act.org](http://www.act.org)) This is the practice test for the ACT. At Christ School, all sophomores take the PLAN during a school day in November; no special registration is required. This test helps students become familiar with the ACT format. Students are assessed in English, Math, Reading and Science; each section's maximum score is 32. Test time: just over 2 hours. This test is not sent to colleges.

**SAT** – ([www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)) Designed to help colleges determine students' college readiness, this aptitude test is administered on Saturdays at numerous test sites around the country. Students must register themselves, but Christ School will provide transportation to a local site.\* Students are assessed in Critical Reading, Math and Writing; each section's maximum score is 800. Test time (with check in and breaks): over 4 hours. Christ School boys typically take this test for the first time in January of their junior year.\*\* NOTE: The College Board announced changes to the SAT's content and scoring which will go into effect in the fall of 2016. Christ School will provide additional information to students and families as it is released by the College Board.

**ACT** – ([www.act.org](http://www.act.org)) Designed to help colleges determine students' college readiness, this curriculum-based test is administered on Saturdays at numerous test sites around the country. Students must register themselves, but Christ School will provide transportation to a local site.\* Students are assessed in English, Math, Reading and Science; each section's maximum score is 36. Test time (with check in and breaks): over 4 hours. Christ School boys typically take this test for the first time in February of their junior year.\*\* Note: Though the SAT may be more familiar to many parents, the ACT and SAT are now completely interchangeable in the college application process. Christ School encourages every student to take both tests at least once to determine which test is best for him.

**Subject Tests** – ([www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)) Formerly known as SAT II's, some selective colleges recommend or require these single-subject tests. Administered on most SAT test dates, students must register themselves, but Christ School will provide transportation to a local site.\* Each test's maximum score is 800. Test time (with check in): just over 1 hour. Christ School boys are encouraged to take these tests after completing Honor Pre-Calculus and AP courses in relevant subject areas.\*\*

**TOEFL** ([www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org)) – This test assesses the ability of non-native English speakers to use and understand English in a university setting. Many colleges require this test in addition to the SAT or ACT. Christ School students must register themselves.\* Students are assessed in listening, reading, speaking and writing; the test's maximum score is 120. Test time: 4 hours. Christ School boys should meet with Mr. Blackard to discuss the timing of these tests.

\*Coco Parham offers registration help sessions for all juniors; if a student elects to take tests before these sessions, Mrs. Parham is available to assist him as well.

\*\*For more information about your son's testing calendar, contact his college counselor. Students review 9th and 10th grade test results with Emily Pulsifer ([epulsifer@christschool.org](mailto:epulsifer@christschool.org)), while 11th and 12th graders meet with Kirk Blackard to determine timing and spacing of future ACT, SAT, Subject Test and TOEFL tests ([kblackard@christschool.org](mailto:kblackard@christschool.org)).



## Accommodations and Extended Time

Students with documented learning differences may apply for various accommodations through College Board and ACT. Applications for all accommodations must be filed and approved by the individual testing agencies. If you think your son qualifies for accommodations, or if you'd like more information, contact Felice Stokes ([fstokes@christschool.org](mailto:fstokes@christschool.org)) ASAP.

## Test Prep Resources

### In Print

Christ School recommends that students purchase and study Direct Hits Core Vocabulary of the SAT (rising sophomores) and Direct Hits Toughest Vocabulary of the SAT (rising juniors). These books can be purchased through the Christ School Bookstore. Peterson's, McGraw-Hill, Kaplan, College Board and Barron's offer comprehensive test prep books; most include CDs and multiple sample tests. These books are available through publisher websites and Amazon.

### Online Programs

- College Board Online Resources ([www.sat.collegeboard.com](http://www.sat.collegeboard.com))
- ACT Test Prep ([www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org))
- Kaplan Test Prep ([www.kaptest.com](http://www.kaptest.com))
- Princeton Review ([www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com))
- Gorilla Test Prep ([www.gorillatestprep.com](http://www.gorillatestprep.com))
- ePrep ([www.eprep.com](http://www.eprep.com))

## Classes and Tutoring

- Christ School Test Prep – This course introduces Christ School students to every aspect of the SAT and ACT, and helps them identify and master the sections that give them difficulty. There is no extra charge for this course and it is offered every quarter during the school year. For more information about this class or individual tutoring at Christ School, please contact Dale Sparacino ([dsparacino@christschool.org](mailto:dsparacino@christschool.org)).
- Chyten is a nationally franchised center with an array of tutoring services in addition to test prep. There are three North Carolina branches: Asheville, Clayton and Wake Forest. For more information about services and locations, visit [www.chyten.com](http://www.chyten.com).
- Direct Hits offers intensive, four-day test prep sessions in Atlanta. Go to [www.directhiteducation.com](http://www.directhiteducation.com) to learn more.
- Academic Consulting & Educational Services offers highly individualized, flexible tutoring for students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. More information is available at [www.bettersat4u.com](http://www.bettersat4u.com).
- In addition to their print and online programs, Kaplan ([www.kaptest.com](http://www.kaptest.com)) and Princeton Review ([www.testprep.princetonreview.com](http://www.testprep.princetonreview.com)) offer courses in select locations around the country. Consult their websites for dates, locations and prices. For additional options, talk with public and private school guidance counselors in your area.

### Questions about testing? Please contact:

**Scheduling/Test Content/Reading Scores** – Your Son's College Counselor (Emily Pulsifer, 9th and 10th Grades; Kirk Blackard, 11th and 12th Grades)

**Registration/Score Reports** – Coco Parham ([cparham@christschool.org](mailto:cparham@christschool.org))

**Extended Time/Accommodation Eligibility** – Felice Stokes ([fstokes@christschool.org](mailto:fstokes@christschool.org))

## Upcoming Spring Events

### April 12

College 101: The College Application Process for PARENTS OF UNDERCLASSMEN (11:30AM in the Patrick Beaver Student Center)

### April 16

Advanced Placement Pre-Registration for ALL AP STUDENTS (8:45AM in Media Center)

### May 3

SAT/Subject Tests for SELECT SOPHOMORES AND JUNIORS

### May 5 – 16

Advanced Placement Exams for ALL AP STUDENTS

### June 6

ACT

### June 7

SAT/Subject Tests for SELECT SOPHOMORES AND JUNIORS

## College Guidance Contact Information

Kirk Blackard, Director,  
828-684-6232 ext. 110  
[kblackard@christschool.org](mailto:kblackard@christschool.org)

Emily Pulsifer, College Counselor for 9th and 10th Grades, ext. 229  
[epulsifer@christschool.org](mailto:epulsifer@christschool.org)

Coco Parham, Testing Coordinator and Administrative Assistant, ext. 167  
[cparham@christschool.org](mailto:cparham@christschool.org)  
(Mon-Thurs, 8:00am-3:00pm)

Jennifer Bird, Registrar, ext. 106  
[jbird@christschool.org](mailto:jbird@christschool.org)