

What Lies Before Us

Brigitte Bigham, President
PACE Parent Support Group

Here we are in February already, with final exams and the first semester behind us. For freshman, it was their first set of high school finals, and seniors, their second to last. It's good to see students bright eyed and smiling. They all survived, and as parents, we did too. As a parent of a junior and an eight grade student, I feel the anticipation of the unknown, and what lies before us. Remember the application process before your child was accepted to PACE? Here I sit, hopeful that my 8th grade daughter will be accepted into the program. How many students have applied this year? We know that PACE is well regarded and it is tough to get in. What will I do if not accepted, remember the feeling? My junior, in addition to all 3rd year PACE students, is busy preparing for and taking the SAT and ACT tests. We are asking ourselves, what is better, the new SAT or the old one, do colleges prefer the SAT or the ACT, which colleges do not look at tests at all and only rely on GPA?

As parents, we want what is best for our students, how do we guide and prepare them? What if our child decides to fill their elective with a sport and we think a science class would be better? Colleges want to see all of the core sciences, Physics, Chemistry and Biology, if they don't have all three, will they get into the college that they want? Or perhaps their "safety school?" When looking at the path to college, do we need a college counselor to guide us through the path, or do we take it upon ourselves? Should I spend the money to have someone help me? If I don't, am I not being a good parent?

In going through this process, I asked many parents who have travelled along this same path how it all turned out. I am pleased to say, most said that everything turned out just fine, whatever choices were made along the way. Each student is the principal force in their life. It is important for them to have dreams, set goals, achieve them, learn from defeat and celebrate victories. I leave you with one of my favorite quotes:

So be sure when you step,
Step with care and great tact
And remember that life's
A Great Balancing Act,
And will you succeed?
Yes! Your will, indeed!
(98 and ¾ percent guaranteed)
Kid, you will move mountains.

DR. SEUSS from *OH, THE PLACES YOU'LL GO*



It's Not All Grades ...continued from page 1

Many PACE students come to Poly when their middle school friends chose a more familiar and less challenging high school environment. Making friends of strangers who share the goal of expanding horizons and learning profoundly in multiple areas both academic and non-academic, are enormously important parts of the PACE experience. The thought that our students are moving joylessly through the process with their heads down, concentrating on drilling for quizzes to the exclusion of all other aspects of the PACE experience or their own growth into responsible and informed citizens, is troubling to many of us who have seen the emergence from this program of remarkable young adults who demonstrate incalculable growth during their years here.

Another troubling aspect of this trend is that pressure to do well at any cost can create a tendency in some students to take short cuts. If a grade is the goal, with or without learning, achieving that goal using any means possible becomes an option. Breaches of academic integrity are unacceptable and deprive young people of the confidence to know that valuable lessons can be crafted from failure. Picking oneself up after failure can provide the spark for previously unexpressed creativity, increasing the personal strength and resiliency of the individual. If a person has never failed, he or she has never stretched. How can anyone reach the stars without standing up, looking around, reaching, running, and occasionally falling?

Teachers in PACE love what they do and the students for whom they do it. We live for teaching students who are not only talented but who are unafraid to take intellectual chances, who are excited by their learning and not simply trudging through their days quietly repeating to themselves, "another day, another A." Students who reach and risk inspire us to be inspiring, and the positive feedback cycle continues.

If an overbearing concern for grades is truly depriving some of our students of the fullness of the PACE experience, how can we, as a program, address this trend? One of the ways is to insist that the lines of communication remain open. Parents and students frequently bring problems to me or to our counselor, Ms. Loggins, telling us that we must respect their confidentiality to avoid the teacher "taking it out" on the student. I know of precious few instances where teachers sought to exact retribution from a student who approached a problem in a genuine spirit of cooperation. As a PACE teacher for over twenty years, I absolutely need to hear from my students about problems they are experiencing.

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More and more experts in the field of education and psychology are speaking out about "over-scheduled" students, students with "overly" involved parents, students who may have an attitude of "entitlement", students who "lack respect" for others or students who are "self-absorbed". Many college representatives are voicing the importance for them to seek students who practice or have developed age-old values such as showing concern for others; nurturing creativity; developing life skills; participating in household chores; developing independence; demonstrating self-control and showing a genuine love of learning. If students find a healthy balance of these attributes, they will discover it will pay incredible dividends.

Recommended readings:

1. <http://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/collegeadmissions>
2. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/opinion/rethinking-college-admissions.html?_r=0
3. *How to Raise An Adult* by Julie Lythcott-Haims
4. *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel, Ph.D



It's Not All Grades

Dr. Michelle Aberle
PACE Facilitator



PACE teachers have started to see what we are hearing from a number of our parents: it seems that some of our students are overly concerned about grades, that they are displaying the dreaded gold robe syndrome. PACE students typically earn great grades; this is not a surprise and is certainly nothing new. What is different, it now seems, is the degree to which the quest for As on a transcript has become obsessive for some of our students, and this obsession is interfering both with their learning and with their ability to enjoy their high school years.

Over the years I have heard PACE students criticized for being more concerned about their grades than their learning. I have always defended our students by noting that attaining a high grade in a class from a teacher whom the student considers an expert in the field indicates that a student has achieved a certain degree of mastery in that subject area. Of course students want an "A", and not simply to polish their transcripts. If a student cares about learning, he or she will want validation that their learning was inclusive of the full scope of the material presented in the class. And yes, glowing transcripts are coveted as well. PACE is a premier college-preparatory program, and college acceptance depends upon performance. What many of us in PACE are now concerned about, however, is the supremacy of attaining good grades as a goal over attaining mastery of content, deep learning, and enjoyment of the process.

When I have broached this topic with my own students, many explain that their parents demand high grades and are responsible for the pressure the students feel. Perhaps this happens, but many of the parents with whom I have spoken lately are the ones bemoaning their children's compulsion to get As, to constantly compare themselves to their classmates, and to neglect their enjoyment and their health. Several parents who have had older siblings go through the program are communicating in worried tones about the pressure the students are putting on themselves and the consequent truncation of their vision of the world and their possible place in it. PACE has always been the place to go to school for kids who excel at learning because they love learning. These students have traditionally loved exploring the many varied contexts that become part and parcel of the PACE experience, which includes what is happening in the world, the region, and the local community. These contexts include the world of arts and letters, both local and global, popular culture, and service to their communities. Certainly an enormous part of the high school experience is taking the time to enjoy friends and learn new perspectives.

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Balance & Perspective

Connie Loggins
PACE Counselor

There is no question that for many students, a wave of hysteria has crept into the college process. If students are not careful, they may find themselves taking on what I will call the "I'm not good enough" syndrome. There is a myth that if your student does not get admitted to an Ivy League college, or a top-tier university, the student is doomed for life. Parents, guardians and students must remember, that this myth is just that, "a myth".

Students should be reminded that their success, self-worth, and self-concept should not hinge upon the decision of a college admission representative; nor should the main motivation for the student be to engage in selective activities, or take elective courses on what others, students or parents, think college officers are seeking. I have witnessed extremely intelligent, gifted students who had forgotten this; thus, became paralyzed by the fear of being "frowned upon" by college admission officers because they did not score a five on all of their AP exams or that their extra curricular activities may not have been impressive enough for the college representatives.

I have also seen what has happened to parents or guardians being burdened by anxiety, comment that since "their student no longer had a straight 'A' in each subject, the chances of the student being admitted to a top-tier school is over" or that "in comparison to my neighbor's child, my child is not taking enough AP courses or involved in enough extracurricular activities" and the list continues.

However, the reality is that the college process is very subjective, and changes from year to year. I have heard college admission representatives say they are looking for "intangible" qualities that set a student apart from others; yet these qualities may change from year to year. Unfortunately, thousands of highly gifted and talented students have been evaluated and turned away in a given year, because the students did not match the "proper fit" for their campus that year.

Instead of a student mimicking students who have been accepted at a university, the applicant should spend time discovering and developing his or her own path and passions. Whatever the involvement, it should be something the applicant truly cares about, along with being something in which the applicant has sustained and invested experiences. When students are involved in something purposeful and enjoyable, the likelihood of burnout decreases. This is the major reason students need to embrace their true passions and enjoy the journey along the way.

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Reflections from PPSG Scholarship Winners 2015



Julia Jaynes, California State University Long Beach*

Last night I was sitting with my friends in our dorm common room talking about college so far. I think the most sticking thing said last night was, "College is great but the school part sucks." That may be true for students who are struggling with the transition to college but coming from PACE, the school part has been an easy academic transition. PACE has more than prepared me for the rigors I have faced these past few months. I would say that the workload I face in college is less than what I dealt with in PACE. PACE taught me how to prioritize and schedule my time; write, study, and most importantly enjoy the learning process. When deciding where to attend college, I struggled in choosing, but deciding to attend CSULB as a President's Scholar has been a blessing, and I have to thank Ms. Loggins and PACE teachers for supporting me and helping me in this decision. At CSULB I have an amazing community of scholars and staff that are there to support me in everything that I do. I get to take the classes I want because I have priority registration; I have a leg up in applying to campus programs because of my status as a President Scholar; and I will graduate debt free. Despite the fact that yes, the college I attend is closer to my house than Poly was, I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to be a part of PACE and now the opportunity to live on CSULB's campus. It is so nice to go home to eat with my family or just play with my dog but also roll right out

of bed straight into the classroom. PACE has made it so that instead of me worrying about my academics, I get to be involved in clubs, hang out with friends and actually enjoy my time in college. I may just barely be a legal adult, but I want to offer a small piece of advice to the seniors who in a few months will be facing the decision of where to attend college. Don't worry about what others think about where you are going to attend, choose the school that you have the gut feeling that it is the place for you to be. And more importantly Go Beach!

Veronica Tan, Loyola Marymount University

The thing I miss the most is having my own bathroom. I can deal with not having my family around 24/7 and not having a bedroom to myself. But I am still not used to sharing one bathroom with the entire floor of girls. To me, that is the hardest part about college. Grades, classes, getting enough sleep, and maintaining the right balance of your social life are a piece of cake. Having no other choice but to learn to share (what used to be) your private space with strangers who force you to listen to their playlist of popular music while singing along (off-key) in the shower is harder than staying awake during a lecture by a professor whose voice reminds you of the teacher in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off." The very concept of privacy is obliterated in the dorms (but of course, this is how I get my daily gossip through thin walls and stalls). There is no division between house and school. Indeed, the college life is certainly, for lack of a better word, different. But "different" can also be good. At Loyola Marymount University, I live in a tight-knit Jesuit community with a "Renaissance Man" core curriculum. For the first time in my entire life, I get to choose my classes, and I love them all. My Comparative Theology class about Hinduism and Christianity has opened up a spiritual path for me, which I implement when sitting absent-mindedly in the empty chapel past the Sunken Garden. My First Year Seminar Class of a handful of people is centered on Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and various C.S. Lewis novels. As a Psychology Major, I absolutely adore my General Psychology class. As a Music Minor, I have come to appreciate Music Theory and develop a small group of friends within my chamber orchestra family. Because of my experience in the rigorous PACE program, I can start off my college career with the maximum of 18 units with a major and a minor while maintaining straight A's without difficulty. I can balance my top priority education with Tennis Club, 8-10 hours of sleep every night, and the perfect dose of a social life. I can enjoy all of my courses to the fullest without complaining about the workload or giving up. It is because of PACE and its wonderfully tough teachers and the guidance of Ms. Loggins and Dr. Aberle that I am able to say that the hardest part of college is adapting to something so miniscule as a bathroom.



Jeffrey Lam, University of California Los Angeles

College is definitely reshaping me. My limbs are getting thinner and my stomach is getting bigger. It feels like I have been in college for a lifetime—in a good way. I've already met some great people and learned an insane amount of material in just one quarter. College makes high school classes seem like a breeze in terms of pace and material. High school is like the ten minute stretching period before the workout that is college. But then again, the workout is the most fun and worthwhile part, is it not? Alongside its challenges, UCLA has been a blast. There is always something for me to do on campus. For those who know my main interests, the food here is amazing as well. Above all else, however, I feel as if I've grown so much as a person in these past several weeks. Despite the angst of being almost independent, it's also amazing how much you can accomplish on your own and how many opportunities actually lie outside your dorm door. I am currently taking it pretty light this quarter—the only extracurricular activity I am in is the UCLA orchestra. I plan on joining a community service fraternity in the future and even looking into archery. Who knows what the future will hold. Not surprisingly, orchestra alone has taken up much of my time, yet, somehow, I have been able to maintain a steady lifestyle. I give much credit of my survivability in this collegiate chaos to my experience in Poly PACE. For example, rather than all of my peers in class jotting down every little insignificant slur coming out of the professor's mouth, I've learned to recognize what is important. My ability to sort out time for studying versus playing has improved. I have also recognized the usefulness of a good nap—do not underestimate the power of a nap. Surely, the amount of work in college compared to high school is tenfold, but the training and help from the first-rate staff that PACE offered me has definitely helped get me through college without being miserable. More importantly, it's given me the ability to get through my academic life so that I can shape myself as a person in the rest of my life.



Dylan McCarthy, Georgetown University

With days left before I return to California, I can't believe how quickly my first semester at Georgetown has gone. In only three months, I've had the opportunity to work with brilliant students and professors on everything from how to study for an upcoming econ exam to the nature of God or other divine reality; I've started the process of becoming a guide in the Outdoor Education program to lead trips in the wilderness; I'm on my way to becoming a fully inducted member of Georgetown's 186-year-old Philodemic (debate) Society; and I am making the transition into life as a walk-on rower for the crew team. These experiences are supplemented by incredible speakers who come to campus like Soviet chess champion Garry Kasparov, presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, the U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees Antonio Guterres, and the commanding General of the U.S. Army in the Pacific Vincent K. Brooks. College has a way of keeping your days busy!

In the midst of everything I'm constantly thankful for the outstanding preparation received from Poly's PACE program. Without a doubt, I would not be able to take as much advantage of what Georgetown has to offer without the rigorous academics, critical thinking skills, and confidence the PACE program instilled. Every day in my international trade class, we discuss topics covered intensively by Mr. Adler and Mr. Manack. The methods I learned from Watson Sensei and Suojanen Sensei put me way ahead of the curve as I continue my Japanese studies (Georgetown's School of Foreign Service [SFS] requires proficiency in at least one other modern world language). I use the skills honed in classes with Mr. Gillogly and Mr. Meckna to make my own SMOs for a class on the Middle East 100 Years Ago. I also write constantly! Without the PACE English program, I would be lost. In such a brief space, there's no way to explain all the ways my time at Poly prepared me for life in D.C. From what I can tell, there is no experience quite like PACE; that is, an intensely well-rounded education in the context of a massive, diverse community. At Georgetown, our approach to education is summed up with the phrase Cura Personalis or, the development of the "whole person" not only mentally, but physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I think that attitude is also embodied in the PACE curriculum. It is this continuing philosophy that has allowed me to feel truly fulfilled and at home at Georgetown. To the PACE teachers, facilitators, and support community, I offer my humblest thanks. To PACE students, I say congratulations, you are a part of something to be proud of; no matter where you decide to go after graduation --you'll be ready.



Shiyun Ahn, University of Chicago

College isn't what I expected, to be honest. I thought of a place where I would be expected to know everything and use every single study skill that PACE taught me. I expected a place where education was above everything else and I would be relieved for breaks to come home and relax. I expected a place where everyone was competitive, where everyone worshiped the Almighty Curve. I will admit, I did get that at least. The Almighty Curve is not a benevolent deity. But everything else? Not at all. I wasn't expected to know everything. I wasn't expected to get an A on every assignment. I was told that A's were hard to come by and that having one on my transcript would place me far above the grades of my colleagues in other colleges. Study skills? I used those when I studied alone. Here, I meet with my classmates practically every day as we work on problem sets and study for finals together. The Regenstein Library is home away from home, but it isn't constricting. I imagine that my accounts are very different from those of my former classmates.



They might speak of nostalgic moments, of wishing that they had PACE's safety nets back. I remember reading accounts like those, accounts that reminisced of the Good Times where everything was taken care of and the only thing to focus on was grades. I don't think that what I took away from PACE was those study skills I mentioned earlier (but hey, you should still study. Studying is good. Studying is fun, even). I might have brought my calculus notebook from Amici with me, but I have long since stored it away in favor of a new notebook filled with notes taken in my Calculus-2 class here. No, what I took away from PACE and brought to college is this: I am not alone. I am not supposed to be the best. I am surrounded by the best, and there will always be one person better than me at any given subject. But if you just ask, you will get help from whomever you need it from. All I need to do is find that person and get answers.

Thank You Dr. Melrose

On December 2 PPSG hosted a parent information night with psychologist and author Dr. Melrose. PACE parents of all grades attended our PACE Parent Support Group event "The High-Achieving Student: Relief, Success & Joy". Dr. Melrose reviewed current neuroscience elucidating the effects of chronic stress and/or trauma on the brain, learning, and behavior. Self-regulation was identified as the single most important foundational capacity for success in spite of chronic stress and trauma. Basically, she taught the parents how to teach their students to relax in stressful situations, such as test taking. Simple resources, strategies, and tools were modeled and highlighted to be used immediately and repeatedly for lasting results. We are so sorry if you missed this amazing event. For further information, please visit her website at www.drmelrose.com. She also has many informative videos on YouTube.

PACE Parent Support Group Board

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