

GEORGIA TECH ADMISSION BLOG

A DIALOGUE ON COLLEGE ADMISSION

- **GEORGIA TECH ADMISSION
SEARCH**

[Georgia Tech Admission Blog](#)
[Financial Aid](#)
[Junior](#)
[Parents](#)
[Prospective Student](#)
[School Counselor](#)
[More and Less, Part 4](#)

MORE AND LESS, PART 4

January 31, 2020 by [Rick Clark](#)

Over the last 20 years I've had the privilege of traveling around our country and the world speaking to families about college, the admission experience, and higher education.

During that time, both the work and the landscape have shifted dramatically. There is no question we currently face some unfortunate macro trends and realities: tuition costs continue to rise, putting greater financial strain on all families ([particularly the middle class](#)); decreased birth rates related to the recession in 2008-2009 will soon have significant impacts on the [number of high school graduates](#); performance on standardized tests correspond heavily to a student's socioeconomic background; state appropriations to public systems which were severely reduced over a decade ago have not recovered; and false narratives surrounding the economic value of a college degree have become pervasive.

Yet at its core, at the micro level, college admission is *exactly* what it's always been—a family experience. Whether in Atlanta, Arkansas, Argentina, or Asia; whether a student is first-generation or from a multiple generation college-going family; whether the focus is on the Ivy League or regional publics in their state; regardless of religion or ethnicity or socioeconomic background, I've found one common and deeply encouraging thread: *parents love their kids*. While their questions may surround sterile topics like weighted GPAs or

super-scored testing or application deadlines or graduation rates, they emanate from the same place: one of deep affection and unbridled love.

So before launching into **the mores and less' for parents**, let me first say, "Thank you."



Thank you for loving your kids.

Thank you for advocating for them.

Thank you for wanting them to have a better life and more opportunities and experiences than you have had.

Thank you for encouraging them and supporting them, even when they drive you nuts, roll their eyes, mumble one-syllable responses, or keep you up late at night worrying.

Thank you for washing the same dishes and clothes a thousand times.

Thank you for driving to and from practice and sitting through hours of swim meets or dance or music performances (just to hear or see your child perform for a fraction of that time).

Do I wish you wouldn't disguise your voice in order to procure your daughter's admission portal password? Sure.

Would admission officers prefer to come in the morning after releasing admission decisions, get a cup of coffee, and check the scores from the night

before, rather than having parents outside (or in the parking lot) wanting to appeal or provide 13 additional recommendation letters? Yep.

Do I enjoy having my competence, intelligence, or soul brought into question based on an admission decision? Not particularly.

Nevertheless, as the parent of two kids, I get it. The truth is you are doing what you always have—loving them, protecting them, and providing for them. So for that, I thank you.

Understanding that is your goal, **here are the mores and less' for parents in 2020.**

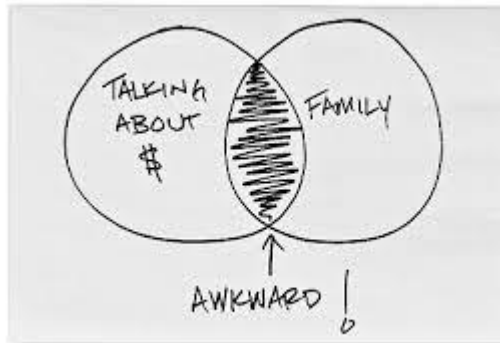
More willingness to talk about money *early*.

Any admission or financial aid director can share countless stories about painful conversations with families in spring. The student has been admitted, posted his intent to attend on Instagram, bought the hoodie, and already started scoping out dorms. Meanwhile, his parents are staring solemnly at the recently received financial aid package. They are weighing the fact that supporting this choice will mean no more vacations, or taking out a second mortgage on the house, or not retiring until the age of 78. Naturally, emotions are running high. At this point, I typically grab my laptop, place a box of tissues on the table, wish them the best and quietly close the door in search of the Keurig. I am simply not certified to moderate that type of discussion.

*If you are the parent of a junior, **now** (before they apply to colleges) is the time to have honest conversations about what paying for college is going to look like for your family. You don't need to itemize all of your expenditures, but "opening the books" and facilitating a transparent dialogue will shift your private financial burden to an open partnership and a collective investment. As a student's first significant adult decision, they should be privy to the expense and implications of their college choice.*

The beauty of the college admission experience is it can actually teach some long-term, real-life lessons. Sometimes that is about humility and dealing with disappointment when they are deferred, denied, or waitlisted; sometimes it's the tension and difficulty of having to wait on results; and sometimes it is

understanding how the lifestyle they know is financed, and how paying for



college will factor into that.

I understand this can be uncomfortable initially. However, talking money early will not only keep you out of that dreaded April scenario I described, but will also help inform your college search. It will help generate important questions to ask on tours about co-ops, internships, major choice, return on investment, careers, salaries, and how those colleges help students pursue employment opportunities during and after college. It will help frame the difference between “sticker price” and actual cost before applying. It will allow you to use and process the results of [Net Price Calculators](#) as a family. I believe talking about money early will actually bring you together, rather than creating a painful silent wedge in your relationship during the college admission experience. Talk money early!

Draw less lines.

“My dad will only let me apply to schools in the Top X.” Before you put those types of conditions on your student’s search, I urge you to check the methodology behind how the rankings are formulated (this is how *US News and World Report* [creates its rankings](#)). Before you blindly follow a singular number as an authoritative signpost, ask yourself if your values are in line with their calculations.

More pointedly, do you care what one president (or their assistant who completes the survey) thinks of another college (20% of the methodology)? Is it of any consequence that a school looking to increase its position might intentionally inflate a small fraction of faculty salaries or decrease the class size in a major your daughter or son has no interest in pursuing (another 20% of the methodology)?

Secondly, just like college football teams may end one season inside the Top 25 and begin the next one outside of it, the same is true for university rankings. They change. The BIG difference is sports teams move up and down because of actual performance or losing a quarterback.

In contrast, last year Georgia Tech was ranked the #8 public school in the nation. This year we are in the fifth slot. The truth is we are the same place. Our students are just as bright. Our research is just as important. Nothing has changed—except that number. So before you tell your daughter she can only visit schools in the Top 50 or 100, consider not only the highly debatable methodology, but also the fact that last year number 94 was ranked 107 or visa versa (*Note: I have no idea who is currently 107, 94, or any other number, except number five*).

Admit rates are another line parents often draw that I urge you to focus on far less. A school counselor put this beautifully last week, “selectivity is not always a proxy for academic quality.” Bam! That is spot on. As a parent, I hope you will not find yourself coaching your daughter or son to, “only look at places with admit rates below X%.” Or to attend the “most selective school to which you are admitted.”

Here is my case study counter. When I arrived at Tech, we were admitting well over 60% of applicants. Just a few years ago we sat around 40%. This year’s class will likely see an admit rate below 20%. Are they any smarter, more talented, or more destined for future success? Absolutely not. Students we admitted at 60% are running companies now and sitting on boards of major organizations. If a parent was drawing draconian lines they may have counseled their oldest child elsewhere, but now demand Tech is the right choice for their 2020 grad simply because of a specific percentage threshold. Same dorms. Same food. Same job opportunities. Draw less lines!

Less talking to other high school parents and more talking to the parents of current college students (or those of recent college graduates).

When you were pregnant or figuring out potty training or trying to determine the best discipline tactics, or as your daughter was about to get her driver’s license, you consulted the parents of kids who had already walked that same path.

This is why high schools invite parents of alumni back to serve on panels. They have walked in your shoes. They have wisdom and tips and can console and empathize. You know what they never say? “We really wish we’d really stressed more about this whole college admission thing!” Nope. Instead, they may talk about the twists and turns. They will likely describe some lessons learned. They’ll certainly talk about how they wish they’d talked about money earlier or drawn less lines or discovered the Georgia Tech admission blog as a junior. But ultimately they say the same thing. It all worked out for the best: “she’s happy,” “he’s dating a girl we actually like,” “I never thought I could cheer for that team, but I have to admit it’s a pretty amazing school.”



So spend your time talking to your peers about the upcoming soccer game or whether their son is also going on that spring break trip, but don't talk to them about college admission. Many exaggerate. Some straight up lie. And unless they've got an older kid or two in college, they are just as confused or anxious as you are. Escape your echo chamber!

As we end this four-part series, I again want to thank you.

[If you are a fellow admission colleague](#) out there bleary-eyed in the middle of reading season, thank you! Thank you for your diligence, your perseverance, and your commitment to building your campus community one application at a time. Stay hydrated. Get some sun. Connect with colleagues.

[If you are a school counselor](#) walking the halls each day, inviting kids into your office to encourage, console or just listen, thank you! Thank you for truly seeing them when they feel unseen or misunderstood. Thank you for being

there to give them a hug or some perspective after a rough exam or a big break up. Thank you for juggling a million responsibilities but consistently putting your concerns aside and pouring out your time and energy into kids.

[If you are a high school student](#), thank you. Thank you for the hope you convey in your essays. Thank you for the bold aspirations and tremendous accomplishments and talents you outline in your applications. Thank you for the boundless optimism and desire to improve our world that you discuss in your interviews (frequently despite carrying burdens of expectations, enduring a tragic loss, or weathering circumstances no teenager should ever have to endure). Our world is broken and dark at times. Too often we see the “worst of us” play out on the nightly news or in our social media feed. Particularly in an election year, when we hear polarizing rhetoric or see caustic divisions and factions, you provide incredibly refreshing light to those of us fortunate enough to read and listen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

If you a parent, thank you! This role is an amazing, terrifying privilege that leads us down a simultaneously joyous yet heart-wrenching path without any real trail map or instruction guide. Thank you for the dozens of unseen sacrifices you make and silent prayers you offer for your kids every day. The truth is you will not be able to control everything about your family’s college experience. The good news is that is not what they need anyway. After watching this cycle repeat itself for two decades, I am convinced what they really need is what only *you* can provide— your love and support. Keep showing and telling them you trust them and that you are proud of them. Thank you for loving your kids!

If you would like to subscribe to receive blog entries when they post, please enter your email address above, or click the “Subscribe” button in the header at the top of this page. We also welcome comments or feedback [@gtadmission](#) on Twitter.