



INDEPENDENT
EDUCATIONAL
CONSULTANTS
ASSOCIATION

3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 510
Fairfax, Virginia 22030-1504

Phone: 703-591-4850
Fax: 703-591-4860

E-mail: info@IECAonline.com
Web: www.IECAonline.com

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Contact:
Sarah Brachman
Manager of Communications
703-591-4850 ext. 11

Twelve Critical Questions to Ask Before Hiring an Educational Consultant

Fairfax, Virginia — The field of private college counseling has seen explosive growth in recent years, with membership in the Independent Educational Consultants Association more than doubling from 350 to 750 members in the last five years. Nationally, the number of high school seniors hiring educational consultants to assist in their college search and application process has climbed to more than 160,000.

“It has become more critical during this period of fast growth,” said IECA Executive Director Mark Sklarow, “that parents be able to distinguish between consultants who are knowledgeable, capable, and ethical from those who make false promises or lack the education and experience to be effective advisors.”

The association has created a list of a dozen questions that are central to the decision about hiring an educational consultant (attached). These include inquiries about how many college campuses a consultant visits yearly (recommended: more than 20 annually), to inquiries about education, professional experience, and membership in professional societies.

“It is just as important to see what a consultant says they will and won’t do as part of their consulting effort,” says Sklarow. “No consultant should make a promise of admission or emphasize ‘getting in,’ rewrite essays or ‘package students.’ Look for a consultant who understands that a good result is one in which the student is a good match for a school’s offerings, including the academic, social, and cultural environment.”

The IECA was founded in 1976 as a nonprofit, professional association of established educational consultants. IECA member educational consultants are professionals who assist students and families with educational decision-making. Their educational backgrounds, specialized training, campus visitations, and professional experience equip them to help students choose schools, colleges, or programs that meet their individual needs and goals. Membership in the association requires consultants to meet IECA's professional standards and subscribe to its Principles of Good Practice. Members continually update their knowledge and maintain skills through IECA-sponsored meetings, workshops, training programs, and information exchanges with colleges, schools, programs and other consultants.

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12 Questions to Ask Before Hiring an Educational Consultant

1. Do you guarantee admission to a school, one of my top choices, or a certain minimum dollar value in scholarships? *(Do NOT trust any offer of guarantees.)*
2. How do you keep up with new trends, academic changes and evolving campus cultures? How often do you get out and visit college, school, and program campuses and meet with admissions representatives? *(The ONLY way to know about the best matches for you is to be out visiting schools regularly—we suggest a minimum of 20 campuses per year.)*
3. Do you belong to any professional associations? *(NACAC and IECA are the only two associations for private educational consultants with established and rigorous standards for membership.)*
4. Do you attend professional conferences or training workshops on a regular basis to keep up with regional and national trends and changes in the law?
5. Do you ever accept any form of compensation from a school, program, or company in exchange for placement or a referral? *(They absolutely should not!)*
6. Are all fees involved stated in writing, up front, indicating exactly what services I will receive for those fees?
7. Will you complete the application for admission, re-write my essays or fill out the financial aid forms on my behalf? *(No, they should NOT; it is essential that the student be in charge of the process and all materials should be a product of the student's own, best work.)*
8. How long have you been in business as an educational consultant?
9. What was your background prior to going into educational consulting? What was your training and education?
10. Will you use personal connections to get me in to one of my top choices? *(The answer should be NO. A consultant doesn't get you admitted—they help you to demonstrate why you deserve to be admitted.)*
11. What specialized training do you have (LD, gifted, athletics, arts, etc.)?
12. Do you adhere to the ethical guidelines for private counseling established by IECA?

One way to ensure that an educational consultant is ethical is to hire an IECA consultant who has been vetted through IECA's intense application process.

