

# Customized Counseling

*Students choose private counseling to receive more personalized help*

BY CLAIRE LU AND JADY WEI

**F**our years. That's how long she has been in the college counseling system.

The anonymous junior girl is one of the many students partaking in a rapidly flourishing industry feeding off of the college admissions process. It is not uncommon for students, especially in affluent schools and like MVHS, to have a team of college counselors help with procedures ranging from organizing exam preparation to essay coaching to admissions counseling.

"[The four years encompassed] a bunch of SAT prep classes, AP prep classes, classes for if you want to self-study APs, a once a month visit to my college counselor and help applying to ten colleges, which includes essay counseling," the junior said.

Admissions counseling often covers the entire process of packaging the student starting from freshman year. Elite Prep, a national college counseling corporation with a branch in Cupertino, "challenges students to create their individualized plan of action through one-on-one counseling." From freshman to junior year, college counselors recommend activities to participate in, summer programs to apply to and classes to take. Commencing senior year, the applica-

tion counseling begins, as counselors help students choose colleges, prepare for interviews and polish essays.

## Why choose a college counselor?

Most students choose to hire private college counselors in order to receive increased personalized attention and advice, as compared to that received from high school counselors.

"[At MVHS], each counselor is responsible for around

600 students, so they devote less time to each student, and they don't get to know the individual student very well," sophomore Daniel Zhu, who also receives college counseling, said. "College counselors give you other personal advice about college that applies specifically to you."

Others hire college counselors due to external motivations, such as parental and peer pressures. Often, the fear of falling behind one's peers motivates students into seeking extra counseling outside of school. Out of the 52 survey respondents, 30 hired college counselors due to coercion from parents, and 18 hired college counselors because peers around them were receiving extra help from private counselors.

## The effectiveness

Guidance counselor Kate West believes that there is little need for private college counselors when guidance counselors can provide similar services.

"I feel kind of cynical saying this," West said, "but I feel like it's because

[private counseling sites] want parents' money, and they know that parents will do anything to help their kids be successful, so they target that sensitive spot within parents."

West notes that it is common for many parents to enroll in a binding course with counseling sites due to the widespread saying that doing so will render their children higher chances of entering an elite college.

"I've had kids come back to tell me, 'Oh no, I have to do this independent project, and someone told me that

## Colleges don't want cookie-cutter kids.

*Guidance Counselor Kate West*

I have to write a book. And I don't understand what's going on!," West said. "[These private counselors] are thinking that's what colleges want and are not focusing on what is truly so great about the students. Colleges don't want cookie-cutter kids."

Many students believe that guidance counselors are busy and don't have time to interact with them, but counselors prioritize to meet with students who have made appointments. It is very common for them to go over college lists and essays with students who wish to acquire the help — similar to how private counselors aid their students.

"I have students email me essays, and they want me to check out how they're doing," West said. "I have a lot of students who will walk through their application — before they submit it — with me to make sure that they didn't forget to include anything. That's a bulk of what we work on."

Ultimately, whether private college counseling is effective is the decision of every individual student. But one thing that West said is universally objective:

"If it ever seems too good to be true, it probably is. If there was a magic formula and a magic system to get you in, we would share that with you. But a lot of it is more intangible and subjective."



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**ONE-ON-ONE:** Guidance counselor Shari Schussel speaks with a freshman and her parent about the college application process on Oct. 18. Schussel explains the classes the freshmen are required to take in the coming years.