



Alexandra Kepler shared a [link](#) to the group: [Foreign Service College Bound](#).

January 16 at 8:00pm ·

The Foreign Service Youth Foundation is very grateful for the invaluable discussions facilitated by Becky Grappo of RNG International, Dr. Lauren Steed of Nomad Educational Services, and Dr. Hannah Morris of Intercultural Transitions and FSYP Board Member. I have personally learned a tremendous amount about the admissions and selection process and will pass on the resources you listed to our global community. FSYP strives to provide the most accurate information about the college admissions process, test-taking procedures, and scholarships and financial aid to our TCKs. We are indeed fortunate and very appreciative for the donation of your time and expertise. Please visit our website if you would like to know about future college-bound events (www.fsyf.org).

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Megan Schill Bartholomew *to* [Foreign Service College Bound](#)

January 15 at 2:17pm ·

I've read that very strong students who choose less competitive schools may get more merit-based aid because the schools want to get those students to boost average SAT scores etc. any truth to this?

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4 You, Becky Grappo and 2 others

Comments



Lauren MacKinnon Steed This is very much true, especially in the last couple years, and will likely be even more true in the coming 4-5. Those ranking numbers mean everything to mid-range schools. I wouldn't even call them "less competitive," some of the so-called Hidden Ivies "buy" high scoring students too.

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Megan Schill Bartholomew Right. I meant less competitive like "not Stanford" lol.



Susanna Mc Just a caution, my son had a lot of choice, including an almost full ride from a less competitive school. He made his own decision. In the long view, I think he made the best choice for him. Being a big fish in a small (less competitive) pond is not for everyone. Some need competition to really prosper.

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Hannah Morris Susanna - Great point! Students usually know the educational environment they thrive in. Some prefer to be in competitive environments while others prefer to have extra opportunities for research and faculty engagement. These self-reflective discussions are great to have with juniors right now (after a very tough first semester) and can help your student in their college search.

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Amy Pratt **Susanna Mc** -same. My son was offered full rides at 2 different smallish private schools but instead opted to pay the full rate at UNC Chapel Hill where he will graduate this summer magna cum laude. He needed to be challenged and given more options for study and internship programs. I'd say he made the right choice. He was also able to get an RA gig at the school to offset the cost.



Lois Hughey We chose a competitive school, but it is small, so they have quite a bit of merit aid to give. And we did an early decision, when there is apparently more money????



Becky Grappo I wouldn't say ED necessarily gives away more in merit aid...the main advantage in ED is if they admit a higher percentage of students.

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Lauren MacKinnon Steed I'm glad they gave you a good offer! Congrats!

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Lois Hughey **Lauren MacKinnon Steed** Well, less than we hoped for, but more than expected, so I guess it's good. Still a LOT of money.....



Jennifer Spande Can we ask which school this was? My impression has been that more competitive schools didn't give merit-based aid, so I would love to know of an exception!



Lois Hughey **Jennifer Spande** she was accepted to Macalester in St. Paul. Small, international, academic.

2



Jennifer Spande **Lois Hughey** That is a good school! Great to hear that they have merit scholarships. Congrats to her!



Lois Hughey **Jennifer Spande** Thank you. We are thrilled for her.



Lauren MacKinnon Steed Is Macalester still doing their AWESOME summer orientation program? It used to be an option to go canoeing and camping for a week with some of your future classmates. I hope they still do that, because I was so jealous of it!



Lois Hughey **Lauren MacKinnon Steed** i don't know. We haven't heard about it yet, if they do. It sounds awesome!



Becky Grappo I have had students chase some big names but it's important to look to see how much - if any - merit aid they might give. Some give zippity-do-da.



Becky Grappo Yet other colleges might be VERY generous with aid and still be excellent options. One such student just got over \$85,000 in aid for the next 4 years.

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Amy Pratt **Becky Grappo** - my son was offered \$110,000 for Emory and we still couldn't afford it 🙄. He's been happy at UNC though-in state tuition helped.



Becky Grappo **Amy Pratt** I get it. I know what that FS paycheck looks like and while everyone has different circumstances, investments, etc., that tuition bill is STILL a lot of money. I can remember when my entire paycheck went to pay college tuition. 😞 But I'm happy to hear that he has landed in another place that is a good fit for him and affordable.



Alexandra Kepler Where can I find merit aid info about several schools to help guide which schools we visit?



Becky Grappo You can look on the college's website under financial aid, or use the Common Data Set online. I also have software that shows what the average percentage of students receiving merit aid is and the average award.



Lois Hughey We used the The Fiske Guide and the Princeton College Review (380 best colleges). We could see what their average aid was.



Lauren MacKinnon Steed Schools are understandably cagey about making that information public. But, there are some answers in the Common Data Set. It takes some interpretation to make sure you're not reading their loan offers as the kind of aid you actually wish they'd give you, i.e. "merit" aid.



Lauren MacKinnon Steed This is one place the Dept of Ed tries to make aid and costs transparent: <https://collegecost.ed.gov/Manage>

Higher Education Opportunity Act Information on College Costs

Becky Grappo **Lauren MacKinnon Steed** Exactly. Look for the words "Non-need based merit aid".

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[Lois Hughey](#) Also, I don't know what all colleges do, but the one my daughter is attending reduces non-need based merit aid by 50% if you get individual scholarships. So the first \$500 is free and then if she gets \$2000 in outside scholarships, she loses \$1000 in aid.



[Becky Grappo](#) **[Lois Hughey](#)** I'm so glad you brought that up. So when searching for outside scholarships, remember that 1) you have to report them to colleges and 2) they can then reduce the amount of aid THEY give you. So 3) that means you just saved the COLLEGE the \$1000 or whatever. Yes, you read that right. I had to learn and relearn that concept when I first heard it because it was so unbelievable. But it's almost always true. So chasing scholarship dollars is not always what it appears to be. Anyone else have a different perspective to offer?



[Lois Hughey](#) My daughter and I are completely at odds about this as well, so I'd love to know if it's really worth it for her to spend her time chasing scholarships and writing essays or if she should be happy with what she's been given. I say \$2000 in scholarships is still \$1000 less in student loans. She doesn't see it that way. Advice??? Thoughts?



[Becky Grappo](#) **[Lois Hughey](#)** How did they package her financial aid? Was it in grants or loans? If her outside scholarships reduce the amount the college offers her in grants, I'd say it's not worth it. If the outside scholarship reduces the amount she has to take in loans, then it's definitely worth it. It might be worth a call to the financial aid offer to ask for clarification. Then write down that person's name, rank and serial number! 😊



[Lauren MacKinnon Steed](#) It is completely annoying when they do that. It depends on the school though. Surprisingly the more elite schools are less likely to apply outside aid to your merit award.



[Lois Hughey](#) That's a good question. I know that there is one category that they won't take from and that is the one true non-merit based scholarship that she received. It's written in the literature that they won't take from that. But then there is something for on-campus housing aid, her Federal Aid, and work study.



[Lauren MacKinnon Steed](#) It's important for FS families to realize that the AVERAGE aid recipient these days has an annual family income over \$100,000.



[Alexandra Kepler](#) That's really surprising!



[Lauren MacKinnon Steed](#) I know, right? Counter-intuitive, but there's a lot of reasons why, most of which are about maximizing their donors, enrollment statistics and rankings. There are consultants devoted to helping schools find the sweet spot in what to offer and to whom, and they've discovered that distributing higher income merit aid is maximizing what they want in their various statistics.



[Hannah Morris](#) I encourage FS kids (and TCKs generally) to look at what comes along with the aid money. Recent students of mine were accepted into academic fellowship programs that included a substantial aid package (on top of a reciprocity program award) but more im...[See More](#)



Lauren MacKinnon Steed That's an awesome bonus. Especially for TCKs. I'm a big fan of supportive mentorship in the early years of college.



Crystal Lynn Hannah Morris - This sounds like a fantastic program. Can you elaborate on what school this is or what schools have programs like this? Or is this pretty general to any school with an Honors College within it?



Hannah Morris Almost every college has these programs - you just have to look! Instead of calling them "safety colleges" I encourage students to identify colleges where they'll have fellowship and honors program opportunities.



Alexandra Kepler Most families probably haven't even considered how important networking is with faculty. Why isn't this factored in when schools are rated?



Becky Grappo One book I highly encourage for students and parents to read is Colleges That Change Lives, or go to their website at www.ctcl.org. Their entire concept is that students need to be seeking a life changing experience while in university - and that includes the tight relationship with faculty who can also be important mentors. [Manage](#)



Colleges That Change Lives – Changing Lives. One Student At A...

CTCL.ORG



Lois Hughey We LOVED that book. It really helped us narrow our focus and think about what was important to us. Also, if you listen to Podcasts, Getting In was helpful and had some great information.



Alexandra Kepler Thank you so much! I will definitely check this out!



Becky Grappo **Alexandra Kepler** They also have a good website but get the book!



Paula McFall Costantino We applied to and were accepted to two of those colleges. Excellent merit aid from both as well. We'll see where she settles on.

Alexandra Kepler Thank you so much Becky!



Becky Grappo **Alexandra Kepler** my pleasure!



[Francesca Huemer Kelly](#) I encourage parents and students to use that book as well. Three out of my four kids went to CTCL colleges and they were mostly wonderful. I can't, for example, say enough good things about the Senior Independent Study program at College of Wooster, or...[See More](#)

[Alexandra Kepler](#) [Francesca Huemer Kelly](#) do you mind if I quote you on our website and in an email to our members?



[Francesca Huemer Kelly](#) Hi, Alexandra. Sure... I must have missed what the website is...can you enlighten me, please? Thanks! I'm a college application essay consultant and can also be found at www.essayadvantage.net[Manage](#)

[Essay Advantage](#)

ESSAYADVANTAGE.NET

[Alexandra Kepler](#) Foreign Service Youth Foundation www.fsyf.org. Sorry I didn't introduce myself. I'm the Executive Director.[Manage](#)

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[Alexandra Kepler](#) Thank you so much for your contributions! I can't wait to check out your website!

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[Francesca Huemer Kelly](#) Oh, of course! D'oh. Well, you can tell we're retiring soon! So sorry!

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[Lesley Lahm](#) It is all a crap shoot. I would not rely on any patterns or assumptions.



[Hannah Morris](#) Lesley - Can you explain what you mean? In my decade of experience on the college side I do not agree that it's all a crap shoot. There are many ways students can research colleges and programs where they're more likely to receive merit aid and have opportunities to be in enriching academic environments.

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[Lesley Lahm](#) Hannah - having done this twice in the last 4 years, the results differed wildly. For example, one child was accepted at a school with less than a 10% acceptance rate and yet did not get into less competitive schools. Merit scholarships were offered at most of the schools, with the amount varying significantly. This issue is one of acceptance in my view over scholarships. The difficulty is getting into the school of your choice and based on our experience and that of many of my peers, there is very little consistency or rationale as to why a child is accepted in one school and not another. I am not an expert, but this is what my experience and that of many of my friends' children has proven. I would never choose a school based on the potential to get a scholarship. Instead, I would choose a school and then try to get the scholarship. If you take the former route, you run the risk of not getting money in the end but accepted at a school that may be low on the list. Each of my children were limited to 10 schools - they could not apply to more. I would not have given up an application to a school I really wanted to go to in exchange for a school I might not be particularly interested in for the possibility of getting money. Put simply, you never know.



[Hannah Morris](#) Lesley - Thanks for you comments. You are correct that at some colleges it feels like a game of roulette. There is a big difference in expecting to receive merit and financial aid and the opportunities students may receive with fellowship and honors programs. I encourage students to include schools that they'd love to attend that have these latter opportunities (fellowships, honors colleges, etc.). I would never suggest a student apply to a school just for money, they would have a miserable four years.



[Lesley Lahm](#) **[Hannah Morris](#)** perhaps I do not understand what a fellowship program is.

[Hannah Morris](#) I'll move this to it's own post - thanks for the question!



[Patricia Lane Faust Yesolitis](#) This is true, our oldest received a merit scholarship from his back up school.



[Troy Fitrell](#) several schools -- Alabama, LSU, for example -- have straight linkages between aid and test scores. reach a certain score, guaranteed assistance. the first level brought the out of state price down to match in-state; the second level made it quite a bargain. don't remember the exact qualifying scores, but they were easy to find on the web pages.



[Erin Rovak Henderschedt](#) It is true for my eldest son.



[Sveta B. Nikitina-Kim](#) **[Alex Shu](#)**

[Alexandra Kepler](#) *to* **[Foreign Service College Bound](#)**

January 16 at 8:39pm ·

Does student aid apply towards computers and books or does it typically cover tuition. In that vein, what kinds of devices do students need to succeed?

Comments



[Hannah Morris](#) Yes - Student aid can often cover computers and books! Many colleges will apply aid to tuition and fees first (what the college collects) then will disburse aid in other ways. For students ordering textbooks through the university they're able to defer their fees until their scholarship aid comes in which can be a benefit for students learning to budget themselves.

If parents are using a 529 savings plan they can also be applied to educational resources such as computers, books, and even housing!

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[Becky Grappo](#) I'm going to mention special devices for students with learning disabilities. The psycho-educational evaluation might mention certain assistive technology that is required or at the very least, helpful. It's important to check with the learning support (Office of Disability Services) to see what assistive technology is part of the university office, and what the student will need to bring.



[Francesca Huemer Kelly](#) Denison University gave our son a \$300 bookstore allowance every year.



Becky Grappo *to* **Foreign Service College Bound**

January 16 at 8:26am ·

I am not sure anyone saw my first question....how are students researching colleges online before planning college visits?

Comments



Hannah Morris Online/Virtual tours!



Debi Fairman For overseas families this is quite a struggle. We essentially squeezed a few in during sophomore and junior year home leaves! The “research” was - what is close enough to home leave address to drive to?



Becky Grappo **Debi Fairman**, I also show kids what to look for online. I'm sure your daughter had some practice with that! 😊



Becky Grappo For kids overseas, it is hard to know how to navigate so much information. That's why it's important to target web searches so that they do more than just "cruise" around.



Hannah Morris Yes! Everything from looking at major course requirements to researching a club or professional organization they'd be interested in. It gives them an opportunity to cruise around the student side of the website and learn more about the campus culture.



Becky Grappo Exactly. And it's so interesting how different colleges organize information about majors on their websites. I was just working with a student who is thinking about being a psychology major. We compared programs and offerings in various colleges and there were HUGE differences in what information was on the website. So while that does not tell the entire story, it does indicate how well they keep the website updated.



Hannah Morris A great glimpse at the student experience! I personally believe it's never too early to learn about degree audits and how to research majors. If the website is complicated and confusing you have to wonder how students navigate it!



Becky Grappo **Hannah Morris** Or if the website does not mention internships and research opportunities, one has to wonder how robust the program is.



Hannah Morris As Becky mentions below, if a student is unable to physically visit a college - these searches help answer why us. A student of mine was just accepted to a competitive aerospace program and his "why us" spoke directly to a flight lab he'd love to research with. You could read the enthusiasm in his words even though he's never visited the college.



Becky Grappo But to add on to that, if a student were really interested in the university, I'd have the student write the department to ask for more info. It could be that they just don't keep the website up to date.



Lauren MacKinnon Steed My students here like to join the prospective student instagram or other groups for the different schools and ask the "ambassadors" questions that they'd have asked on a tour.



Becky Grappo It's also good to take notes during the process, and during tours, so that if they apply and have that "why us?" question, they have something to refer back to.



Debi Fairman We found photos helped us remember certain details as well.



Hannah Morris Informational Interviewing: Many students don't realize they can email admissions officers to request Skype interviews with the admissions team, international centers, student ambassadors, faculty, and more. Every school handles these requests differently but it's a great way to interact and learn about campus culture through your computer!



Becky Grappo Some colleges also offer online chats or virtual college fairs - those are also good ways to get to know about colleges. And here's something that has been a sticking point for me....many American universities spend fortunes to send their reps around the world to meet with students in their schools. Kids don't have to go anywhere except SHOW UP to talk to them. You can't believe how many kids forget, don't write it down, miss the opportunity, etc. It's so important to talk to people, make good impressions, follow up, etc. Remember - school reps are traveling the world to scout for talent.



Lauren MacKinnon Steed And sometimes those reps will take them out to dinner! At least they do here in cheap Rwanda. 😊



Becky Grappo When I was overseas, I used to offer to take the reps to their next appointment, or take them out. It really helped to get to know them so that if I ever had a question, it was much easier to reach out and ask.



Lesley Lahm Our children took advantage of the colleges that visited - resulted in acceptances in many cases due to relationship established during visits.



Hannah Morris I remind students to research the college before so they can ask questions not found on the FAQ, have a great conversation with the college rep at the event, then write a thank you email! Students are always surprised when reps remember their names whe...



Becky Grappo That's awesome!!! I see this happening, too. I often tell kids it's like a car showroom. When a qualified buyer walks through the door, the salesperson gets all their info and follows up again and again. Filling seats with qualified students is not rea...[See More](#)



Lois Hughey We did six the summer between sophomore and junior year when in Home leave. Lumped them by location (flying and then driving). Then looked at a few more during our Christmas break junior year. We knew those would be our only opportunities to see colleges in person.



Becky Grappo When you did that, did you sign up for campus tours or info sessions? I tell students that at some colleges, it's important to show "demonstrated interest" so be sure to sign in! And if you were there, but the college didn't know it, be sure to mention...[See More](#)



Julie Zimmerman Perez For my oldest daughter we hired Becky and she saved us. We were completely overwhelmed and didn't know where to begin looking. For my second daughter she was more focused on what she wanted to study so that helped with our research. We really took advantage of the college reps when they came to visit. This was especially helpful because she applied to art school and she had a lot of time spent on portfolio review she may not have otherwise had in a different setting. And ten we also hired Becky!



Becky Grappo Thanks, [Julie Zimmerman Perez](#). I love your family so much! 😊



Julie Zimmerman Perez We would've been lost without you! My oldest daughter still says so. Not bad for her to still remember!!



Julie Zimmerman Perez We also had the privilege of living at the same post as [Hannah Marie](#)! Weren't we lucky



Hannah Morris Miss you [Julie Zimmerman Perez](#)!



Julie Zimmerman Perez Miss you too!! If you stop through Manila over the next few years look me up ❤️



Beth Kirkham We always tried to find youtube videos posted by students (not campus sponsored ones) to get a feel of the college.

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Hannah Morris This is great advice! I always suggest tech-savvy students to follow Instagram hashtags and other student social media that students use to get the real experience.



Beth Kirkham If anyone is buzzing through Tokyo, I'm happy to host an informational meeting at my place. Love this topic!

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[Becky Grappo](#) I'll be buzzing through Tokyo the beginning of March! Literally a few hours while on a layover but I don't plan to hang out at the airport.

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[Hannah Morris](#) Headed to Beijing and Shanghai next week but have a trip to Tokyo (to visit a college friend working on a Tokyo Disney expansion project) this fall - I'll message you!