

Talk to SSIS University Counsellor

Mark DONAGHER
Head of Counselling

mark_donagher@ssis.asia



1. How do you think of the relationship between college applications and students' future career development?

Besides having a strong relationship between college applications and a student's future career development, it affects a student in two ways. Firstly, going to a world renowned university naturally helps a student in the future in terms of the connections they make at school and also the name recognition that will be on their CV throughout their career. Secondly, the major the student takes at university will in many cases determine their choice of career.

2. What content does the school's university counselling program contain? In what grade does the program start?

The university and career guidance program actually starts as early as the 7th and 8th Grade when students start to focus on:

- what they like to study
- how that can link to future careers and
- what they may want to study at university.

In Grade 9, students are introduced to the importance of extra-curricular activities and the rationale behind them. By Grade 10, students are introduced to the IBDP program to help them make the correct choices in IBDP.

In Grades 11/12, students are introduced to the application systems of the major countries that they will be applying to: USA, UK, Canada, Hong Kong, Australia. Our goal is that our students know the fundamentals of applying to the universities they want to go to and that we have advised them throughout the process in a way that can help them maximize their chances of success.

3. What is the ratio of the counsellors to students? How does a counsellor address each student's needs and provide them with personalized guidance?

The ratio depends on the grade level. As the student proceeds to higher grades (G10-G12), the ratio decreases to approximately 1 counsellor: 56 students.

Each student has a Counselling class that occurs every two weeks. These lessons are age-specific and help them deal with age-appropriate issues. Counsellors are available to meet with students anytime they feel the need to; we have an open door policy. It is one of our KPI's that each counsellor HAS to know the name of all the students they counsel. For the Grade 7 to 9 counsellor that can be a bit of a challenge –but knowing a student's name is an important way to start a relationship and sends an important message to each student that they are important.

4. Will the counsellor engage in one-on-one counseling sessions with students and parents? In this process, if parents and students are found to have differences of opinion, how will the counsellor deal with the situation? Can you provide any impressive cases?

As part of our university application process, we meet with parents and student a minimum of three occasions:

- in Grade 10 when the student is choosing their future IBDP courses,
- at the start of Grade 11 when we discuss the student's goals for university and
- at the start of Grade 12 when we look at where the student will apply and what we need to do and when.

Differences of opinion do occur from time to time between parents and students and it is part of our job to try and help them come to some agreement. Parents tend to forget that it is the student who will need to go a particular university and study a particular major for four years...not them...and students tend to forget that it is their parents who will pay for it! Generally, we can help them come to a compromise. Sometimes it only takes them to understand that this is probably the last year the family will be living together in its current form and that they should use this time to come together, not pull apart.

5. Besides academic achievement, comprehensive quality is also a very important factor. Do you have any suggestions for the choice on extracurricular activities, internships and summer camps?

Extracurricular activities should be about **quality not quantity**. Students should choose one or two activities that they love to do and build around them. Internships are great. - I would seriously recommend doing them, but not with relatives! Summer camps and courses are also a great way to learn more about university life and majors but remember there are selective and non-selective summer programs. It is always better to choose a selective summer program run by a university than one that is based at a famous school but run by a private company that allows all students to attend based on payment.

6. What is your main consideration in recommending college to students? How can students find the best school for them?

I look at several factors when working with students on choosing universities.

- Their **grades**-how competitive are they.
- **Where** do they want to study USA, UK?
- What **major** do they want to study?
- How much can and does the family want to spend - family **finances**

Once I have found out these, then we look at what the student is looking for in a school:

- size-big or small,
- location –urban or rural, a school in a major city or in the countryside.

Your school counsellor is probably the best place to start looking at the above and your counsellor can put you on the right track.

7. It's easy to get information these days, but the more choices students have, the more likely they are to be confused. What do you think is the best way to learn about a university?

The best way to learn about a university is to visit it! If that isn't possible, then the next best thing would be to try and meet one of the university reps when they come and visit Shanghai. AT SSIS, we have over **170** university reps visit our campus each year-this is a great way to get a feel for the school.

8. Are there other ways for students to learn about foreign universities in addition to the university counselling program? (e.g. hold a university fair, hold a lecture, etc.)

Attending university fairs and lectures as I just mentioned above is a great way to find out more information. There are many fairs throughout the school year in Shanghai. Our SSIS University Fair is March 14th 2019 from 10.00am to 12.00pm. It is open to students and parents from other schools-for more information email counselling@ssis.asia Last year, we had over 85 universities attend and we hope to have over a hundred in March 2019.

9. Applying to university is a long and arduous process. How should students adjust their mentality to the possible ups and downs? Any suggestion to them?

I always tell students that they should do everything they can to maximize their chances-they do not want to have any regrets about maybe they should have done this or that. If they have done everything possible in their studies and in their applications, then no one can ask any more. It is important that they have deliberate safety school choices just in case things don't go as planned. If they have followed this advice, then they will end up a school that is right for them. 99% of my students come back to me and say they love where they are now studying in university and it is a great feeling to know that I have played some part in that!