Turning Points
THE HIGHLANDS COMPANY STUDENT NEWSLETTER #2

THE SEVEN BIGGEST MYTHS
About Heading Off to College

Myth #1: I already know what I want to study in college. I don't need to do any further exploration.

Fact: Until a student understands her innate abilities – how she learns and solves problems best, any decision about what to study in college is premature.

Students feel enormous pressure: *"What are you going to study?" "What do you want to be?"* If the student answers, *'I'm going to study medicine,'* all the pressure stops. Problem solved. But who knows if there is something else the student should consider that she just hasn't thought of?

Example: Karen was set to study philosophy at a small liberal arts college. She was accepted on early admission. Then she completed the Highlands Battery and found out she had structural abilities. Interestingly, when she found out about these abilities, and did some research on what she could do with them, she discovered that she had always felt a deep seated but unexpressed love of architecture and design. She ended up at a large university where she could explore abstract fields such as philosophy, but also architecture and industrial design as well.

The point: By finding out about her abilities, she went to a college that would leave all her options open.

Myth #2: I have no clue about what I want to study in college, I'll wait until I get there to figure that out.

'There's no way I can even think now about what I want to study in college or what I want do in life. There's time enough for that.'

The results of this approach are fairly predictable. The student spends four years taking courses, going to parties, and avoiding the real world. At some point (4-5 years down the road), the student is going to face graduation. And students who have not been dealing with who they are and what they want to do in life probably aren't going to be any further along than they were when they first entered college.

Fact: Even the most elite universities cannot look inside your heart and mind to know what you are passionate about, what has meaning for you. Only you can know that.

The Highlands Program is a process that students can use to come up with 2-3 reasonable options. If a student goes to college with these reasonable options at hand, he will have sufficient focus to choose courses, majors, and summer jobs (or internships) that will actively allow him to take the ball down the field.

The point: Having no focus is just as bad as having a focus that is prematurely narrow.

Myth #3: I'll just shoot for the best school I can get into.

This is a subtle variation of Myth #1. *'So, Jimmy, what are you going to do?' 'I'm going to go to Harvard and I'm going to be a doctor!'* Now there's a powerful one-two punch. Case closed. No anxiety here.

Fact: In the 'real world' – that place out there after college – people get ahead fastest, are most successful, and are happiest when they know clearly how to state what their highest and best contribution can be. The key ingredient in the ability to do this – knowing how you can contribute – is self-knowledge.

The point: If a student's only goal is to get into the most prestigious university (*or that slight variant – the college that Dad went to*) the student is overlooking the most important piece of the puzzle: herself.

Myth #4: My parents, teachers, and college counselor can guide me through this college selection process.

Fact: All the people in your life want what is best for you, of course. But they are not you. They can't feel what you feel, or know what sort of courses will turn you on. **Only you can know these things about yourself.**

Example: Bill's father thought he should be a dentist. Bill was a good student. Dentistry would be a well-paying, professional career with some stability, status and prestige. There was only one problem. He didn't know it at the time, but Bill's strongest abilities were not in science or spatial relations, two very important aspects of dentistry. He had other very real abilities, but not those. Because Bill was a responsible, hard-working

young man, he listened to his father and enrolled in chemistry. He made good grades, but he was miserably unhappy. In his junior year, frustrated and lost, he left college.

The point: Advice is fine – **but it helps only when the student has done the basic work of finding out about himself.**

Myth #5: It's too early to think about life after college.

Fact: The transition from high school to college is the first important Turning Point in our adult lives.

It is meant in some ways to be a transition – a place to make the jump from the security of the family, where adults take charge of things, to becoming an adult and taking care of yourself. To effectively make this transition, college has to be more than just a place away from the family. It has to be a place where a teenager can mature and grow.

Too many students don't make the jump. There are more young adults 22-29 living at home with their parents than at any time since the Great Depression.

How do you make college an effective transition? Look beyond it. Form a plan about where you are going. Then you may be able to get there. The reason so many young people are dropping out and transferring is that they miss seeing a connection between college and life after college.

Example: Peter went to college with three thoughts about what he might want to do: be a journalist; be a lawyer; or go into politics (as a speechwriter). These may be related, but each is a distinct and broad category. All three were also related to Peter's strongest natural abilities. In college, he systematically took courses and got internships in all three fields. By the end of college, he had eliminated journalism and politics, but had settled on law. He went to law school. Now he's a lawyer. Of his group of 6 or 7 high school friends, he was the only one who graduated in 4 years.

The point: When students go to college with 2 or 3 clear ideas or career goals, they can significantly increase their chances of

1) enjoying college, and
2) being successful in college.

Myth #6: It's all up to my SAT/ACT score, GPA, essays & recommendations, & my athletic/leadership/artistic talents.

Fact: What you've accomplished, how well you do on standardized tests, and how well-rounded you are, are all important. But what is more basically important is who you are. Your school grades, SAT scores, or athletic performance can't always tell you that.

"In the 'real world' people get ahead fastest, are most successful, and are happiest when they know clearly how to state what their highest and best contribution can be."

Example: Diane scored well on all the standardized tests. She got very good grades at a well-known prep school and went to an Ivy League school, where she also excelled. She then went on to law school and landed a job at a great law firm. She was successful at the law firm, but miserable. She began to hate getting up in the morning. When she took the Highlands Ability Battery, she realized why she was having such difficulty. Her strongest abilities were abilities that lawyers never utilize. She was relatively weak in abilities that lawyers need to use all the time. Because she was intelligent and hard-driving, she had overcome these obstacles. But she had come to hate it. As most of us would.

The point: Before going off to college and beginning to make decisions that are going to affect you the rest of your life – find out what your natural talents and abilities are. You'll be much happier that way.

Myth #7: If I take the right courses, do the right extra-curriculum and put the kind of stuff they want to read on my essays, I'll do OK.

We can only quote Lourdes Ramirez, Associate Dean of Admissions at Harvard: "Of all the questions that parents and students ask me, the one that I absolutely refuse to answer is 'what courses should I take to get into Harvard.' You should take the courses you are interested in, that you know you want to take, that you love. The people we admit are those that communicate to us that they have some feeling and passion behind what they are doing. Not that what they are doing follows some formula that someone else has approved."

We totally agree with this. And we feel that the normal school curriculum and the normal series of standardized tests do not help high school students or college students to find what their feelings and passions are. And yet there is almost nothing quite so important. When we're talking about your career, we're not talking about any job. We're talking about your life.

It is possible to find out what your real talents are, what really turns you on, and what, ultimately, is going to make you feel it was all worth it.

To learn more about the Highlands Ability Battery and the Highlands Student Workshop, contact:
LuAnn Brown, Careers that Fit
706-354-2501 / 404-285-8028
LuAnn@CareersThatFit.com