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Counselors and admissions

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Quad 136

Counselors and Admissions

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Counselors and Admissions

A recent *New York Times* [article](#) notes a challenge in college admissions that could have important implications for schools like Saint John's and Saint Ben's. High school counselors play an important role in providing information during the college search and admissions process. The quality and even availability of such counseling can have a significant impact on what schools students consider and where they end up. As the article notes:

While small private schools can often afford to provide their students with tremendous hand-holding, large public high schools across the country struggle with staggering ratios of students to guidance counselors. Nationally, that ratio is nearly 500 to 1, a proportion experts say has remained virtually unchanged for more than 10 years. And when it comes time to apply to college, all of the students need help at once.*

For many students, especially first-generation students and those from outside Minnesota, their first introduction to liberal arts schools like CSB and SJU comes from a counselor. Without a gentle push to consider an option they may not have heard of or believe is out of their price range, the default can be the local state university, which might not be the best fit. As the article notes:

When it comes time to apply to college, students who are insufficiently counseled can easily stumble into making poor decisions, especially if no one in their family has gone to college before. They might “undermatch,” for example, by applying just to nearby schools they have heard of, rather than to the best institution they are qualified to attend. They might not fully understand the financial aid process, and skip over schools with high ticket prices, even if they are eligible for a free ride.

We work closely with counselors because we understand their importance in the admissions process. We regularly invite counselors from out of state to visit to learn what we have to offer since we believe that coming to our campuses and meeting our faculty, staff and students is the best sales pitch we could possibly make.

The group most likely hurt by the high ratio of students to counselors is naturally first generation students. They typically go to schools that are even more underserved by counselors who are likely busy with other significant counseling challenges. These same students are also less likely to have support networks that can provide them with college information. These

hurdles make it all the more incumbent upon institutions like ours to seek out these candidates. This is also a place where alumni and parents can help by encouraging high school students to give small liberal arts schools a look. These are the kinds of schools that are less likely to be known by first generation students but, ironically, provide exactly the kind of personalized and nurturing environment that can help them succeed.

* Interestingly, in a claim I found hard to believe, the article said that, “Minnesota has a ratio of nearly 800 students for every counselor...giving it the second highest ratio in the nation, behind California.”

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | February 2nd, 2015 | Categories: [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).