The college admissions process can be a stressful time for students and parents alike. Will my child get into his first choice? How many APs should she be taking? What sort of SAT score does he need to get into my alma mater? What are colleges really looking for, anyway?

These are the kinds of questions that Forsyth Country Day School’s college counseling office deals with every day. Helping students and parents answer these questions—and any others they may have as they navigate the college admissions process—is not only their job, it’s their passion.

“We want parents to know that we care about their child’s future, and we’ve been through it ourselves, said Co-Director of College Counseling Virginia Perry. “It’s hard for parents. I’ve done it four times for my own children. We all want the best for our kids.”

Co-Director of College Counseling Lorna Hogan concurs. “We’re a huge safety net,” she said. “We think of your kids as our kids, and we want to help them not only find the right college but to thrive as people.”

Relationship: Students

The college counseling office deals with every day. Helping students and parents answer these questions—and any others they may have as they navigate the college admissions process—is not only their job, it’s their passion.

“We want parents to know that we care about their child’s future, and we’ve been through it ourselves, said Co-Director of College Counseling Virginia Perry. “It’s hard for parents. I’ve done it four times for my own children. We all want the best for our kids.”

Co-Director of College Counseling Lorna Hogan concurs. “We’re a huge safety net,” she said. “We think of your kids as our kids, and we want to help them not only find the right college but to thrive as people.”

Relationship: College Reps

The college counseling department also works hard to build relationships with college admission representatives. “The relationships we have with our college reps are second to none,” Mrs. Hogan said.

Mrs. Perry agreed. “The college counselors build such strong relationships with the college reps with whom they work. We often hear, ‘I like your letters [of recommendation]. Your letters mean a lot.’ The college reps want to understand the kids beyond the numbers, and we help them do that.”

When college reps come to campus for visits, counselors make sure that kids who have expressed an interest in the college not only attend the visit, but get to meet the representative.

“It’s a two-way street,” Mrs. Perry said. “When you come to a college visit, you learn about the college and that college rep learns about you. If someone has decided to apply, we make an effort to introduce the student to the rep, have them talk to them a little. Reps like that. They like to put a face to the name, so that when they get the application, they say, ‘Oh, I remember him.’”

Ben Merrick said that the college counselors helped him establish connections at Bucknell, Wake Forest, and Notre Dame, where he will matriculate in the fall. “The way they reached out to schools for me was huge. They’ve been really helpful with establishing connections with college representatives,” he said. “One of the counselors would call the Bucknell or Notre Dame rep and say, ‘I have this kid here.’”

Jacob Jung saw the same thing. “Practically my entire family has gone to Davidson,” he said. “College counseling at FCDS helped make that a reality for me.”

Rahul Krishnaswamy ’17 said that the entire college counseling staff stepped in when he was hoping for admission to Duke (where he will matriculate in the fall). “They pushed really hard for me – all of them,” he said. “They e-mailed their admission contacts at Duke and updated them on the awards I received recently and what I’d been doing outside of school. I think they wanted me to get in as much I wanted to get in.”

Relationship: Parents

Also key to a successful college counseling program is the relationship between college counselors and parents. For the counselors, that means being available to answer questions or address rumors parents may be hearing.

“Rumors come up about what it takes to get in at certain schools, and we want parents to contact us when they hear something—we cherish the opportunity to maintain contact with them,” Mrs. Hogan said. “We are in constant contact with the colleges and we have the most up-to-date, trending information.”

An interesting fact: because of the relationships the counselors have with their college reps, “They know our school,” Mrs. Perry said. “They’ll take slightly fewer APs from our kids than they will from the public schools.”

“We’re not competing with the number of APs that the Career Center offers,” Mrs. Hogan agreed. “The schools know Forsyth Country Day School, and they know what they’re getting with our students.”

Upper School math teacher Teresa Angell concurred. “As a faculty member, I have always known our college counseling department was excellent, but I didn’t realize the extent of it until I was the parent of a senior.”

The college counseling staff was invaluable to Harrison Angell ’17 throughout the admissions process. “They walked him through every step, and we benefitted so much from their expertise,” Mrs. Angell said. “We’re so grateful for the entire college counseling department—they work so hard to provide a positive experience for our children as they apply to college.”

Jeremy Burnett, the mother of twins Ben ’17, who will attend Duke University, and Molly ’17, who will attend Middlebury College after a gap year, said that the key to college counseling was to trust the process—and the counselors. “It’s a scary process, especially your first time through,” she said. “But they have a system that breaks it down for the kids and parents. They give the kids responsibility, but just a little bit at a time so that it’s not too difficult to handle.”

The Parent Brag Sheet, which parents fill out in a student’s junior year, was especially helpful to the Burnetts. While Ben “realized he put himself out there” and already knew his college counselor, Molly was different. “She’s quiet, and she’s not one to draw attention to herself,” Mrs. Burnett said. The college counselors, however, talked to Molly’s advisors, her teachers, and carefully read the brag sheet that Mrs. Burnett had filled out, and got to know Molly’s strengths and personality well.

“They really did their homework, and they were able to pull out all of the great things that Molly does,” Mrs. Burnett said. “Molly never seeks the spotlight, but she is a one-of-a-kind young lady who provides great energy in the classroom or in...”
any group,” Mrs. Perry said. She was fascinated to learn about Molly’s work with home composting, gardening, bringing the FCDS greenhouse back to life, and earning her Girl Scout Gold Award. “Molly enjoys being outside of the box, and she’s a brilliant thinker who’s always expanding her knowledge base in some interesting way.”

“As a parent, there were times when I was freaking out, but I had to trust the college counselors,” Mrs. Burnett said. “They had it under control, and their process works. They’ll go above and beyond for every kid and they’ll give it their all.”

Kellie Faulk, the mother of three FCDS alumni and one rising ninth grader, agreed. “At our first daughter’s College Night for Juniors, we were shocked to receive color-coded directions regarding the testing, application, and touring season Hannah faced,” Dr. Faulk said. “We had friends with kids in public schools who were struggling to navigate the complex system, while we were handed step-by-step instructions along with someone to guide us through it all.”

“The combination of fabulous faculty members with an advisor and college counselor all four years results in the ‘secret sauce’ that makes FCDS great,” Dr. Faulk said. “It has been a sacrifice for our family to travel from out of town [they commute from Statesville], but it has all been worth it!”

Relationships with Alumni

For many FCDS alumni, the relationships with their college counselors don’t end after graduation. Jackie Kniejski ’15 University of Georgia ’19 said that she spent much of her time from sophomore year through graduation eating candy in the College Counseling office. “They truly got to know me as a person, which made me comfortable to talk to them about everything in my life,” Jackie said.

During her first semester at a big state school, Jackie began to doubt choosing UGA. “I was unsure if I’d made the right decision, so I went back [to the college counselors] during winter break to discuss transferring options. They quickly put my life back into perspective.”

The counselors realized in short order that Jackie, who had been very involved at Forsyth, wasn’t getting involved at the University of Georgia. “They told me I needed to fix my priorities and from there everything would fall into place,” Jackie said. “They gave me that tough love that I really needed to hear, and now I am beyond happy at UGA. I wouldn’t trade this school for anything. College counseling at FCDS helped to get me to where I am today, and I will be forever grateful for FCDS’s college counselors.”

Hannah Vrooman ’16 Appalachian State ’20 remembers a dilemma the college counselors helped her face: choosing between two programs she loved equally – the Honors College at Appalachian State or UNC-Chapel Hill. “I agonized for weeks over my decision, and ultimately going with my gut was definitely the right choice,” she said. “To those who are where I was a year ago: ultimately, college is a very fun and formative time of your life, and the decision you make will be a good one! Have confidence that your college counselors, family, and friends will help you through your decision process and that wherever you go, as long as you take advantage of your time, will be incredible.”

FCDS students on a college tour for juniors in front of Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University