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## EDUCATION with **student News**

# Consultants replacing high school counselors

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**WASHINGTON (AP) -- As high school seniors across the country wait anxiously for the responses to their college applications, some can take comfort in knowing they sent out the best money can buy.**

Their parents paid hundreds -- sometimes thousands -- of dollars to private consultants who help the students draft admissions essays, rehearse for interviews, prepare for tests and even pick after-school activities in the hopes of bettering their chance of admission.

Andrea DuBrow, 54, of New York City, wanted to give her daughter every edge when she applied to Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. So instead of relying on the advice of the guidance counselors at her daughter's private boarding school, she hired a consultant.

"There's just so much pressure now and so many good applicants," said DuBrow, a vice president for a women's accessory company. "We felt our daughter could benefit from some extra help."

The consultants charge for work traditionally provided free by high school counselors, but with rates averaging \$120 an hour to \$2,900 for two years of consultation, it is a luxury. One exclusive two-year consulting program rings up at nearly \$40,000.

"Certainly it skews things for people who can afford it, but the whole system is skewed that way, unfortunately," DuBrow said.

Parents are spending money on consultants because they promise more individualized attention than high school counselors and often tout their connections with colleges. "We give parents an insider's view," said Jane Shropshire, a private consultant based in Louisville, Ky., who



Yale student Rosie Avila had the help of a private education consultant to gain admission to the Ivy League school.

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has admissions experience at three different colleges.

Many students who aren't getting all the attention they need from a high school counselor can't afford a private consultant. Some independent consultants, in an attempt to level the playing field, offer their expertise for free to some low-income students.

Education 

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And there are some groups now dedicated to providing free college consulting for students with low-income parents.

College Match grants low-income students in the Los Angeles area free access to resources usually reserved for wealthier students: two years of intensive college preparation and guidance counseling, including all-expenses paid trips to East Coast colleges.

"We try to give these really great kids from public schools in Watts and East Los Angeles everything they would have received had they been born to wealthy parents in Beverly Hills," College Match founder Harley Frankel said.

Rosie Avila, 18, wanted to go to Yale but couldn't get all the help she needed at her East Los Angeles high school. She got picked for the College Match program and said, "There are a lot of privileged kids out there and we have to compete with them. So we have to do everything in our power to try to get to their level."

Kevin Quinn, a counselor at the public South Kingstown High School in Wakefield, R.I., and vice president of the American School Counselor Association, said most school counselors must juggle academics, social problems, special education and college counseling for hundreds of students -- something consultants don't have to worry about.

Mark Sklarow, executive director of the Independent Educational Consultants Association, a professional organization of private consultants, said the number of consultants in his organization has more than tripled in the past ten years and the growth shows no signs of slowing. He estimates that there are now as many as 4,000 private consultants in the country.

Sklarow pointed out that members of his organization, which was founded to institute professional and ethical standards for consultants, must have qualifications similar to certified counselors. One difference between school counselors and consultants is that counselors have to be licensed by states, while consultants do not, he said.

The National Association of College Admissions Counseling, the nation's largest group of professional counselors, counts 282 independent consultants among its 9,200 members -- about a 50 percent increase from 2000.

Edward Gillis, director of admissions at the University of Miami, doesn't see much benefit in hiring a private consultant. "In general, I don't think working with a private counselor changes where a student is going to be admitted to college," he said. Gillis said the main benefit of independent counseling is that it might help a student get more organized.

Bruce Poch, vice president and dean of admissions at Pomona College in Claremont, Calif., said many parents are driven to hire consultants out of "paranoia" about the difficulty of the application process. "Most of what a private consultant provides can be found in a few books or on the college's own Web site," Poch said.

But some admissions professionals do see a bright side. "I think the independent consultants often do fill a niche for students who don't get the kind of help that they need from their public high school counselor," said Lorne Robinson, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn. He pointed out that there are good and bad independent counselors, just as there are good and bad high school counselors.

DuBrow's daughter got into Northwestern and Avila is now at Yale. DuBrow said the consultant may not have been the single reason her daughter got in, but did make her application stronger.

But for Avila, who said she hadn't even considered leaving California before College Match helped her out, the intensive college preparation made all the difference.

"I wouldn't be here without it," she said.

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