

## The Long View: Alumni Share Advice for Navigating Life Beyond Menlo



FROM

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At Menlo, we are constantly working to ensure that our program helps prepare students for the ever-changing world they will encounter. We like to take a long view: offering life prep, not just college prep, by empowering students to manage their time, show initiative, access the resources available to them, take ownership, try new things, and take on challenges. It's always reaffirming when we hear from our graduates that we are doing this work well.

It has become a fun tradition to invite a group of young alums to serve on a panel at the January MSPA meeting to share a candid glimpse into their transitions and experiences after Menlo. This year, we assembled a group from the Class of 2022 attending different-sized schools from various parts of the country: Saaz (Babson College), Tessa (Colorado College), Sophie (Colgate University), Charlotte (UC Berkeley), and Ryan (Boston College). I invite you to watch the full [MSPA meeting and panel here](#).

Moderated by Associate Director of College Counseling Elena Wong, topics ranged from the application process, choosing the right school, what they miss most about Menlo, adapting to wintry weather, living far from (or close to) home, and what they would do differently were they to go through the process again.

While the panelists were not cherry-picked, and another group of five would have been similarly thoughtful and articulate, it was an impressive bunch. Resoundingly, these young adults reported feeling well-prepared for college with writing skills well above their peers', are comfortable and proactive accessing professors during office hours,

understand how to manage their time, and appreciate the college guidance and overall education they got at Menlo. (Similar feedback to what we learned in our [Class of 2021 alumni survey results](#), which you can hear me dig into in an episode of John's Corner.)

"Menlo teaches us from a very early age that learning is about forming your own opinions and your own arguments, and being able to do that is helpful for the rest of your life beyond high school or college," said Charlotte. "That's something that has helped me a lot in my college classes, and it's something I see other students struggling with a little bit because they've always thought of learning more as regurgitating information."

To which Saaz added, "I think Menlo teaches you how to present yourself effectively, to write and communicate effectively, and that shows up even outside the classroom... Menlo teaches you how to study, how to meet new people, how to network, how to use your resources effectively...to really make sure you're prepared."



## It All Works Out

The School's senior leadership is always asking ourselves, "Are we preparing kids to be sentient, thoughtful, curious, ethical, decent people who have agency in their own lives?" And the answer from these five alumni is a resounding "yes."

As three of the panelists said, "It all works out." And they're right. Sophie talked of thriving at a university that she hadn't heard of until her college counselor mentioned it to her; Charlotte is now grateful that she did not get into the East Coast school she applied early to because she now realizes that she very much wanted to stay in California.

Taking the long view with alums is a reminder that our job—as teachers and parents—is to help students avoid catastrophizing the problem du jour. There are plenty of different routes both to and through college, and 4,000 colleges in the U.S. alone. If we can help shift mindsets to think more positively and allow our teenagers to believe it's all going to work out, they can make healthier choices about how to use their time and energy. They might invest in their relationships or try new things. Perhaps they will reach out to new people, sleep more, or focus on their well-being. I hope you'll partner with me to model this 'it all works out' attitude and behavior.

As Charlotte said, "Reevaluate what you're looking for as you go, and try not to close yourself off to anything. I would say not only does it always work out, but a lot of the time when you end up somewhere you weren't expecting, it can even work out better."

## Applying (This Advice) to College

"I would say to let your kids take the lead on the college application process," said Ryan, addressing the room full of Menlo parents. "I know a lot of my friends' parents would micromanage every college that they're applying to and make sure they're doing SAT prep at 9:00 am every Saturday. I think it's important to let your kid apply to the schools that they want to apply to and approach the process the way that they want to so that they'll end up at a place that's best for them."

Sophie added this advice for college applicants: "Trust your instincts...try to enjoy the process and explore as many options as possible and try not to stress about it too much."

Tessa, who took a gap year before college, reiterated the importance of staying open-minded. "Of course, it's good to have high standards and ambitions when you're deciding

your future, but I also think that being open to every avenue is equally important, because it's not always going to go your way," she said. "Even if you do everything right, and you put yourself out there, and you really show your personality, there's still a chance that you're not going to get the outcome that you want. And I know that I personally, in my first semester of college, have found that even when things weren't necessarily going my way in school or extracurriculars, if I kept an optimistic attitude, I kept moving forward, and was proactive in my life, I was just immeasurably happier. So while I think there's a place for everybody and you want to put yourself in the right position, keep in mind there are

amazing people everywhere, and...any path that you go on is going to lead to something fruitful and exciting."

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## The Long Game

After the panel, I shared one of my biggest concerns as Upper School Director with the audience: that I see too many students (and parents) approach high school from a position of brittleness. They view the experience of school as all these doors potentially closing on them. They put so much energy into asking questions like, "Did the teacher give me a fair shake?" "Am I in the right math class?" "Did I get the right quiz grade?" What's great about hearing from our alumni is that it elevates our vision. Not one of the panelists mentioned grades.

I am proud of these alumni and how they are navigating their college experience with confidence and engagement. And I feel validated that Menlo prepared them well. Given our long-term vision of "raising 40-year-olds," it will be a while before we know their life trajectories, but I hope you feel confident in knowing that together, we are building the skills, offering the support, and developing the resilience and sense of purpose your child will need to thrive.

