

Episode 73 - Sara Cavalieri

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SPEAKERS

Sara Cavalieri, Moira McCullough



Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. I'm your host, Moira McCullough and today we are talking with Sara Cavalieri on what to know if you are even thinking of applying to college overseas.



Sara Cavalieri 00:10

But when it comes to the actual admissions piece, it's a lot more academic fit. So do they have the academic background to study the program that they're applying for at a high level for three or four years? My colleagues and I we like to joke that in the US, they're looking at a student's heart but overseas, they're looking at a student's brain



Moira McCullough 00:38

This is the College Scoops podcast and I'm your host, Moira McCullough, we focus on everything college related from the admissions process to where to eat, stay and explore on and round campuses. Our guests include founders, educators, authors and experts in the college space. Join us as these experts share their knowledge, experiences and lessons learned to help you have stress free and formative and tasty college journeys. Whether it's your first or last child going to college, or you're just interested in going to a college town for a game or meal, we've got you covered. If you haven't already, please subscribe to the

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S Sara Cavalieri 02:30
Happy to be here. Thanks.

M Moira McCullough 02:31
Well, we met at the HECA conference, which was really nice. I always end up meeting so many nice people. And it's, even though you're not in person, we were able to meet each other face-to-face. And then I kind of was traveling through all your memories. Like as you were describing what you do and how you studied overseas. I felt this immediate connection. I'm like, wait a minute, I want to talk to you offline about so many things. But I know with so many students applying to colleges overseas now that our audience would greatly benefit from your expertise. So that is why you're here today.

S Sara Cavalieri 03:08
Yes, I'm really happy to share. It's been a long journey. For me, I feel like I've lived 10 lives in 10 years. So happy to share any info again,

M Moira McCullough 03:15
I studied abroad as well. But what led you to what was the impetus for you studying

abroad? And then continuing that journey by working over there for international colleges and universities?



Sara Cavalieri 03:27

Yes, how much time do you have? It's a lot. I'll give you the cliff notes, basically. So I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, kind of a sheltered life. You know, a lot of people in the Midwest don't have passports. So for me, I think it was my aunt took me to London when I was in high school. And I realized that there's a whole world out there waiting to be discovered. Having said that, I didn't even think that I could go to college overseas at that stage. So when I was applying, I just you know, did the normal thing ended up at Ohio University to study journalism. But while I was there, I happen to go to a study abroad fair and realize that I could do part of my degree overseas, and not lose any time and have those credits transferred back. So I ended up at Adelaide, Australia. And while I was there, my study abroad advisor from Ohio, flew over to visit the campus and meet with the, with the university there and check in with the students. And I remember thinking, Wow, that is so cool. She gets to travel for work, like what a dream job and internationally as well. So I didn't really think too much more of it. At that stage. I was kind of, you know, on the path to becoming a sports reporter, which was like my two passions at the time of sports and writing. So I graduated, realize that I preferred watching sports without having to write an article and be under pressure. So I was like, I don't think this is really for me, decided to go to law school. Maybe I'll be a sports agent. And then the summer before I had gotten accepted to a few different law schools the summer before I thought to myself, I don't know if this is really what I want to do. So I decided to take a gap year in Ireland and the UK just to kind of explore my interest in do more travel and meet new people. And then while I was there, I was like, why don't I work in, in education, international education. I mean, that's a dream job to be able to help students to kind of have a similar experience to what I had. So came back to the US started applying for masters programs overseas ended up back in Australia in Sydney to do a Master of Education. And I ended up staying in Australia for five years after that working for various universities and recruitment and admissions happened to meet a Brazilian while I was there and moved to Brazil with him and got married and lived there for four years, but continuing to work for the University of Western Australia while I was there, and then ultimately moved back to the US in 2018, to work for the University of Edinburgh as our regional rep in the US. And then after all that experience in mind, I thought, why don't I become a consultant because I've worked for UK universities, for Australian universities, I've lived in so many different countries, so why not kind of bring all that knowledge together and help as many students as I can. And here we are today.

M

Moira McCullough 06:01

In San Diego, no less. So another really great area, I really place it many, many people would love to be able to live visit or work in.

S

Sara Cavalieri 06:12

my husband was like, we're not moving to Ohio. He's from a warm climate, he needs a beach. And also San Diego happens to be the sister city of Perth, Australia, which is where I spent most of my time. So it was like the closest I could get to being in Australia without actually being there.

M

Moira McCullough 06:27

Okay, I love that. That's right. When when we first met as well, I mentioned that my son was studying overseas in Sydney. And unfortunately, he had to come back and it was maybe three days before we were supposed to go over and visit him and I had these grand plans of like, everything I was in a pack into that two weeks, but it's so disappointing. And I never knew sister city like There you go, you've learned something new every day, San Diego and Perth. Yeah, I'd love this. I'm traveling that then again, my mind is already off and I have 10 more questions. Oh, my goodness. So in terms of when you were actually working at University of Edinburgh, in the States, like what are some of the things that you looked for? from students that expressed a desire to study overseas? Because there's so many I mean, culturally, there's so much to think about academically and then planning that admissions aspect. But what were some of the things that you would look for in candidates and also recommend to candidates who are looking?

S

Sara Cavalieri 07:33

Yes, I think there's two sides of it. One, I can always usually tell when I'm speaking to students, whether they would do well, studying overseas for an entire program and, and that students that are quite independent, quite self motivated, confident, that's not to say that students who aren't confident won't do well, but it's a big deal to be placed into a different culture where you're not familiar, those students that kind of already have that sense of independence tend to do well off the bat. But when it comes to the actual admissions piece, it's a lot more academic fit. So do they have the academic background to study the program that they're applying for at a high level for three or four years, my colleagues and I, we like to joke that in the US, they're looking at a student's heart, but overseas, they're looking at a student's brain. So they're pretty much just concerned about, do they have the right testing scores that are at GPA and the right prerequisite

subjects to to get into that program. And that's basically because degrees are shorter, though, in most cases, there is a three year degree, Scotland's a little bit different, it's four years there, but there aren't any general education requirements. So you don't have those kind of first two years of the broad education to make sure you're still kind of interested in your subjects overseas, you're jumping straight into your field and graduating faster. So the universities want to see that you are passionate about the area. So you've, you can demonstrate that you took some subjects at a higher level, so like a PS or the IB curriculum, and that you'll be able to do well academically in that program.

M

Moira McCullough 09:08

Okay, so there's a lot there to unack. So the first thing is culturally, and I can totally appreciate that in terms of even in colleges, as a parent of three kids going through it. We fall into the trap of buying a school that we think our students would love and then you really have to sit back and say, wait a minute, is this the right fit for them? And to your point, when I studied it overseas, I remember I stayed with the host family in France and I could not speak fluent French to them. And so the level of French that I was at, and living with the French family. I felt like I wanted to quit after the first week and it took a lot of you stuck it out right? I did and dinner time was really interesting. Yeah, I didn't have a glass of water for I think the first week because I had to ask for you know that type of thing. But you're right in terms of a when you're in missions, looking at the student to make sure it is really their choice and that they want to go and they have a curiosity of learning of culture of different people. And that they know it's going to be challenging. So that's a cultural fit. But then academically, so you mentioned so many things, because a lot of people wouldn't know that Scotland's a four year program, but other programs are three year. And also, you're going for specific major or program of studies. So to your point, it's not like a liberal arts over here. If you want to study engineering, it's very specific track. Is that correct?

S

Sara Cavalieri 10:34

Yes, exactly. And there are a few liberal arts programs popping up in the UK, just because I think a lot of universities realize it's hard for a student of that age to determine their career and their future. So the other thing that I would suggest is, you know, for students that really don't know what they want to study is having a look at an American University abroad, because they offer the liberal arts curriculum, but anywhere else, you're applying directly to a program and not the overall University. So a lot of schools have individual admissions teams for that faculty. So they're looking for those very specific things. So if you're applying to engineering, as you said, they're wanting to see prerequisite calculus, those prerequisite subjects that prove that you're ready for a program at this level.

M Moira McCullough 11:18

So let's look at Edinburgh and University of St. Andrews. Those are popular kind of places that a lot of students go to. What are the normal tracks that students are in Americans that are going to those schools? What typically do they apply to?

S Sara Cavalieri 11:33

A lot of humanities, I would say, like international relations, history, politics, computer science is really growing, it's become really competitive program at Edinboro informatics as well. But I would say by and large, it tends to be the humanities based subjects.

M Moira McCullough 11:49

So if you're applying there, for humanities, you're saying, okay, it's either you're accepted or rejected. It's not as if you go into the wait pool of candidates, correct.

S Sara Cavalieri 12:00

There's no kind of waitlist, they might offer you an alternative programs, let's say international relations is full, they do get a lot of applications for that program, they might offer history. So it's slightly similar, but different enough to where you could be made an alternative offer, there's no waitlist option like to see if students accept or not quite different.

M Moira McCullough 12:21

So that's the first thing. So you're looking at culture first, then you're looking at program of study in terms of testing, and the other aspects of the college application that are different from the US. Can you walk us through that please?

S Sara Cavalieri 12:34

Yes. absolutely. Most universities aren't test optional. We saw a lot of US universities go that route during COVID. Unfortunately, it hasn't been the same overseas, just because a lot of universities view the US high school diploma as not equivalent to their local system. So students need to have testing, in order to prove that they're ready to study at that

level. It really depends on the country. So Australia, New Zealand, for example, it's pretty much just an SAT or ACT, a lot of times they won't look at your GPA. There's no essays, there's no recommendation letters, a lot of times it's a free application, and you're hearing back within a couple of weeks. So I would say very easy application process there. In the UK, it's slightly different. So there's a much bigger emphasis on AP exams. In the past universities were considering SAT Subject Tests in place of those APs. But unfortunately, the SAT Subject Tests are no more I know, a lot of us counselors were really happy when those when it was announced that those were going away. But for me, I was like, Oh, no, this is not good. Because you know, a lot of people don't have access to AP's or they realize too late in their degree that they want to apply to the UK and, and there's no way to get those AP's, they either wouldn't be accepted, or they would have to do what's called a foundation year, which is basically a year of prep, in order to get admitted to the actual program. But a lot of students, they don't want to do the foundation here. They just want to go straight into the program. So they're very disappointed to find out that they did need a piece. But a lot of universities will also look at SAT or ACT in addition to AP's. But generally if you have three AP's, that's enough to get into a university in the UK.

M

Moira McCullough 14:16

Okay, so a couple things one, the testing optional that has now been extended for many schools, that's not an option at all.

S

Sara Cavalieri 14:24

It is that some some universities that have a big presence in the US that have recruited a lot of us students in the past, they have been able to be more flexible recently to go test optional, but it is I could probably can't count on two hands, the number of universities that are would just look at your GPA. But I have seen a trend to universities, looking more at honors classes in place of one AP so potentially students could have two AP's plus an honors class. It really just depends. It's a case by case basis from university to university and even within the university, each particular program has their own entry requirements. So it's basically a program level sometimes.

M

Moira McCullough 15:07

You were the University of Edinburgh rep. So I'm interested in humanities or something? Do you put prospective families in touch with different admissions representatives of that program that they could talk to other interviews that are offered at all?

S Sara Cavalieri 15:22
Edinburgh, for example, there's a rep based in the US. There used to be an office in New York as well. The North American team is fantastic at making sure that the process is transparent for students. So all the entry requirements are on the website. And this is the case for most of the universities as well. But if there's a question, you can reach out to the North American team, and they'll let you know whether a student has a good chance or not. They can also contact admissions directly, there's a specific admissions email. Yeah, I think a lot of people are kind of afraid to reach out to the reps themselves. But that, you know, there isn't a such thing as demonstrated interest overseas. So they're not kind of keeping track of how many times you contact them. If you set up a zoom call with with one of the reps. It's not an interview. So it doesn't affect your admissions at all. It's really just a fact finding mission. So in terms of interviews, there's really only introduced for the really competitive programs like veterinary medicine, medicine, that sort of thing. But everything else, it's just a straight application, in which the most important things are your academic. So you're testing your personal statement and the reference. So those three things,

M Moira McCullough 16:28
All we've been hearing here is, you know, demonstrated interest how many times you can get on that website,

S Sara Cavalieri 16:34
can save so much time, like I still encourage students to go to the virtual affairs and try to get as much information as they can. So they can make an educated decision. A lot of students can't visit campuses as well, but not having that pressure of having to engage with everybody at the same time. It's quite relieving.

M Moira McCullough 16:54
Absolutely. And then they have everything online so it's clear in terms of what the criteria is for applying. But you mentioned something earlier, in terms of the response time, is it a rolling application process?

S Sara Cavalieri 17:09
So in most cases, universities overseas do have rolling admissions, it really varies. So like I said, with Australia, New Zealand, they're pretty quick at getting back to students in the

UK, it depends on the university. I know this year with COVID. And you know, a lot of staff and working from home, it wasn't as quick as usual. So the application in the UK opens in September, I always encourage students to apply in September, when admissions isn't as busy and chances are, they would have their offers before Christmas, maybe weeks even sooner than that. But definitely for American students you want to apply before January 15th. That's kind of the equal consideration deadline, it means that if you apply your your application will definitely be considered. After that a lot of programs tend to close and they won't accept more applications. Technically, you can apply up to the end of June. But again, a lot of those programs may already be closed.

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Moira McCullough 17:59

Okay, so that is something that really when you're working with students now, in your current educational consulting role, again, different criteria and mindset, you need to really think about this Junior spring, and then by the summer, get everything ready. So that September you're applying and the good news is you could be done if it all works out. Exactly. Before anyone else has applied to ED.

o

18:24

Yes, I try to get the students to front load as much of the work as they can. So with my junior class, now, we're kind of finalizing the list of colleges that they'll apply to with the UK, you can only apply to five choices. So it's a little bit different than in the US where students are applying for 20 schools sometimes. And then over the summer, I think it's a really good idea to just kind of work on that personal statement, get that finalized, so that when applications open in September, everything's ready to go.

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Moira McCullough 18:51

Can you walk through for us - when you say the UK, you're only allowed to apply for five? That is a single application platform.

S

Sara Cavalieri 19:04

Absolutely. So in the UK, the platform that you apply through is called UCAS It's basically like the comment app for the UK. They just revamped it for this year. So it's a lot more user friendly. I think a lot of people got confused in the past because it wasn't very pretty. And some of the terminology wasn't international student friendly. So with UCAS, you get to apply for five choices. That's it. Whether it's three choices at Edinburgh or two choices

somewhere else, you only get five choices in total. So you do have to be a little bit focused in terms of what you're applying for. The other tip, I would say is you'd want to apply for programs that are similar, because you only get one personal statement, which is kind of nice, you know, for students in the US that have loads of supplementals to write and, and this essay, not essay, there's only one essay for for the UK and it's it goes to all five choices. So with that as well. You wouldn't want to say oh, I'm really in didn't plan to Edinburgh because then St. Andrews is going to read that like, okay, she really doesn't want to go here. So I love this system. I think it's great. A lot of times people get intimidated by it. But I think it's it's a lot easier than applying in the US.

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Moira McCullough 20:13

Well, I think it's almost like you're sharing who you truly are. And it's more about expressing okay, here's what Sara is all about. And this is what makes you a curious learner. And this is what you're looking for overall, both in and out of the classroom, versus cut and paste some general info. Maybe it's more authentic or genuine as the essays for certain schools you're just tweaking just because you think they might want to hear what you say XYZ for this particular University. So I think it's a more organic and more honest.

S

Sara Cavalieri 20:47

Yes, it's almost like a letter of motivation, in a sense that you're talking about why you're passionate about the subject area, and not why you're really unique as a person. The other thing, I guess, with admissions that's quite different is that extracurriculars don't really come into play. It's not something that's as big overseas, unless your extracurricular is relevant to the degree that you're applying for. The example that I usually give is for a student that's applying to a medicine program, and medicine can be applied for straight from high school. So another difference there, you wouldn't want to talk about how you're the world's best piano player, unless you could directly link, the fact that playing the piano gives you dexterity that will help you as a surgeon or something like that. So you really have to link everything to the field that you're applying for, and why you're passionate about that area.

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Moira McCullough 21:34

So when you mentioned something about applying to Edinburgh you're allowed five, is that five schools or programs? So I could apply to three different programs at Edinburgh. And then I'm only allowed two more applications because their applications for programs exam, not necessarily school specific.



Sara Cavalieri 21:56

Yes. And I don't recommend applying for more than one program at a school just because like I said, it's a lot of times it's about keeping communication lines open with the admissions office. So let's say you didn't get accepted to that program, get in touch with them say, is there an alternative program that you would consider me for sometimes they automatically just do that and give you an acceptance letter to a different program? Already? So I don't recommend wasting the choices on three Edinboro programs, I think it's better to try five different schools and just kind of expanding your chances there.



Moira McCullough 22:30

Absolutely. That's for the UK. So Australia is that different, like if you were applying to New South Wales, where you used to work and University of Sydney - two separate?



22:40

So there's no central portal in Australia so you're applying to each individual University on its own unless you're an Australian or New Zealand citizen. So if you've got the passport, doesn't matter if you've never lived there or never stepped foot, you qualify to be a domestic student. And the fees are like \$6,000, for all the Aussies and Kiwis out there. It might be worth looking to go back there. But yes, unless you have the passport, it's the direct application. And I think there's only one Australian University that's on the common app. And I think that's Monash, but everyone else, okay, direct application.



Moira McCullough 23:14

And then for the American universities abroad, you're applying to those specific universities. And that would be their own application as well, or a different portal for that? Yes, most of them are on the common app, too. Okay. So a couple different questions. We talked a little bit about the expense in terms of how much less universities are is that the same? Like in the UK, if students are applying, and again, I'm going to go back to, let's say, we mentioned Scotland was four years. So that's similar to the US, but King's College is that three years or the Australian universities three years,



Sara Cavalieri 23:54

Exactly. So outside of Scotland, the degrees are typically three years, some programs in Australia that are law, or some of the professional programs, that would be four or more,

but in the UK, excluding Scotland, you also have the chance to add a year abroad or a year in industry. So you could go to one of the partner institutions on exchange or work in an internship in a company locally or overseas as well. And that would add the fourth year option to that. But if you're not doing either of those options, then yes, the degree would just be three years.

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Moira McCullough 24:28

And then I heard recently about the Trinity College and how they have a partnership some of these international universities are having to into programs with US schools. Can you talk a little bit about that and how students might apply to those types of programs and is it more strategic to apply to Columbia or to Trinity, Dublin?

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Sara Cavalieri 24:52

I've heard that it's easier to get into the dual degree with Trinity and Columbia than just to get into Columbia, but I think it's a great experience. You get two degrees from two institutions in four years. So it makes you look very competitive in the job market. Having said that, one thing to consider is you do need to be a bit resilient because you're living in a place for two years getting adjusted. And then all of a sudden, you're being uprooted and thrown into kind of a new environment as well, which is great for the independence aspect and adapting and, you know, facing challenges, but at the same time, it's can be really difficult because you, you fall in love with the place and you make your circle of friends, and then all of a sudden, you're, you're leaving faster than you expected. So definitely worth considering the type of experience that you want to have.

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Moira McCullough 25:36

Well, definitely, when we used to live overseas, our big joke was the first year is the hardest, the second you start to reap the benefits. And then you'll see a lot of people leave during that second year. And it's the getting over the hump. It's a third year where then you really get to have fun, and you're settled and everything like that. But the two plus two, as you said, you're not, you're not settled long enough to make a home per se. Or you have to go in there with the right frame of mind that you're going to go after it. And every single day is gonna be a new journey.

S

Sara Cavalieri 26:07

Yes. And you'll also be with the cohort as well so you won't be the only one that will be

doing that. So it's worth keeping that in mind too,

M Moira McCullough 26:14

In terms of other parts of the campus experience once you get like housing, and I know that it's not like they have parents weekend, do they Sara?

S Sara Cavalieri 26:23

No unless the mom decides to drop in unexpectedly. It is a different campus culture.

M Moira McCullough 26:30

But that's something that students should be aware of as well, just because of the fact that from what I'm told and please clarify for us, they don't hear from parents and sports are not big, you're getting a different campus experience than you would at a US University.

S Sara Cavalieri 26:45

Absolutely. Yes, I think the biggest differences are one, there is no greek life, no fraternities and sororities, some students, that's exactly why they want to go overseas just to get away from that. Also, the sports aspect, definitely more the participation culture. So people love to play sports at universities overseas, and there'll be social sports, they'll be more competitive performance sports as well. But you're not going to have 100,000 people coming and watching your game. So if you really wanted that rah rah, football weekend kind of experience that's not going to exist overseas. But you have the local sports teams overseas as well. So in Australia, there's cricket, there's rugby, there's Australian rules football in the UK, you've got the Premier League. So there's lots of other teams that you can go and support and have that kind of experience in a slightly different way. You mentioned housing as well, that's also a really interesting point overseas, there's no roommate culture. So students will have their own rooms, sometimes their own bathroom, usually shared cooking facilities as well. So it's a lot more independent living. And usually housing is guaranteed for international students for the first year. And then after that students would typically move off campus and get a flat with with friends. Also, I think it's worth managing expectations. Because we've all seen the the fantastic dining halls here in the US like loads of options overseas. Not all universities even offer meal plans, but if they do, it's, it can be pretty much just one building and set hours where you can go in and have a meal. And it's it's not as fancy, I think that's one thing that kind of shocks students sometimes. So it's worth managing expectations, a lot of students will will cook for

themselves. So if if students are independent and wanting to do that they have that option to

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Moira McCullough 28:32

Well, I would also then caution that in terms of financially, that needs to be factored in to the cost of attendance, because that could add up pretty quickly. As we know going out every night, you could blow through your monthly allowance pretty quickly if you took that route versus buying and cooking for yourself.

S

Sara Cavalieri 28:53

Correct. One other thing I should mention though, when speaking about finances is that usually students in most countries, you're able to work part time during your your program. And if you're staying over summer, you're able to work full time. Australia, New Zealand, for example, the minimum wage is like 20 something dollars, so it's quite high. And the exchange rate is good for Americans as well. It's just a good opportunity to get some extra pocket money to help pay for trips or going to restaurants and things like that. Usually you can only work about 20 hours a week. But there's no restrictions in terms of you know, working on campus or working in a local coffee shop. I generally recommend students not to start working in that first year just to focus on getting adjusted and settling into the new life and the studies because it's quite a different academic system as well. Once you feel comfortable, then maybe the second year look for a part time job.

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Moira McCullough 29:43

Do they help you on the part time jobs is that something that the school helps students with or is that really again being like self motivated and advocating for yourself and going out and finding that on your own?

S

Sara Cavalieri 29:54

I wouldn't say the ladder universities, they do have career centers. So there are often part times available that the Career Centers are aware of, they can definitely help students kind of sort out their their CV's and prepare if they were preparing for an interview. But I think for the most part, it's just a matter of the student going out and going into various places and just handing out their CV and seeing if they're looking for workers. We talked about career centers, that's probably a different concept as well. In those universities, many countries do have a post study work visa. So if students after they graduate, if they

wanted to stay, they'd be able to apply for a visa between one and three years putting on the country, a lot of times students will go to the Career Service and just get help preparing for the interview getting the local CV, because every country has a different kind of culture in terms of applying for jobs. I know in Australia, when you're applying for kind of a more professional type of work, it's a really long application process. You have to put your CV and you have to put your cover letter, and then answer a huge number of questions. Sometimes it's hard, it's hard to apply. So the Career Services is great. They often run career fairs as well as bringing companies from all around the world at New South Wales, where I studied my for my Masters, they had an affair specific for international students. So companies that were coming directly to recruit internationals.

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Moira McCullough 31:24

And that's the other thing when we talked about little bit about the differences in in the campus experience with clubs. There's not like 300 clubs that you can choose from at some of these schools.

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Sara Cavalieri 31:34

Yes, both of which have between 200- 300 clubs. That's kind of the main way for students to get involved on campus and meet friends. And I did this really well personally as an undergrad. But when I went overseas, for my grad program, I don't know, I was just really focused on the academic side of things and doing well. And I didn't get involved at all. And I really feel like my social experience suffered. So I think that that clubs and societies are the best way for students to to form those friendships, especially if they're over there on their own.

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Moira McCullough 32:06

And you've mentioned academic a couple times. And I just know, from way back when going over and setting a semester over there. I was at a really good high, high school, I was a really good, you know, college as well. But academically, I felt like I wasn't there yet. It was really, really hard. So is that something that you definitely caution students with? I mean, you're you may have been in an honors econ class here in the States, but I think it's more rigorous over there, or is that not correct?

S

Sara Cavalieri 32:39

I don't know if it's more rigorous. I think it's just different. And like you, I don't think that I

was really prepared for how different the academic style was in the teaching style as well. So in the US, I feel like a lot of times professors are kind of hand holding students checking in finding out like, why aren't you in class, that sort of thing. Whereas overseas, you're, it's very much independent learning. So you'll have a lecture, you also have probably a tutorial or seminar, which is smaller groups. And that's kind of really where you have your discussions and group projects and whatnot. But I found if I wasn't keeping up with the readings, nobody was on my back telling me, you need to be reading this. So you're in a class a lot less. And I just remember thinking, wow, I have so much free time, I'm gonna travel, I'm gonna do this and do that. But I wasn't keeping up with the readings. And I found at the end of the semester, I suffered, because there's a lot bigger emphasis on the final. So it can often be worth 60% of your semester grade to have fewer assessments for your time in class, as I said, so if you're, if you're feeling like you're struggling, it's really up to you to reach out. And the professors are lovely, they have office hours, you can go in and ask for help. But it's really about asking for help. And that's one thing that I didn't figure out right away. And the other difference, I guess, is in terms of grading where in the US we're so used to kind of, you know, being the best and getting the A plus but A pluses are quite rare overseas. In fact, I remember getting a credit in Australia, which is like it was a 60% and I just remember thinking, Oh my gosh, I really bombed this paper and they're like, my classmates like a credit is great, like you did well you should be happy with that. So I think it's just kind of managing expectations and just accepting the fact that you're not going to get a pluses on everything. It's so it's it's a completely different teaching environment. Having said that, they do a really good job in orientation of preparing students academically, what to expect there's writing workshops, but it's up to the student to go and make use of those, they're not going to force you to go to those sessions.

M

Moira McCullough 34:42

So that's that's a great point as well in terms of the orientation said, do they offer that is an optional and you would definitely with your students recommend or to any student listening. If you get accepted to one of these schools, if they have the orientation program go like that's a no brainer.

S

Sara Cavalieri 34:59

Yes. It's a no brainer. I mean, orientation is a great time to meet other students as well. Just because, you know, a lot of times, they'll have kind of fairs with all the clubs out there talking about things that they can join, you'll be in sessions grouped with your academic subjects. So you'll get to meet people from that subject area, you'll have the more general sessions as well, sometimes there's sessions specific to international students. So it is so

valuable to go, it's usually about a week long. And I think that students who do attend orientation end up adjusting much quicker and doing much better than those that kind of just come and jump straight into the academic side of things.

M Moira McCullough 35:38

Is it offered right before school?

S Sara Cavalieri 35:44

It's usually a week before the classes start.

M Moira McCullough 35:49

Okay. And then I know when my son applied, and this was for a semester abroad, but University of Sydney, then a couple of the schools and University of New South Wales, they had a surf camp that they offered for students beforehand. And I remember him saying, No, I'm not going to spend it. It's just too much. And I thought, you have to like, yes, that's a no brainer. And he met a whole host of students from different from University of New South Wales, which was great, because then they all meet up afterwards at this kind of same places. They go to Bondi Beach for this, you know, Sundays or whatever it is. But is that something else that they offer before? Absolutely,

S Sara Cavalieri 36:27

Yes. So a lot of times there's organized trips, sometimes there's clubs specific for international students, or even North American societies. So it's kind of a nice, I know, at Edinburgh, there in North American society, they put on a Thanksgiving dinner and have Fourth of July parties just to kind of make you feel more at home to your point as well. I think, you know, a lot of times students think, oh, I don't want to spend the money and go on this trip. But it's so important. Those are the places where you really form those friendships. And you know, you're you're going all the way over there. Why not? Just Just go for it.

M Moira McCullough 36:59

Absolutely. Last thing in terms of finances, you also think, can you talk about FAFSA? Some people may think, we can't apply it overseas, but you can get aid. And you can use

FAFSA overseas for certain schools.

S

Sara Cavalieri 37:18

Yes, absolutely. There are a number of international universities that are FAFSA approved, I want to say it's around 300 or so. So students can take out direct loans to help cover the costs of their tuition and living expenses. Having said that, the Pell grants or any other form of grants, they don't apply to us only, but the loan portion is eligible as long as the school is FAFSA approved. And there's a website that has a database of all those schools that are updated, I think quarterly. But personally, I when I went to do my grad program in Australia, I took out FAFSA loans to go to New South Wales, I ended up staying in Australia working because of the high salaries there and the exchange rate at the time, I was able to pay off my grad loans and my remaining undergrad loans in just one year. So I still have friends that are still paying it off.

M

Moira McCullough 38:06

That is really impressive. Every parent is like trying to, you know, take notes on that front.

S

Sara Cavalieri 38:16

Yes, I mean, that's the thing you kind of have to look at, you know, the tuition is often lower, check out the exchange rate. Many universities offer merit based scholarships. So when you when you factor it all together, including a three year degree, so that's, you know, one whole year that you're not having to pay living costs and tuition. A lot of times it does come out to be way in your favor to go overseas.

M

Moira McCullough 38:42

Thank you so much, Sarah, that was a wealth of information. Unbelievable. I am already thinking about where I'm gonna apply for school. I have my MBA, but why not go back for my PhD too. I may have to book a session with you. What do you wish you knew before you attended college?

S

Sara Cavalieri 39:02

I wish I knew that overseas universities, you don't have to do general education requirements. So I personally hate math. Had I known that I wouldn't have to do statistics or anything like that. And as part of a journalism degree, I would have absolutely gone

overseas because I was really passionate about writing, and maybe I would I would still be working in journalism had I just gone straight into it, rather than you know, because pretty much it was just my junior and senior year that I was taking the journalism classes. And this was a while ago. So you know, this was at a time when you could specialize in broadcast. And online journalism was just an elective that you could do, whereas now it's like, it's all digital. So I think just having known that, you know, I didn't have to look within my own borders. I think life would be different. But having said that, I am who I am because of my experiences. So that's fine. And he did.

M

Moira McCullough 39:56

I think you've done so much that you know, I think he turned out okay. Yeah, I think we're all about food here. Any any places that you would recommend if students who are on a college campus at one of the ones that you worked at or attended or have been to that you would recommend?

S

Sara Cavalieri 40:16

I guess I have two answers for this question. The first one I at the University of Edinburgh is campus, there's a place called espresso. Perhaps they have amazing porridge which is like oatmeal, but better if they do it really well with berries and what not. So I that that place stuck out in my mind. Besides that, I would say I'm a big coffee drinker after living in Australia, they have the best coffee. So I kind of judge campuses based on where I can get a good coffee. That's what I'm always on the lookout for. And my favorite coffee place on campus is happens to be in Perth, Australia. So you have to go quite far to find it. But it's a place called The 10th State. They do amazing coffee, they give you a little panda cookie as well. And it's also a little shops, the things that they sell changes on a regular basis. It's very hipster and trendy kind of whatever they they find. But it's so cool. Every time you go in there. It's a different experience different things to look at different foods and desserts that they offer as well. But best coffee in my opinion.

M

Moira McCullough 41:18

Oh, I love coffee too. But I love it sweet. So anyone who's going to give me a cup of coffee with a cookie? I'm all over that. Yes, it's the best. Sara, thank you so much for joining us today in providing this wealth of information. It just makes you realize that as a student thinking about it, it would be easier if you thought about it in junior year, rather than all of a sudden adding it to your list in October or November of senior year. Exactly.



41:51

The best advice I could give students is just start early. I'm working with some freshmen now. And it's amazing that they've already decided that they want to go overseas, but they'll be in the best position because they've been able to plan the right curriculum. They've been able to plan kind of mentally, they'll be hopefully be able to visit some campuses as well. They know it's really hard to choose a university without visiting but most most do. So yes, best advice. Just start early in your planning,



Moira McCullough 42:17

In terms of with COVID, and what's with a lot of the campus on campus programming was non existent this year. In terms of Australia in the UK, What's changed? And are they open to on campus visits?



Sara Cavalieri 42:33

Yes, that is a really good question. At the moment, Australia, New Zealand are closed, they've been closed for more than a year. Now. They're not likely to welcome visitors until 2022. At this stage, even Australia and New Zealand citizens are having a hard time getting home. On the other hand, the UK is hopefully reopening international travel on May 17, depending on kind of what happens, they're putting in a traffic light system. So if your country's on the green list, you won't have to quarantine you just have to test before you depart. And also to date up to two days after you arrive with a rate that the US has been vaccinating people, it's hoped that the US will be on the green list. For students that went last year, they were always able to arrive there would just be a quarantine requirement in place. But hopefully that quarantine won't exist anymore. And then for schooling and once they're there, is it as of now or do in terms of a hybrid scenario, or was it virtual in your room? Because that's another big question for students in terms of making sure it's the right fit.



Moira McCullough 43:41

If that's not going to be an option for a year.



Sara Cavalieri 43:44

Yes, it's pretty much mostly been hybrid. So large lectures online, and then the tutorials or seminars in person, not sure what's going to happen this fall. I think it really depends what

happens over the summer, but I would expect maybe a bit of hybrid until we're fully out of this. Right. Perfect.

M Moira McCullough 44:00

Thank you Sara again for joining us.

S Sara Cavalieri 44:03

Thank you so much for having me. That was fun.

M Moira McCullough 44:06

Thank you to Sara for joining us today as we discussed all the nuances of applying to colleges overseas. If you have an inkling that you may want to study overseas start the process earlier rather than later. The criteria for applying to universities overseas is very different from the US and students need to plan accordingly. Admissions look at ACT and SAT test scores. There is no test optional. There are no interviews recommendations, demonstrated interest and supplemental essays required in terms of affording tuition. international universities are far less expensive than us based colleges and you can use FAFSA. You can find all of our show notes and links to the helpful resources mentioned throughout our conversation on our website at college skips.com slash podcast. You can learn more about Sara at College Apps Abroad at collegeapps abroad.com. Please take a couple of minutes to rate review and subscribe to College Scoops. Thank you for listening to our College Scoops podcast. Our entire College Scoops team strives to make the college journey a little bit easier, less stressful, fun and tasty by sharing all the inside scoops we have curated along the way. We would love to hear from you about topics to cover and your ideas and everything college related. Reach out to us at collegescoops.com or follow us on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.