

Episode 145-Beth Farias

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SPEAKERS

Beth Farias, Moira McCullough

M Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. I'm your host, Moira McCullough. And today we are talking with Beth Farias. So you got an email from a college what next?

B Beth Farias 00:10

But whether or not you clicked on eight emails or 10 emails is not going to be the reason that a student isn't ultimately admitted to a school

M Moira McCullough 00:25

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 College Scoops podcast to get the inside scoop, send everything college related, and leave us a review. Thanks to all of our sponsors partners in the entire College Scoops Ambassador team for helping us bring valuable content to our community. If you would like to support College Scoops as a sponsor, please head over to Patreon at patreon.com/collegescoops and sign up as a sustaining listener, insider or Deluxe sponsor. We have exclusive benefits for our members and even a College Scoops care package. Beth Farias has worked in the field of college admissions for almost two decades. She first developed a passion for the admissions process as a student worker admissions ambassador as a summer tour guide in the Office of Admissions at Providence College. Beth's professional career in admissions began in 2003 at Bryant University as a Senior Assistant Director of Admissions. Beth traveled throughout New England in the mid atlantic visiting high

schools and reviewing applications. She's read more than 10,000 essays. She also sat on the admissions marketing team, which helps her give families insight into how to interpret communications from colleges, and how institutional priorities shaped the admissions process. During her time at Bryant University, Beth served as Treasurer and President of the Rhode Island Association of Admissions Officers and collaborated with admission professionals from all colleges and universities in Rhode Island. In 2011, Beth moved to the other side of the desk as a college counselor, she incorporated various college admissions partners in 2015. She loves working closely with students and families to help them navigate the college search and admissions process and find the school that is the best fit. Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. Beth, thank you so much for joining us today.

B

Beth Farias 02:43

Thank you for having me.

M

Moira McCullough 02:44

You've been in so many different parts of the higher ed world working as a student, I love that you went to Providence College, I went to Fairfield so I feel like we're connected in that Catholic education way. I think Providence is not Jesuit? Fairfield is Jesuit. Providence is Dominican? Yes. So we both went to our schools. I was also a tour guide way back when and you were very active in admissions. So that says something. I think when students get involved in admissions while they're at school, it just shows that they love their school and they want to help and shout out to the world why they love their school to all those prospective students. Is that kind of what you did, or did your parents make you do admissions?

B

Beth Farias 03:20

No, actually, it was work study was part of my financial aid package to go to Providence. And I looked through the list of potential job opportunities and said, Oh, admissions that kind of sounds pretty cool. It sounds like they do some cool things in that office. And so I applied that job and pretty quickly fell in love with the process fell in love with meeting with families and seeing their excitement, being able to share my own story. Helping students that would say to me that they're interested in Providence was really because of some things that I said or some time they spent on campus with me. And then I also loved getting kind of a behind the scenes look into the admissions process. I would help process documents and back then everything came through the mail through snail mail, it was an online like it is now so I used to help you know, match transcripts and recommendations and things to applicants files. And I remember very vividly being a student in the admissions office. And you know, being a part of that and saying, I really want to read application someday and helped make that decision to craft a class and that really sparked my interest in going into admissions professionally.

M

Moira McCullough 04:18

I'm going to date myself and tell you that I remember coming home and I remember my parents looking at the envelope in the light trying to see if they could decipher any words and steaming the envelope open. So long gone are those days where that's how we found out

steaming the envelope open. So, long gone are those days where that's how we found out whether we got in or not. Now it's the big envelope that is the big clue as to admissions. But what I'd love to do and focus on today is because you worked in admissions and behind the scenes, you really have an appreciation to for how much admissions representatives work so hard to gather prospective students information and be able to share that in a meaningful way to their team to make sure that that student will thrive at the school. I mean, at the end of the day, admissions are accepting students who they want to succeed at school. Right? So you have all this insight into that. But you also worked a marketing standpoint for admissions, which is so different. So can you share a little bit about that side of the house?

B

Beth Farias 05:18

Sure. So in the beginning of my career, I was in the traditional counseling role visiting high school was traveling to the on the admissions committee. And after a few years, as technology started to explode, and social media came on the scene is something that colleges or businesses might start to use, they really felt like they needed a dedicated role to technology in the admission fields, you know, managing the website, and how that website communicates to families, how well it communicates the type of message that's going across making sure that that messaging is consistent across the university through print pieces and brochures to online technology. We started doing online chat that was very popular back then we would send out an invitation by email, students could come on to this chat service and ask questions, and we would have students live on the chat who could then answer some of those questions. So finding different ways to connect to the prospective students and the places where they were spending their time. And so within my role as the technology person within the admission office, I was able to set on the admission marketing team, which consisted of the Head of Marketing for the university, the Vice President for Enrollment Management, the Director of Freshman Admission, the Director of Transfer Admission, and of all interested parties, all of the people who will be communicating and all the different populations that we wanted to make sure were represented so that when you were putting together a print brochure that was going to sit on a college fair table to make sure that it covered representation, what would be interesting to a transfer student that they might want to know, as we use kind of some of that language, what would be appropriate for students of color to try to make sure that there's representation there, the male female dynamic, I worked at a school that was a little bit heavier on the male population, the female population. So we would have some events specifically geared towards women to try to encourage female applicants and show them that there was a strong community for them at the school.

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Moira McCullough 06:57

What you've described, too, is there's messaging based upon the different market segments. And how do you do that in a way that's coordinated, and has a consistent overall theme. But also, when you talk about the online chat, or now how it's moved to other ways to market to families, what is important from a family aspect that they should know in terms of a interpreting that information, but also what to do with it? Because institutions are analyzing that traffic, and that's going to feed into probably demonstrated interest in how they would view you as a candidate as well.

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Beth Farias 07:31

Beth Farias 07:51

Absolutely. So one of the first things I tell families about interpreting the information they're getting from colleges is it can feel very overwhelming. I have students who feel like if they don't open every single email that somehow that's going to be a negative I have students who are worried about if they sign up for an open house or an event on campus, something comes up in life, and they have to cancel is that going to be kind of a negative on their application. And really, it's students can certainly interact as much as they want to, especially with the colleges that they're most excited about, but they shouldn't feel like they have to click on and engage with every single email, schools are sending or sending out a lot of information. And they do track emails that are opened, and they can track on clicks. And they can track lots of information. And some of that does go towards demonstrated interest. But whether or not you've clicked on eight emails or 10 emails is not going to be the reason that a student isn't ultimately admitted to a school schools tried to segment their communication where they can. So if you've indicated in your prospective student information that you're interested in business or you're interested in communication, they will try to give you some communication and some email specifically for you in that stream. Sometimes if they don't have that information, a school will just send everything about everything. And so they're looking for students to say, oh, what's engaging to you and your site to interact with that. But I think sometimes students can get nervous feeling like I visited campus, I did an interview with the admission counselor, I did an information session, and now they're doing you know, an online webinar do I have to go, let's say, if you want to go when you have the time, that's great, but don't feel like you haven't done enough to show interest, you have done a number of different things. If it's a situation where it's a school, that's further away, the student isn't able to visit those virtual resources can be really effective, you haven't been able to make that physical visit, but you can take advantage of opportunities that are coming right into your computer. Like with so many things, it's a lot about balance, but not feeling overwhelmed that feel like you have to do everything for every school that's on your list.

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Moira McCullough 09:12

Because we all get tons of emails, and we could be at our desk the whole day answering emails or opening and reviewing a big distinction you've just made though, is if you can't physically get to a campus priority would be to open those emails as a student and engage more than you would if you had already been on a college campus.

B

Beth Farias 09:30

So for example, when I was working in admission, we would call an applicant who would apply having no previous contact that we could come up with, we call that a stealth applicants and then we would sort of ask ourselves the question, How did they find out you know, was it through word of mouth, they haven't visited campus, at least in an official capacity. Maybe they drove through campus, but if they don't let us know that maybe they really are their first choice, but they haven't interacted with us in any of the ways that we've given them. And so I would encourage students to try to think about that to not be it doesn't again, doesn't mean you have to have done everything. But those stealth applications are all whereas the ones that were kind of a little bit of the most, we just weren't quite sure what to make of them.

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Moira McCullough 10:04

M Moira McCullough 10:04

Like a red flag, I would put that in the pile, or you just throwing it out there and you don't really care because exactly the first time I've heard from them.

B Beth Farias 10:11

Right, and those are some of the places that can make a little bit of a difference in the actual admission decision process. Because if you have two candidates who are similar in terms of academic and extracurricular involvement, and one has done some of those things, has engaged with us either through an online chat or through social media, or through a visit physical or virtual, and someone who hasn't done anything. If I can't admit both of them, I am certainly feeling more confident about the student who has taken the time to learn more about us than a student maybe who maybe they have, but we just don't know about it from a student's perspective.

M Moira McCullough 10:42

Great advice. Are there other lessons learned or advice that you have from students, because then I would love to address it from a parent perspective, in the same sense of do I open up all those emails as a parent?

B Beth Farias 10:52

One of the other things that comes up a lot is how personalized this email communication is. And some of the can seem pretty personalized. Some of it can seem like the admission counselor or the current student at that school is talking directly to you as a student. And I do try to say to students that it's likely, you know, I can kind of read through that and say, This is a blast email that was sent to 30,000 of your closest friends. And that happens a lot as we get into that August, September timeframe, where colleges are really trying to ramp up application numbers as early in the process as they can. So you'll see schools that will offer things like personalized application, and sometimes they'll waive an application fee. Sometimes they won't. Sometimes they'll shorten the application with what's required. And they'll say, if you can get this done, you get first priority for scholarships and for admission if you apply by October 1, and that causes a lot of anxiety for students and for parents, because students feel like Am I missing my chance? If I don't do this, what if my application is not ready, parents feel like you know, should we take advantage of this and I having been on the other side of the desk can say that those emails, and those early applications are meant to increase application numbers and try to fuel that the high end of that admission funnel to get as many prospects converted to applicants as you can early in the process. But if you look at the fine print, especially if it's a common application school, it will always have a line in there that says or you can submit your common application to us for the same consideration. colleges can not prefer another application over the common application, if their common app school every year, every admission counselor has to sign a form saying that they will use the common app and not give any an institutional application. Any other type of priority application, VA will favor that over the common application. So I always tell students to look for certainly an application fee waiver. And even if they waive your application fee, they'll give you a code that you can put on the common app and still get that benefit. But not to feel the stress of having to do this specialized

early application, they are going to also accept the common app, the student chooses to do that that's fine, but not to feel like oh, my goodness, I have to do this. And now it's moved up my application timeline much more than I'm comfortable with. Thank you, I've been enlightened, I always say look that there has to be a line in there look for that line about the common app. And it has to be there because that's one of the stipulations of being a common application school is that you will view it the same way that you would view any other application.

M Moira McCullough 13:02

So it's one of those emails that we get right before Black Friday saying yeah, that's a better deal than the Black Friday do, I have to take that and just process it for a minute colleges do a great job marketing their institutions and marketing their people, that is their job, they do it well. And that's why they have the tours and information sessions. That's why they have the applications that they have on their numbers, but it is a business and you are the consumer. And it's your opportunity to do the research. You need to be an educated consumer and make sure that what you're receiving in the timeframe that you're getting, it fits in with where you are in the college applications process. From a parent perspective, I'm getting the same emails from them as students are what is important for me as a parent going through this the first time or the last time.

B Beth Farias 13:47

Sure. So, I think as a parent, you shouldn't feel that same you know, have to click on everything have to engage with everything colleges understand that parents are obviously a huge part of a process where their students will apply where they ultimately decide to enroll parents certainly often, you know, bear a lot of the financial burden of their children going to college. And I think as a parent, you want to learn as much as you can about this institution that you're you may be sending your child off to for the next four years. That being said, it really should be a student driven process. And so there may be some webinars or things like that for parents or virtual sessions for parents that a parent can feel free to take part in. But in terms of communication with the school admissions can tell when parents write emails for students and sign their name as their parents. So I know it can be hard, you know, as a parent myself, but I think to feel like really try to give students as much ownership into the process as they can. It's of course, you know, if you find out about an opportunity for an interview that you want your child to participate in, can certainly share that information and tell them that information, you know, but really giving your child the confidence to kind of manage the process as much on their own with your support as you can. There will be some opportunities for parents to ask questions and to be involved in sessions even on on campus visits. It's great for parents to certainly participate but when parents are driving the questions and the student is kind of cringing, is really giving students the confidence to own that process and no admission decision is going to be made based on whether or not a parent has engaged in a marketing campaign.

M Moira McCullough 15:12

In the negative aspect - but being overly involved or having too much input could work negatively against your students in the same sense.

B**Beth Farias 15:19**

Sure, I think just in the sense, it'll overshadow them. There were certainly sometimes some phone numbers that I would recognize from caller ID sitting in my office that it was apparent calling to check on some more information or trying to use a different angle to get some information. You know, the parents who in an interview setting would push up their chair and say, can you just tell me what do you think his chances are? It's not how the admission process works, and not a professional way to handle that. Nor is it helpful to the students?

M**Moira McCullough 15:41**

Well, it's interesting, because there's so many schools that did have interviews way back when now there's so few, I will say, I had a very interesting experience with one of my kids, where they called from the admissions office and said, You better get back here. There's a parent interview, I did all I couldn't to laugh because I was, you gotta be kidding me. Like, no, this is your opportunity. Right? Right. I actually thought they were joking. And I went back because I knew that my child was stressing a little bit that I wasn't there. And it was a parent interview. And I was like, I asked my student, do you have any other questions? Have they fully shared everything about the school? It's your journey, and you need to get the answers. And at one point, I did ask the interviewer, I'm like, Can I ask how this all started? Is it because there's a lot of parents out there I wanted to talk to, you know, because it was really one of those where I've never had that in all my experience. And I really wanted it to be you know, that particular student answering all the questions. Are there any tips that you have being an admissions and having some stories, as you said, where you recognize the number coming in and thinking, Oh, I've got student applicant number five again, on the phone. So Beth having been in admissions, are there any like lessons learned that you would share with your students or parents on some things that they can do to help them uncover answers to their questions or things that you really shouldn't do that are like a no go zone for students or parents,

B**Beth Farias 17:01**

Parents, it can certainly be common for parents to write emails on behalf of their students, but they will use the students email and sign the email as though they were the student. It's pretty obvious most of the time when a parent is asking a question in a way that does not sound like a 17 or 18 year old. That being said, I would say when we talk about demonstrated interest when colleges list on their admissions website, who the admission counselor is for your high school, to me, that's their way of saying please be in touch with us. If you have questions. Not all schools do that. But if they're saying this is the person who is likely going to visit your high school, or at least visit the region, the person who's going to take the lead on reading your application, then I think it's important to establish a conversation with that admission counselor. And I think there are there definitely professional ways to do that. And some things to avoid. So I think sometimes students can think everybody relies on texting, and students don't use proper grammar when they're texting or even they use and abbreviations. When you are communicating with a professional admission counselor, you do want to keep that communication professional, Dear Mr. or Mrs. So and So and don't say, Hey, I think sometimes admission counselors sort of portray this, we want to get to know you this kind of friendly relationship, but it really is counselor, student, adult student professional. So I think you'll

certainly benefit your application. If you are asking thoughtful questions. And something that's not as obvious as something's going to be found on the website. You don't want to email admissions counselor to say how many undergrads go to your school, what you want to do is ask the question about your particular major. Or if you have a question about housing on campus, maybe you've heard something. There's a lot of stories in the news right now about some housing crunches on college campuses. And you know, there are delicate ways to ask some of those questions. Maybe you want to ask I'm an undecided student, not quite sure what happened in a take what resources are available on campus to help me in finding my path, those types of things and genuine questions that students have. But there is a way to do that to be thoughtful to be respectful. This is not a one line text chain saying to someone, Hey, can you let me know about your psychology program things? So those types of things those exist, I have been on the receiving end of those emails. And I know that that still continues, especially as texting has become the primary mode of communication. I am much more interested in responding to a student who has written me a thoughtful email than someone who has said a What are your school colors?

M Moira McCullough 19:09

Let's go back to that housing crisis, because that is a big concern. And how would you ask that in a delicate way? If you absolutely know that they are oversubscribed by foreign students, and every person that you've heard from that you've reached out in the community of students say you are not going to get housing for this particular semester, but that's a real financial hardship for you. So how do you ask that?

B Beth Farias 19:29

I would ask some very genuinely very honestly saying, you know, I read in the newspaper if local or I saw an article online for some of the challenges with housing as an incoming or potential incoming student housing is really essential for me, I would be able to afford an off campus apartment on my own, what support is in place for students like me and how the school is addressing the housing situation? And that's the question that I think parents can get involved with as well. But I think at some point, most schools have experienced some type of housing crunch. I think COVID has exacerbated that in a number of schools. And I think that how a school deals with But that can tell you a lot about the school overall as a whole. And if it's a community that you want to be a part of, is it a school that is to say, oh, no, it's really not that big of a deal. It's okay. Or is it a school that saying, here's the situation, here's how we plan to address it. Here are some of the potential outcomes. And you know, letting students know what all of it is, I really do think that the way that colleges address a challenge or a crisis, for lack of a better word can tell you a lot about the type of institution and they are overall.

M Moira McCullough 20:24

I love that because that is so important. As we said, You're the consumer is a community that you're going to be a part of for four years, and how they respond to you when you're willing to fork over money versus when now you're in the school as a freshman, sophomore, junior, if you're not getting the answers in the way that you need, up front, you're not most likely going to get them when you're in school. So phrasing it like you did, and at the end of the day,

students are going to have to ask those questions on their own when they're at school. So having the opportunity to test it out when they're applying, putting it in a thoughtful email is something that will just help them going forward. If there is a potential situation that they really need addressed right away, it's really important advice.

B

Beth Farias 21:06

One more thing I would add about communication with admissions as a whole or with admission counselors is that many schools now use a platform that collects all of those communications based on the original Salesforce CRM manager. And now it's something through a higher education company called leaps that not every school uses. But it certainly is very, very popular in many of the schools in the northeast, many of the most quote unquote, elite schools use this platform, but they will collect all communication. So you have a platform, you have an ID number, anything, any engagement that you have in any way, including the application, any email communication, it all becomes a part of that. So when the admission counselor then opens your file, which is also on this platform through slate, they have not only all of your application information, your high school, your transcripts and everything. They also have all of the other information, they also can be reminded, I met the student for an interview. Oh, that's right. They emailed me back and forth and asked me a couple of questions. And so all of that becomes a part of your application file,

M

Moira McCullough 21:59

Which is really important. Because if you ask the same question five times just to show demonstrated interest or whatever, be thoughtful and know that it's all tracked, recorded. And also, that's how you can see the different writing styles. Yes, absolutely. We talked about how to communicate effectively and thoughtfully during the college application process. But now the application isn't and you're waiting to receive the news, can you share some of the different approaches for communicating if you're deferred, if you're waitlisted, said because I know a lot of Educational Consultants and provided some great insight as to what to do. But I'd love from an admissions perspective what you would recommend?

B

Beth Farias 22:36

As an admission counselor, if a student is getting news, if their application has been deferred, or waitlisted. I am looking for communication from them, I see what opportunities may await you know, down the road as we see how much space may be available in the class, I would not encourage the student to be in touch every day, especially students who are waitlisted sometimes would call frequently a couple of times a week to kind of say is there been any movement there is such a thing as too much. But I think an initial strong letter of continued interest saying I've received this deferral notification I've been placed on the waitlist, I want to let you know that this school is still very high on my list or is my top choice here the reasons I think I'm a good match. Thank you for reviewing my application. Again, in the case of deferred application, I will submit updated grades as soon as I can. So I'm looking for some type of communication from the student. When I worked in admissions, I would keep a list especially for waitlisted students of what I would call noisemakers. And so those students who have been in touch who have reached out and I know are very, very interested that I know if I were to pick

up the phone and call and say, Hey, we have a spot, they're going to take it in a heartbeat, I would already start compiling my list so that if there was space in the class, and I got the information from the Vice President for Enrollment, I need Each counselor to take their top 10 whatever number it might be, but their top 10 waitlist applicants and pass them forward. For another review. I'm already putting together my list because of students who have been in touch with me, I think sometimes if students don't know to be in touch, they think oh, well, they're going to review my application. Again. That's what the letter says. The letter says if there's any new information to be in touch, but regardless of that, if it's a school that you still want to keep your options open for you definitely should be in touch with admission, because admissions is tracking that that information as well. So if especially for a waitlisted candidate, if I'm thinking about offering it admit to you, but I haven't heard from you in a month, I'm assuming that you've probably made another decision and have decided to go somewhere else. So I think it is definitely beneficial from both, you know, the student side to show their interest but also on the admissions side for me because I was keeping a list of students who seemed like they would be a good fit seemed like they were really showing that extra interest so that I didn't have to really go searching through my list of files of waitlisted students, I already was keeping that list of those that if I was given the opportunity, I already knew the ones that I was going to put forward for consideration first.

 Moira McCullough 24:42

Ok. Be a noisemaker. A thoughtful one. I'm going to tie in also your advice that you gave earlier about your high school college counselor. They are a great advocate. And the more you establish that relationship with them, the more that they can help also to advocate for you because I'm sure that they're going back to admissions representatives and saying hey, Listen, I've got this great candidate Moira, who really wants to go there. She's a really good noisemaker. And she'll be the first one to say yes, when you pick up the phone, I agree that is a very important relationship.

 Beth Farias 25:08

And that's something that your school based counselor is able to make phone calls and advocate on your behalf and educational consultant can't do.

 Moira McCullough 25:15

All great advice. And I always learned something new every single time I talked to somebody. And that's the beauty of it. Because people have so much experience on different sides of the higher education. We always like to ask our guests two last questions. What do you wish you knew before you attended college?

 25:30

For me, I wish I knew, too, that it was okay to spread my wings a little bit further and look outside of the area that I grew up in for college. So I grew up in southeastern Massachusetts, and went to college, about 2025 minutes from home. And they did have a great experience. I

think of my class of 250 or So graduates, maybe three or four of them went outside of the Northeast for college. It just wasn't something that was ever on my radar. It wasn't something that at the time my guidance counselor encouraged or really even mentioned, it was like, Oh, we have all these great schools right here in New England, and I visited a couple I found one that I really liked. And that's where I went. And it really wasn't until I had an opportunity in college to study away I didn't study abroad, I studied in Washington, DC, and that opened up so many doors, it was just so such a great experience to be away from home in a new city that I could make my own that I wish that I had had a little bit more information about going a little bit further away from home had a great college experience isn't take away from my time at Providence, but I try to tell students now it really is the only chance you're gonna have to explore a whole new city without the constraints of work and finances and housing. And you know, where all of that is put together for where you can really just explore a totally different part of the country if you want to and just kind of go beyond what you knew growing up.

M Moira McCullough 26:44

It's so true. It's like take the risks now because you still have this support system in place like that there to help you through that journey. And you're right, you don't get that out in the real world. So enjoy it while you can. We are all foodies here is there anything that you would like to share about a favorite food spot dessert spot on a college campus or the surrounding area,

B Beth Farias 27:03

I would say my favorite dessert spot would have to be Le Creperie on the east side of Providence right near brown because I went to college in Providence we would go there sometimes students and it's still there and it's delicious and all of their crepes are freshly made and right adjacent to Browns campus. And I just always think it's a great spot for a great late night snack or just something a little bit different. That's one of my favorite.

M Moira McCullough 27:25

Thank you so much for joining us today. Moira thank you so much. This has been great.

B Beth Farias 27:31

Thank you so much for having me.

M Moira McCullough 28:16

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