

Reach High Scholars Program

The Harder I Work, the Luckier I Get" – The Serious Six

The Serious Six

Six members of the RHS Class of '11 have had record-breaking results in their college acceptances. For simplicity, they are referred to in this Newsletter as the "Serious Six." To place their accomplishments in context, in the history of RHS there have been 19 people who have graduated from, or are currently attending, one of 80 highly competitive colleges which we have identified for this purpose. The list of those colleges is on the website of the Reach High Scholars Program (www.reachhighscholars.org). In each of the prior four years, there has been an average of two acceptances and one attendee (who in most cases had received all the acceptances).

This year, spread among the Serious Six, there were 20 acceptances at the following top colleges: Brown, Colgate, Dartmouth, Grinnell, Hobart & William Smith (3), Holy Cross, RPI, Skidmore (4), Smith, Tufts, Washington & Lee, Wesleyan, Wheaton (2) and Williams. Jake Leavitt will be going to Brown, Samantha Harmon to Dartmouth, Ami Neeper to Holy Cross and Kristina Francoeur, Jesse Hardman and Jonathan Lemay to Skidmore.

These students have set a standard that should inspire RHS students for years to come. Theirs is a wonderful story: "It can be done; here are six people who did it in one year. But they worked very hard in ways not normal in the past to get there." It will not be easy for others to emulate what the Serious Six have done without an understanding of how they made it happen.

Each of them (like many students in earlier years) is intelligent, had a high grade point average and ranked at or near the top of their class. However, they have several other ingredients that led to their success. They set very high standards for themselves and were extremely thorough in pursuing the college admissions process. Each of them was highly motivated and determined to get into a top college. And, they had an appropriate sense of humility that kept them from thinking that they were entitled to any particular result. It is unrealistic for others to think that what they did can be easily copied or achieved by taking shortcuts.

Control Your Destiny

“Mud on the Wall”

There is no one factor (grade point average, SAT scores, well-written essay, interviews or other) that will result in acceptance to a top college. Rather, it is the accumulation of several high-quality attributes that attracts the attention of admission committees. We have used the expression “throwing mud on the wall.” If a student throws a lot of good-quality mud on the wall of admission offices there is the hope that some of it will stick and attract attention. That has certainly proven true for the Serious Six. We have had direct feedback from several admission officers at schools like Brown, Holy Cross, Skidmore and Wesleyan commenting on the quality of the Raymond mud.

For the benefit of RHS students who will be on a college path over the next few years and their parents, it would be useful to summarize the thorough approaches that these students took.

Standard Tests

SAT and **Advanced Placement** tests are taken by students from all over the world who apply to top U.S. colleges. It is a chance for a student to show that he or she is as good as the next guy even if the latter had the advantage of a more academically-challenging high school or intensive (and expensive) preparation for the tests.

Three of the Serious Six took the **SAT I** test three times and three took it twice.

The best score on the **SAT I** test for each of the six was in a range of 1850 to 2300 and they averaged 2090 (out of 2400).

They took 21 **SAT II** tests, averaging 3.5 tests per student. The average of all their **SAT II** scores was 680 (out of 800).

American History was the only **Advanced Placement** test available to them in their junior year (and therefore includable in their college applications). Four of them had scores of 5 (the highest possible) and two had 4s. As evidence of their continued high achievement, they took 13 more AP tests in their senior year with average scores over the two-year period of 4.37.

Summer Enrichment Programs

Attendance at summer enrichment programs at top educational institutions such as Phillips Exeter, St. Paul’s, Brown and Middlebury were an important component in the admission process for the Serious Six. They attended a total of ten such programs of two to five weeks duration, with four of them attending two programs. Again, we have been told by admissions officers that this was eye-catching and helped our students distinguish themselves from the

thousands of other applicants.

College Visits

College visits by students (and parents) are valuable both to gain an impression of a school's personality and approach to education and to evidence to the admission office that the student has an interest in the school. To accomplish these objectives it is important to do a combination of an organized tour and an admissions office information session (rather than just driving through or walking around the campus or the town). The Serious Six did 81 such visits (average of 13.5 per student), practically all of which were at highly competitive colleges.

Admissions Office and Alumni Interviews

Interviews play varying roles in the admission process. Some top colleges make them optional with little weight placed on them and others require interviews and treat them as an important component of their decision. The Serious Six went after interviews wherever they could on the theory that it was more good mud. They did 39 interviews (average of 6.5 per student).

College Applications and Acceptances

Because admission to highly competitive colleges is, one might say, highly competitive, even the top students at the best secondary schools in the country apply to eight to ten colleges including some schools where there is greater likelihood of acceptance. The Serious Six understood this. They applied to 57 colleges (average 9.5 per student) of which 39 were highly competitive colleges. At the highly competitive colleges, they had 20 acceptances (3.3 per student), 12 wait lists (2 per student) and just seven rejections. They submitted 18 applications to next-tier-competitive (*i.e.*, good) colleges and had 17 acceptances and one wait list.

As Sam Goldwyn once said: "The harder I work, the luckier I get."

8.24.11

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