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### *Cram Sessions*

#### **For High Schoolers, Summer Is Time To Polish Résumés**

**Companies Pitch Classes, Trips As an Edge for College;  
A Wheat Harvest in Peru Paying to Watch an Autopsy**

**By JUNE KRONHOLZ**  
**Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**  
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Forget about the lazy, hazy days of summer.

As soon as classes are over for the year at John Jay High School in Cross River, N.J., old Jamie Cohen is off to Senegal where she'll work with AIDS victims for four weeks. With her research, she'll then head to Yale University to present an AIDS "plan of action" to other teens, as part of a program put on by a travel company. When she applies to college in a few months from now, Ms. Cohen says the experience "will definitely help. I'll do an essay on it."

Amanda Baratz, 14, will head from Kehillah Jewish High School in San Jose, Calif. to Georgetown University this summer for a five-week course on medical careers, during which she hopes to watch open-heart surgery. She'll take an admissions-exam prep course, though she won't take the SAT test for another year. That way, "I won't be pressured when the time comes," she says.

Getting into America's elite colleges has never been tougher, and now, in addition to high test scores, essays, recommendations and class rank, there's this for teens and their parents to worry about: summer.

"Summers are important, big time," says Lloyd Peterson, vice president of College Connection, which charges \$3,499 for its college-counseling services. "The more prestigious the college, the more important the summers are."

Admissions officers dispute that. They say that how a youngster spends summers is more important than how to break a college application. "It doesn't matter as much as what they're doing in the fall year," says Richard Nesbitt, admissions director at Williams College in Williamstown, Vt.

But as a record number of high schoolers heads for college, summer is taking on new importance among super-achieving teens and their parents—and a whole industry has developed to serve them.

This summer, Putney Student Travel in Putney, Vt., is offering new, month-long "global awareness" trips to El Salvador, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Senegal. For prices ranging from \$1,500 to \$2,500, the trips include airfare, lodging, meals, and transportation.

\$5,090 to \$6,290, students will study such issues as sustainable development, bio-the cultural survival of indigenous groups.

A Boulder, Colo., company called Where There Be Dragons LLC is offering a \$6,700 trip to Vietnam where teens will teach English, build houses and help volunteer doctors in addition to kayaking in Halong Bay and snorkeling in the South China Sea. Community service is "the buzz word" among teens signing up for such trips, says Julie Carey, who runs the company's programs in Peru, Bolivia and Central America. "It's what people are as

For \$5,799, New York-based Musiker Discovery Programs Inc. sells summer courses in medical and law careers, aimed at high-school students. "We passed around a hundred applications," says Sam Pawliger, a junior at Miami's Palmetto High School who watched an aunt take the medical course last year.

For youngsters who already have full résumés, Academic Study Associates of White Plains, N.Y., puts on \$2,895 camps where teens—many just finishing their sophomore year—spend two weeks polishing their college-application essays, undergoing mock admissions interviews and prepping for SAT exams. Thirty kids came to the company's first course two years ago, it says it's expecting 150.

A record 16.7 million students are expected to enroll in college next fall, 1.2 million more than five years ago. The U.S. education department expects up to 18.8 million enrollees from now. At the same time, ambitious high-school students are loading up on advanced-placement classes and taking prep courses to boost their scores on college-admissions tests, heightening the competition.

California's Pomona College says one-third of the students it accepted for next fall had a minimum 800 on either the verbal or math part of the SAT admissions tests. North Davidson College says one-quarter of its new class has a combined SAT score over 1,500.

With the glut of high-scoring applicants, colleges are paying closer attention to factors like community service, artistic talent, leadership—and summers. "There's more demand for students who can accommodate at the selective institutions. What do you do? You need some time to do it," says Barmak Nassirian of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, a Washington, D.C., trade group.

"These days, just having perfect grades and perfect SAT scores does not guarantee admission," says Victoria Hsiao of IvySuccess Corp., which charges up to \$15,000 for its college-admissions services. "It's the complete package that colleges are looking at."

Admissions officers agree—although their view of a complete package doesn't always match a consultant's. Christopher Gruber, acting dean of admissions at Davidson, says he is looking for students who round out the entering class—a cellist or soprano for the music program, kids with different "life experiences," and those who pursue their academics outside the classroom.

He gives high marks to community-service "entrepreneurs"—students who, say, "initiated a need for teaching kids in the inner city and created a program." He also likes "creative leaders," he says—youngsters "who may not be on the cutting edge, but can do it better as they go."

That sounds like a terrifyingly high bar for many kids. At Cheyenne Mountain High School in Colorado Springs, Colo., Jessica Clayton scored 1540 out of 1600 on her SATs, took advanced-placement courses last semester, volunteers two days a month at a midtown library, works after school at a smoothie shop, is on the varsity Lacrosse team and runs cross country.

But she worried that wasn't enough: An Ivy League recruiter told her about a rival who had composed harp music, recorded the compositions and sold the CDs for charity. "I can't play the harp," says Ms. Clayton. "There are kids who have sent up satellites that have

the Earth. At my school, I'm pretty average."

So, with money she earned and a scholarship from the Where There Be Dragons to Ms. Clayton signed up last summer for the company's trip to Peru, where she painted harvest wheat and organized a trash cleanup. "I guess I knew that it would give me an edge," she says. Five colleges accepted her, she says, including Bowdoin, \ and Colgate; she's wait-listed, she says, at Pomona.

The Supreme Court's affirmative-action decision two years ago also seems to be fueling summer angst for students from affluent families. The ruling freed universities to mention factors other than grades and test scores, including family background and race and other things.

Economist Tom Mortenson, who publishes a newsletter about college accessibility, says that blacks and Hispanics represent only 11% of undergrads at the country's top public universities, even though they make up a quarter of all U.S. undergraduates. Low-income students, he says, account for 12% of students at the country's 51 top-ranked liberal-arts colleges, up from 13% a decade ago.

Still, ambitious students see fat résumés as a way to overcome a perceived handicap. "If you're not a football star, you're not a minority, you're us—white, blue-eyed, private-school kid," says Will Daly, 18, a senior at Middlesex High School in Concord, Mass. "What do you do to make you stick out?"

Last summer, he paid his way to Varanasi, India, where he spent three weeks writing language lesson plans for an ashram's school, then spent another three weeks traveling. "I did not do this for college," says Mr. Daly, who says he went for "the experience." Still, he wrote a college-application essay about the trip. He is going to George Washington University.

"I am the average white American, and colleges have their pick," says Daniel Gerrard at Madison High School in Madison, N.J. He joined an organized trip to India, where he learned English, built soccer goals and did other "little things that needed to be done" at an ashram. "Yes, I met their academic requirements," he says of the six colleges that gave him admission, "but I'm positive that all my extracurriculars are what got me in."

Many high schools now make community service part of their graduation requirements. "I've seen exotic summer programs that youngsters think will help them stand out in the crowd," says Ms. Hsiao of IvySuccess, who says she tells clients not to work in the local hospital because "that's something every single high-school student does."

Tour operators say teens are eager to pay for trips that include chances to volunteer. "I've seen kids who've been waited until graduation and joined the Peace Corps," says Peter Shumlin, director of Putney, the youth-travel company, which this summer offers trips to 13 countries, plus Hawaii and Alaska.

Sara Hubbard, a junior at Park Tudor School in Indianapolis, says she earned 150 service hours last summer teaching English and decorating a school in one of Putney's programs in Rajasthan. Now, she's doing a two-year school research project on the life of Phoolan Devi, an Indian bandit, and hopes the two projects will "show a growing interest in something different."

Admissions officers say exotic summer programs don't give youngsters a leg-up in college. "A fancy trip "is going to be looked at as an opportunity anyone with \$7,000 can get," says Pomona president David Oxtoby. He worries such pricey programs—just like prep school—can boost SAT scores—will further tilt admissions in favor of privileged teens. His school adds, "It's going to give an edge to kids who have overcome obstacles."

But if summer trekking in Mongolia (\$6,850) or bicycling the Alps (\$4,795 plus airfare) count with admissions directors, that's not a message kids say they're getting. "It's a cutthroat ever since I've been in fourth grade—if I didn't have great grades and extra-

I wouldn't stand out," says James Sacks, a junior at Wooster School in Danbury, C

Last summer he joined a \$7,000 Musiker trip to Australia, where he spent three weeks with dementia patients and restoring antique ships in Sydney before heading to the Barrier Reef and Ayers Rock. With that trip, and a moral philosophy course the summer before, "I think I have it all there, summerwise," he says.

"I was 13 and already being told the importance of doing things" to build a résumé, says Peter Daly, the Middlesex student, who biked cross-country after his freshman year and traveled to Peru after sophomore year, both with organized tours. "The pressure's on." Some of the pressure is coming from the college-counseling industry. College Coach's Mr. Pete tells clients to spend the summers after freshman and sophomore years "putting together your extracurricular profile." For the final high-school summer, he urges teens to do something intellectual. This isn't another break, this is it. This is the big banana."

Katherine Cohen—whose company IvyWise LLC charges \$23,995 for two years of admissions advice and assistance—recommends an internship after the freshman year, a minimum 100 hours a year of volunteering, and a "real job" after the senior year at an investment bank or an internationally prominent museum, places she says she placed last summer. If that's not enough, "I might put you in an art program in Mexico for a little while where you can do pottery and learn Spanish," she says, or suggest a trip to a place "where you study with Tibetan monks."

Even for teens without access to high-priced advice, the message is the same. "The Best Ways for Teens to Spend the Summer," a new book by New York-based Princeton Review test-preparation company, advises teens that "summer programs are the ace up your sleeve. They are the true point of differentiation" for getting into college.

That's a message many kids believe. Liza Friedman, a senior at Columbia Grammar Preparatory School in Manhattan, says she wrote her college-application essay about Vietnam, and also told college interviewers about previous community-service trips to Tanzania.

The trips helped her decide to focus on African studies in college, she says, but also gave her something to talk about in the interviews. "She received admissions offers from several colleges, she says, including one that wrote that her summer tours showed she is "a member of the global community." But during the interview with her first-choice school, she is still waiting to hear from it, there were more questions about her softball team for Amnesty International, she says.

So then, what has come of the idea of summer as a time to relax and unwind? Univ. of Chicago admissions director Theodore O'Neill says he would look kindly on an applicant who spent the summer "reading 50 books under a tree." IvyWise's Ms. Cohen urges students to take a two-week vacation and make time for reflection. Either that, or "take a power nap." "I'm all for power naps."



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Ivywise™, LLC, 140 West 57th Street, Suites 3C and 3D New York, NY 10019

Tel:(212) 262-3500 Fax:(212) 262-4100 [info@ivywise.com](mailto:info@ivywise.com)

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