

## **College Admissions Advisor Know It's About The Project!**

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*The lessons learned along the way taught them more about life and gave them the tools for success that they didn't learn in high school, or even college.*

“Congratulations! You’ve been accepted to Stanford University!” Nicole read aloud from the hastily-opened letter. We screamed, jumped up and down, and then laughed and cried as we read and reread her acceptance letter. Stanford had been her first-choice college since she was in eighth grade. That was a defining moment in Nicole’s life, and I was one proud mom.

When students with 4.0 GPAs and perfect SAT/ACT scores received denial letters from selective colleges, everyone wanted to know what colleges were looking for in their incoming freshman class. Unlike many of her peers who just focused on joining a dozen clubs, playing on several sports teams, and volunteering at many nonprofit events, Nicole did a project.

Nicole was interested in finding an alternative energy source to help solve America’s dependence on foreign oil. After meeting with a family friend, she learned about hydrogen fuel cells. I made a few phone calls to set up mentors who could help her, and she and a classmate worked with engineers to build a hydrogen fuel cell. What happened next completely changed her life. She was invited to demonstrate how the fuel cell worked at the National Hydrogen Association’s Conference, which launched her five-year speaking tour across the nation.

Motivated to improve her presentation skills, Nicole met with a speaking consultant and conducted further hydrogen fuel cell research. Nobody needed to tell her that she had to be knowledgeable about her fuel cells; she knew she had to be ready for any question. Nicole spoke at universities and conferences from coast to coast. After speaking on a panel of PhDs at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, she received a standing ovation. She learned marketing skills as she promoted her fuel cell and improved her negotiation skills through handling fees and expense reimbursements. Doing this project made her become confident and engaged. The more she became involved in her project, the more she realized how powerful she was.

Jaclyn, Nicole’s younger sister, joined her on the tours, and scooped ice cream made from the fuel cell powered ice cream maker. When Nicole went off to Stanford, Jaclyn explored other alternative energy sources. She, too, found hydrogen to be the cleanest and most viable option for America, so she founded Kids 4 Hydrogen, a California nonprofit organization.

Jaclyn first worked with engineers and auto mechanics to convert an internal combustion engine so it would use compressed hydrogen gas instead of gasoline. Upon encountering many complications, she redirected her campaign to promote hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. She spoke at Governor Schwarzenegger’s Award Ceremony at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, which instigated her work with American Honda. A V.I.P. guest, Governor Schwarzenegger flew her to LA to introduce her at his First Hydrogen Refueling Station. Next, she met with research scientists and marketing representatives at American Honda to discuss a possible partnership between Kids 4 Hydrogen and Honda.

Even though Nicole and Jaclyn chose to do projects to improve their personal portfolios and ultimately improve their chances of getting into the best colleges, the most amazing part about doing a project was that they became intelligent, articulate leaders. Their self-esteem soared and nothing could stop them from

reaching their goals. When they started receiving accolades from industry leaders, newspapers, and radio talk show hosts - people other than their mom -- they knew that they were making a difference.

When it came time for Nicole and Jaclyn to write their college application essays, they had plenty of material to consider. Instead of writing about their hopes and dreams, they wrote about their projects and how they learned to overcome obstacles. Nicole wrote about how the security staff at the Hart Senate Building in Washington, DC wouldn't allow her to enter the building because they thought her fuel cell was a bomb. They called the bomb squad, and she had to demonstrate how the fuel cell worked before they let her into the building for her fuel cell presentation. It was experiences like these that made their essays interesting and gave them the opportunity to show how their passion helped them blossom in ways admissions officers could appreciate.

Jaclyn got accepted to Claremont McKenna College and received a substantial scholarship. The Toyota Community Scholars foundation awarded her \$10,000, and then selected her for an additional \$10,000 at their awards ceremony at the Kentucky Derby Museum in Louisville, Kentucky. She received four of the five additional scholarships she applied for. Who would have guessed that their projects would get them into top colleges and made them strong candidates for scholarships too.

As a private college advisor, I encouraged my daughters to do projects to position themselves to be competitive in the admissions game. Naturally, I knew that their projects would win scholarship dollars. But what I didn't realize at first was that these projects could fix problems that our government can't in this economic crisis. Even though my high school clients work on their projects because they hope they will improve their chances of getting into their top colleges, what they don't realize is that their projects are making them better people. Imagine if every college-bound student did a project. These two million students can solve our energy, housing, health care, and civil rights problems -- one project at a time.

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