Help Your Rural Teen Find a Path That Fits Their Community and Goals

with Auvria Hampton Oliver, Susan Semonite, and Jaclyn N. Pageau

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BigFuture®



Meet today's speakers.





Greg Rafal-Brooks
Senior Director, Program Strategy, BigFuture



Auvria Hampton Oliver
Associate Director of Admissions for Outreach & Diversity, UC Berkeley



Susan Semonite
Senior Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions, Duke University



Jaclyn N. Pageau
Associate Director of Admissions, Dartmouth College

STARS COLLEGE NETWORK

The Small Town and Rural Students College Network (STARS College Network) brings together 32 top colleges and universities who are dedicated to working with high schools and access organizations to widen pathways to higher education for rural and small-town students.



Widening the View

with Auvria Hampton Oliver

Associate Director of Admissions for Outreach & Diversity, UC Berkeley

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Widening the View: More Paths, More Possibilities



Expand Definition

Explore four-year colleges, community colleges, trade & technical programs, military service, apprenticeships, and direct-to-work opportunities.



Look Beyond

Encourage students to consider schools, programs, and unique opportunities outside their immediate community or geographical region.



Connect Interests

Introduce high-growth careers in rural communities as well as emerging career paths that open doors in other regions.

Key Message: There is more than one path to a meaningful and successful future.

Rural Roots Are Strengths — Not Limitations

What students bring from their rural communities matters. The experiences teens gain growing up in rural communities can be powerful assets in college applications, career training, and the workplace.

Help Teens Tell Their Story

Encourage them to connect everyday experiences to the qualities colleges and employers value.



Self-reliance: Demonstrating initiative, problem-solving, and the ability to take responsibility.



Strong work ethic: Highlighting employment, family responsibilities, agriculture, and hands-on experience.



Community connections: Showing leadership, service, teamwork, and commitment to others.



Practical Skills Recognizing skills gained through trades, outdoor work, caregiving, and community involvement.

Big Futures, Near and Far

Help teens imagine careers both close to home and beyond it. Opportunity can exist in their hometown, across their state, or somewhere entirely new.



Careers Close to Home

Explore opportunities in healthcare, education, agriculture, skilled trades, renewable energy, technology, and local entrepreneurship.



Careers Beyond

Introduce fields and industries that may require additional education, specialized training, or relocation.



Connect Education

Help teens identify the training, credentials, and experiences needed to pursue different career options.

Key Message: A student's future can include staying, leaving, or eventually coming home. All are valid possibilities.

The “What If I Leave?” Conversation

Expanding possibilities doesn't mean leaving home behind. Parents and trusted adults can help rural teens navigate these feelings without unintentionally limiting choices.



Mixed Emotions

Make room for mixed feelings. It's okay to be excited about new opportunities and sad about leaving familiar places.



Leaving ≠ Losing

Separate leaving from losing. Moving away doesn't mean abandoning family, community, or rural roots.



Ask, Don’t Direct

Try open questions: "What excites you about that opportunity?" or "What helps you feel connected to home?"



Keep Doors Open

Remind teens that they can explore, leave, return, or build a future connecting multiple places.

Conversation Starter: "You don't have to decide today where you'll spend the rest of your life. Let's explore what's possible."
Key Message: Our role isn't to choose their future. It's to help them navigate their options.

Closing Takeaway

"Widening the view means helping rural teens recognize that their **roots are a strength**, their **options are bigger** than they may realize, and their **future is theirs to define**."

- **Roots = Strength**: Recognize local background, life experiences, and community values as core assets.
- **Bigger Options**: Expand horizons beyond immediate geography to include diverse education and career pathways.
- **Future to Define**: Empower teens to confidently shape their own individual journey—whether staying, leaving, or returning.

Key Takeaway: Their background is a springboard, not a ceiling.
Help them dream big and pave their own path.

Weighing the Options

with Susan Semonite

Senior Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions, Duke University

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Finding Colleges That Fit Your Student

Start with your student's goals and interests.

> The best fit is where your student can thrive academically, socially, and personally.



Academic Programs
Majors • Career Opportunities



Campus Experience
Culture • Support • Student Life



Size
Small • Medium • Large



Location
Rural • Suburban • Urban

Sticker Price Isn't What Most Families Pay

Don't eliminate a college because of the sticker price. Look at the full financial picture.

Compare:

- Cost of attendance
- Grants and scholarships
- Work-study opportunities
- Expected family contribution
- Net price (What your family may actually pay after financial aid)

Balancing Opportunity and Distance

Questions to Consider:

- How far is too far?
- What are transportation options?
- How often can my student come home?
- What support systems exist on campus?





Visit Smart When Travel Is Difficult

Explore Colleges Through

- Virtual Tours
- Student Panels
- College Fairs
- Fly-in and campus visit programs
- Admission webinars
- Virtual advising opportunities

Use **BigFuture's College Search** tool to find the right college.

Search over 4300 college by location, major, type, and more!

Parents don't need to have all the answers. Your role is to help your student explore possibilities, ask good questions, and make informed decisions that align with their goals, values, and future plans.

Finding Trusted Guidance

with Jaclyn N. Pageau

Associate Director of Admissions, Dartmouth College

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Resources for you!

BigFuture.org

Khan Academy Course

College Admissions

College Greenlight Resource Library

Admission Beat

STARS

Small Town & Rural Students College Network

CollegeWise

Appily

The Colleges!

11th Grade

CollegeBoard **Access**

College Planning: 11th Grade

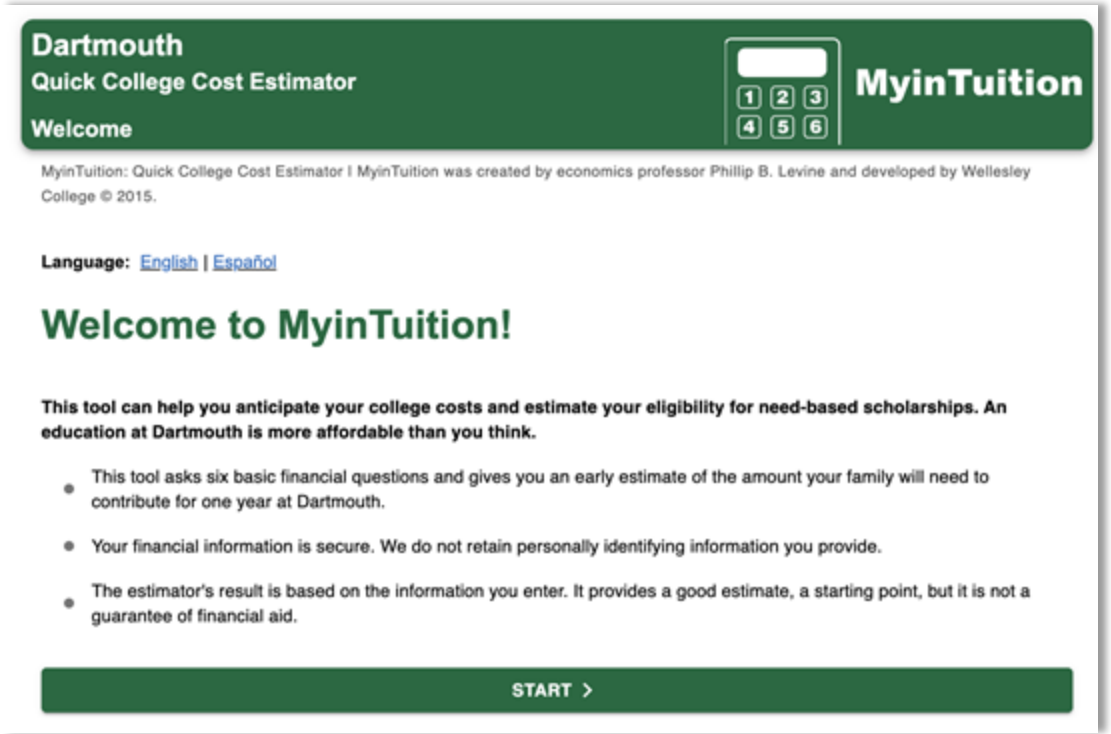
Junior year marks a turning point. This is because for most students and families, it's when college planning activities kick into high gear. Here are some things you can do this year to stay on track for college.

FALL

- ☐ **Start with you:** Make lists of your abilities, social/cultural preferences, and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.
- ☐ **Learn about colleges.** Look at their websites and find colleges at bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search. Talk to friends, family members, teachers, and recent grads of your school now in college. List the college features that interest you.
- ☐ **Resource check:** Visit the counseling office and meet the counselors there. Is there a college night for students and families? When will college representatives visit your school? (Put the dates in your calendar.) Examine catalogs and guides.
- ☐ **At school, speak to your counselor about taking the PSAT/NMSQT®,** which is given in October. If you plan to ask for testing accommodations (because of a disability), be sure the College Board has approved your eligibility.
- ☐ **Make a file to manage your college search, testing, and application data.** If appropriate (for example, if you're interested in drama, music, art, sports, etc.), start to gather material for a portfolio.
- ☐ **Estimate your financial aid need.** Financial aid can help you afford college. Use the College Board's *Getting Financial Aid* and the financial aid calculator at bigfuture.org to estimate how much aid you might receive.

Your Role

- Support!
  - Let your student be in the driver's seat
- Talk about the money (and other important items)
  - Have an honest conversation about what your family can afford and what may be important (distance, community, etc.)
  - Educate yourself about financial aid options & be open to surprises
    - Try not to let sticker prices scare you. Use Net Price Calculators
    - Ask questions!
- Listen to and Believe in your student



Advice vs. Noise

- Every college is going to be pitching themself with their best foot forward
- Social media has A LOT of noise about how best to apply to college
- Reddit is (almost always) not your friend!
  - Go to actual school's social media accounts or podcasts
  - STARS events
- Utilize resources like BigFuture

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You've got questions. We've got answers.

Find resources for college and career planning at bigfuture.org/community.

Watch short videos that answer questions fast.

Read articles packed with expert advice.

Get tips for your teen’s college and career planning.

Explore tools that help you plan every step, together.