

The Unspoken Truths in Career and Higher Education Choices

The Career Choice Illusion



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Guess the career

MAJOR Computer Science

MINOR Theatre

He loved coding but spent every free hour backstage, building animatronic props, including a motorized, sensor-driven “talking” tree for Macbeth.



ICEBREAKER 1 OF 5

Guess the career



MAJOR Computer Science

MINOR Theatre

He loved coding but spent every free hour backstage, building animatronic props, including a motorized, sensor-driven “talking” tree for Macbeth.

THE ANSWER

Imagineer

Designs animatronics and ride mechanisms for a theme park.



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Guess the career

MAJOR Chemistry

MINOR French

She loved lab work. Her capstone: extracting and recreating the smell of rain on dry soil (“petrichor”) for a class exhibit.



Guess the career

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THE ANSWER

Perfumer (“a nose”)

Formulates scents for luxury brands at a fragrance house.



Guess the career



MAJOR Mathematics

MINOR Studio Art

Obsessed with tessellations and geometric patterns, his senior project modeled the mathematics behind Gothic stained-glass windows.



Guess the career



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THE ANSWER

LEGO Master Builder

Builds large-scale architectural sculptures in LEGO's model-design studio.

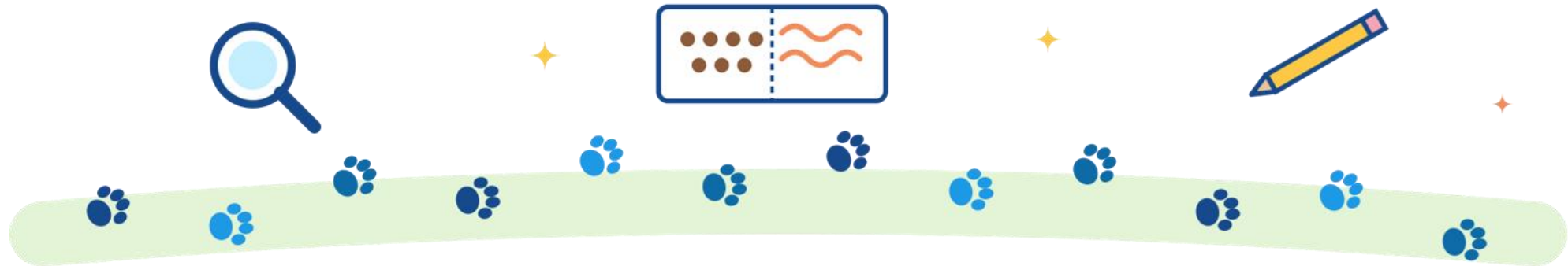


Guess the career

MAJOR Biology

MINOR Art

She loved research and animal behavior. She mapped how dog breeds respond to grooming touch and sketched coat patterns for a “visual field guide.”



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THE ANSWER

Pet stylist

Combines animal biology with an artist’s eye to groom and style show dogs and pets.



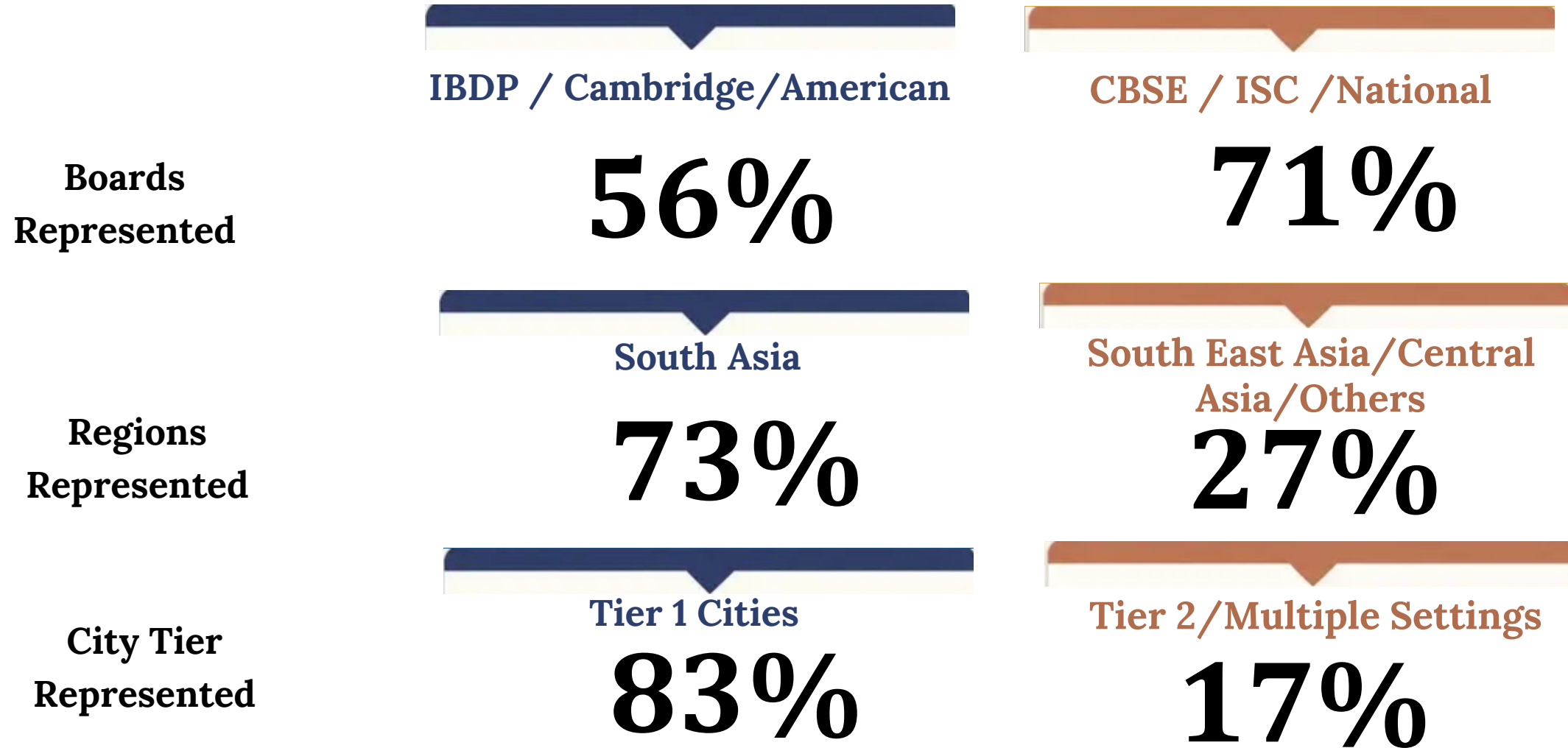
The Counsellor Perspective



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Counsellor Perspectives: Educational contexts represented

A Counsellor lens on the educational contexts shaping higher education guidance.



You are Arav. Which of these offers will you pick?

Option A: Globally recognized University, Highly Selective, Highly Ranked, Expensive

Option B: Less Famous University, flexible curriculum, strong student support

Option C: Well known University, Familiar Destination, Parents' Preferred option

Option D: Generous Scholarship, Mid-Tier Ranking, Good outcomes, Lower overall Cost



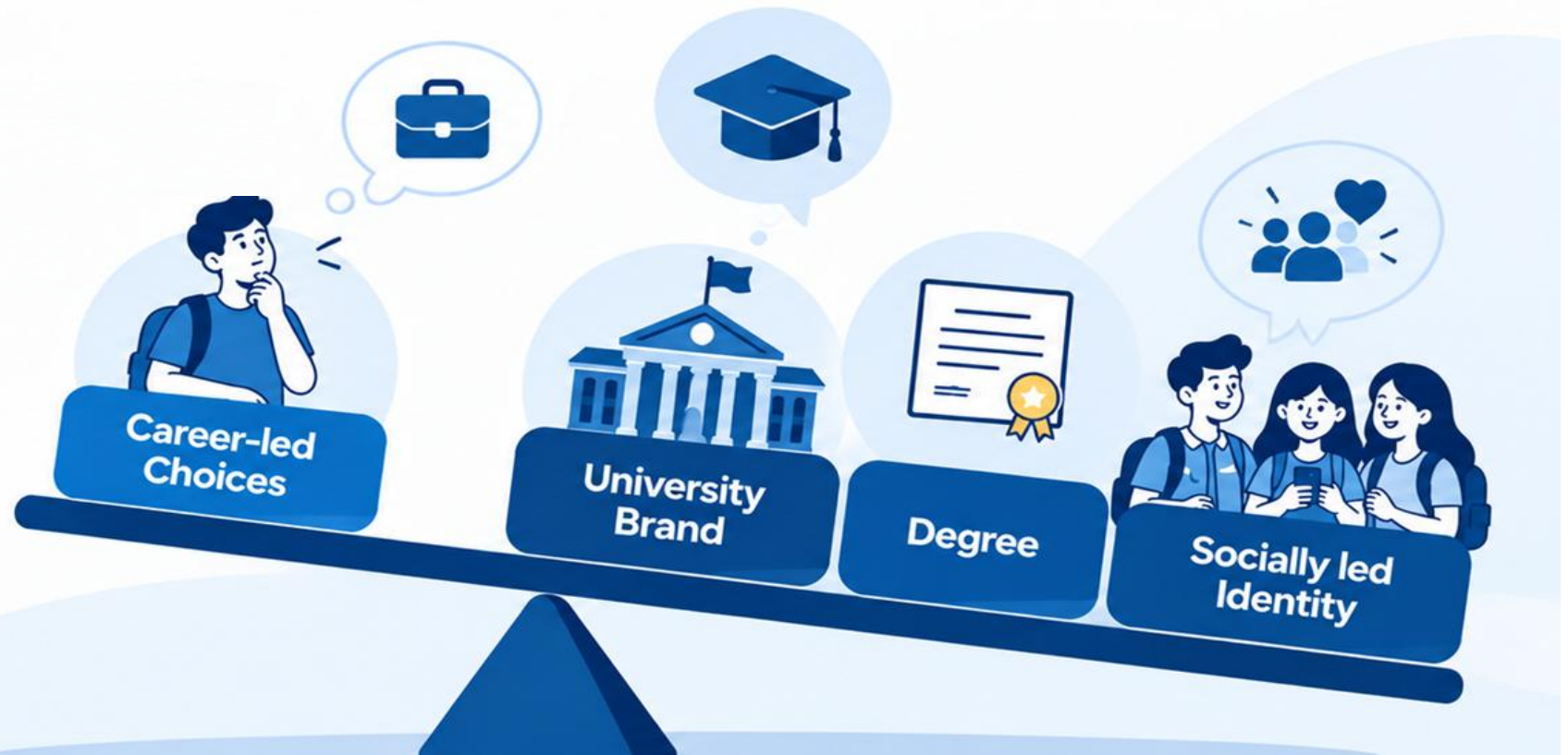
<https://www.menti.com/>

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Student's Perceived Driver of Choice?

**Only 10% counsellors feel
student choices are
career-led.**



Let's find out a little more about Arav. As a Higher Education Professional, which of the offers will you now choose?

Arav loves creative problem-solving and interdisciplinary learning

His family can only afford limited overseas tuition.

He struggles in highly competitive, impersonal learning environments.

He wants flexibility to explore different career pathways.

He worries about belonging whereas his parents believe that a prestigious university guarantees employability..



<https://www.menti.com/>

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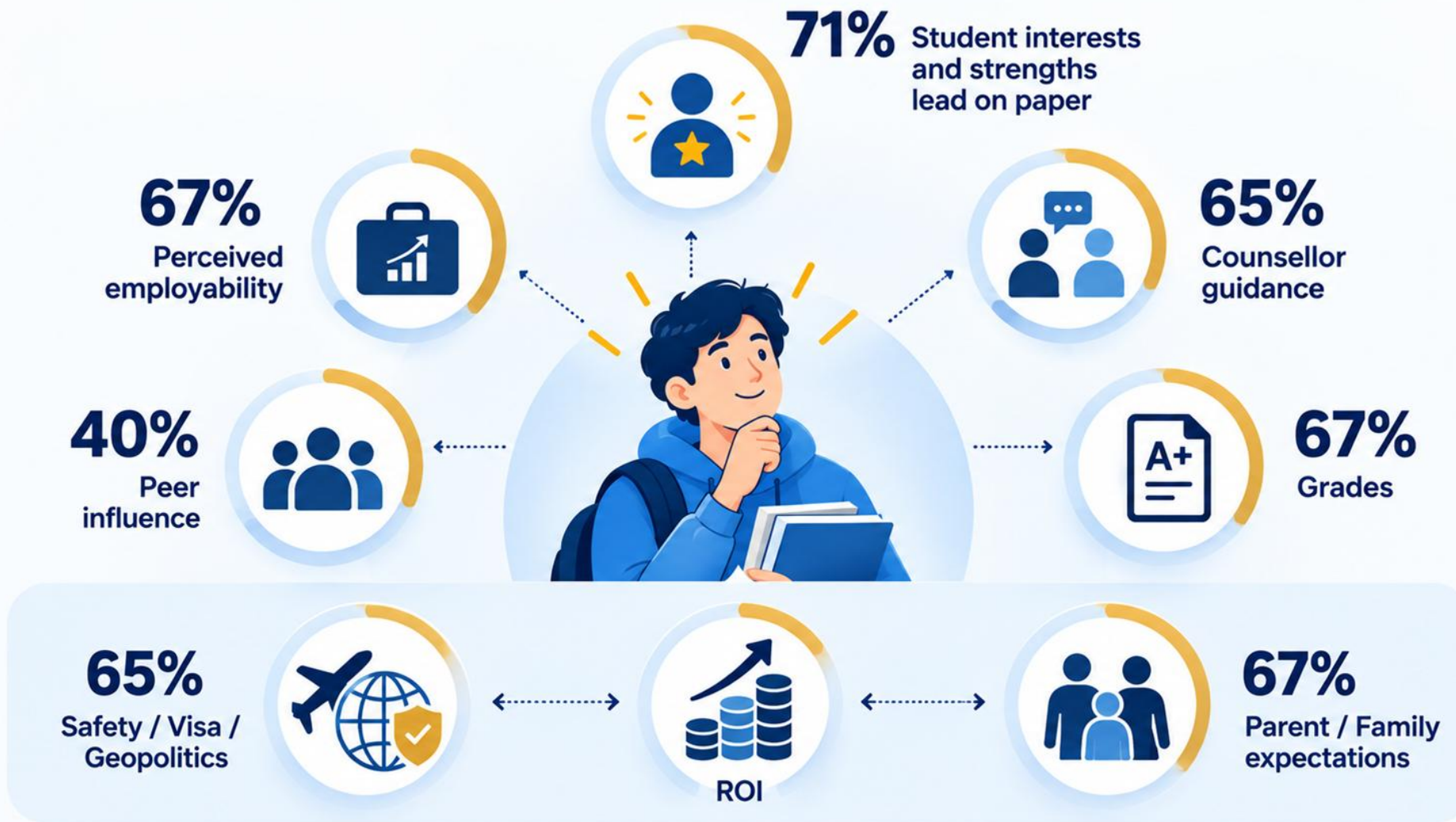
Are We Guiding Choices or Validating Decisions?

81%

report students
arriving with a
pre-framed choice.



What shapes choice: stated priorities vs lived pressure



The Overriding Influence

79%

Feel **Parent and Family Expectations** are an overriding factor for higher education final choices.



**FAMILY
EXPECTATIONS**

60%

Feel **Financial Constraints** are an overriding factor for higher education final choices.



**FINANCIAL
CONSTRAINTS**



Counsellor Courage to handle conflict

70%

Counsellors feel confident challenging prestigious but poorly aligned choices.

Factors that cause the hesitation:

- Attachment to Prestige
- Fear of Damaging Trust
- Fear of Blame
- Institutional Realities
- Family Authority



Neglected Dimensions of Fit – Bridging the Gap



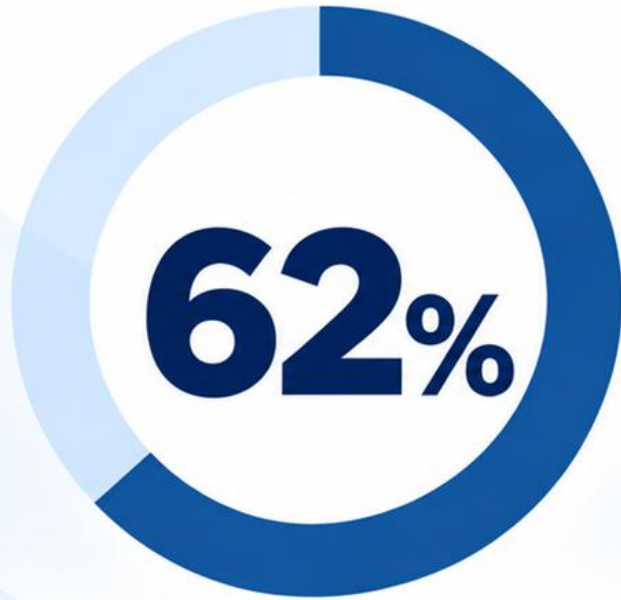
Important Learning Experience Factors introduced to Families



Across board groups: access, readiness and noise



Across board groups: access, readiness and noise



Counsellors are
not well prepared
on global information.



The Narrative Paradox

71%

feel that
**Viral social media
narratives create fear
and influence decisions**



Counselling – From Student Centric to Family Centric

KNOW THE STUDENT

Evidence before Assumptions

- Start with Student Evidence
- Make hidden pressures visible
- Compare Fit not Labels
- Build Meaningful Alternatives

ENGAGE THE FAMILY

From guidance to Advocacy

- Create Advocacy for Parents
- Turn Competing Expectations to dialogue
- Bring the Family into Fit Based Decisions

ELEVATE THE COUNSELLOR

Protect time for Human Connection

- Practice Self-Reflection
- Be a Continuous Learner
- Use AI to Streamline workflows to free your time to use it where it matters
- Access to the right information at the right time



The University Perspective



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Myths vs. Reality

Six common beliefs, and what admissions actually rewards

01 – 03

Before you apply

04 – 06

After you submit



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“I need to know my career by 12th grade.”

— every Grade 11 student, panicking



THE MYTH

A single, confident career goal signals maturity.



Heard it or Said it?

Hands up before we reveal



“I need to know my career by 12th grade.”

— every Grade 11 student, panicking



THE MYTH

A single, confident career goal signals maturity.

BUSTED



THE REALITY

**Curiosity and exploration
impress more than premature
certainty.**



“STEM or Business is safe; Arts or Humanities is risky.”

— the family WhatsApp group



THE MYTH

STEM or business guarantees admission and jobs.



Heard it or Said it?

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THE MYTH

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BUSTED



THE REALITY

STEM pools are crowded with similar profiles. A sharp humanities application stands out.



“The college name determines my career.”

— *the rankings table*



THE MYTH

A brand-name school gets you a good career.



Heard it or Said it?

Hands up before we reveal



“The college name determines my career.”

— *the rankings table*



THE MYTH

A brand-name school gets you a good career.

BUSTED



THE REALITY

What you do in four years matters more than the school's name.



PART 2 · AFTER YOU SUBMIT

You've hit submit. Now what?



The no

Myth 4



The yes

Myth 5



The rep

Myth 6



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“A rejection is a verdict on the student.”

— every family, on results day



THE MYTH

If a strong student is turned down,
they must have fallen short.



Heard it or Said it?

Hands up before we reveal



“A rejection is a verdict on the student.”

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THE MYTH

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BUSTED



THE REALITY

A “no” reflects seats, the applicant pool, timing and what the application showed.



What a “no” usually means



Seats

Every program has fixed capacity. Strong applicants often outnumber the places.



The pool

Students compete with that year's applicants, often many from the same school or city.



The evidence

Grades show ability. Where required, supplementaries show readiness for that classroom.



The timing

Application rounds, deadlines and study-permit limits shift year to year.



MYTH 4 OF 6 · IN REAL LIFE

97%

Not admitted.

Brilliant on paper. Silent on how he works with others.



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“The best student deserves the best-ranked university.”

the rankings-first mindset



THE MYTH

The most prestigious offer is always the right one.



Heard it or Said it?

Hands up before we reveal



“The best student deserves the best-ranked university.”

the rankings-first mindset



THE MYTH

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BUSTED



THE REALITY

Rankings measure reputation. Class size, teaching style, campus and cost decide whether a student thrives.



MYTH 5 OF 6 · IN REAL LIFE

95% → 60s

By November.

Same student. Wrong room.



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University reps recruit. Counsellors counsel.

— one a 'personal note' - tell us what you really feel?



THE MYTH

University reps sell. Their advice is a pitch.



Heard it or Said it?

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THE MYTH

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BUSTED



THE REALITY

The best reps counsel. They're honest about who thrives with them, and who doesn't.



RAPID FIRE ROUND



**When counsellors counsel with courage
and universities engage with clarity,
students can move from
inherited aspirations to
informed, authentic and best-fit choices.**



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QUESTIONS

Thank you

Your questions, for any of us.

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readiness

Lighthouse learning group of schools

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South Asia

Foothill and DeAnza Colleges



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