

Founder of College Match US and Unifluence.com

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BRAND U

4 STEPS

to the

COLLEGE

of Your DREAMS



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HARNESSING FIRE: scaling upwards

BUILDING VALUE TAKES time, usually a couple of years, so if possible, we recommend getting started early in high school, sophomore or even freshman year.

Once the fire of strong talents and interests gets lit, there's no reason to stop. Building confidence and esteem to high levels assures that your student will:

- Have a clear vision and purpose for the future to guide his college selection
- Convey her story with pride and excitement on her applications
- Head into college with strength and momentum

We have found in our work with young people that when they fuel their sparks in their deepest ambitions, they consistently exceed their wildest expectations. Potential has no limitations, and the discovery of this fact is an integral part of the Brand U process that we call **Scaling**

Upwards. By Scaling Upwards, students take their skills and passions as far as they possibly can.

Scaling Upwards puts the defining touches on your child's accomplishments, allowing personal goals and achievements to build on themselves:

- If your student has completed a research project or won a competition or scholarship, these accomplishments can be used to raise awareness and bring a positive message through media recognition.
- If your student has created art or writing or has performed at a local level, that success can be used to build community support to push the accomplishments into state, national, and even international forums.
- If your student has started a business, nonprofit, club, or community program, that achievement can be expanded and replicated in locations beyond the local level.

scaling upwards: third-party recognition

In the ultra-competitive arena of college admissions, third-party recognition validates your student's ambition and purpose by profiling achievement in ways that colleges can see.

It's great if a student starts a nonprofit, but if that nonprofit gets written up in a newspaper or garners a positive quote from a mayor or civic leader, that achievement is suddenly awarded far more weight and importance. Likewise, if a young person forms an acting group that stages a play, that's great, but that achievement will be far greater if it's written up in the local paper.

Third-party recognition is a primary method for scaling upwards, and it's not as hard as it looks. With so many negative stories always

swirling around, media outlets—from local papers and TV news to online media—are hungry for positive stories about young people taking initiative and making a difference.

Recognition can take any number of forms:

- Getting a research paper or journalistic piece published
- Getting profiled by TV news or newspaper for academic and extracurricular successes.
- Winning a science project, or getting one's name in the newspaper for starting a community service.
- Superlative comments from teachers for academic success
- Positive recognition from leadership figures

For college admissions, third-party recognition will make your student a “triple threat” in the eyes of admissions reps, taking the ambition and achievement and providing the substantiation they deserve. Remember, admissions officers only have fifteen minutes to learn who your student is. When colleges see that your student's hard work has been validated in this way, they'll fling their doors open.

I'm passionate about this point because it works every time. Third-party recognition ensures that your child's hard work stands out from the thousands of other applicants to make sure that their theme of value is clearly positioned in the minds of admission officers.

Sharon from Belmont, Massachusetts

Sparks: Love of computers, commitment, teamwork

Harnessing Fire: Third-party recognition

When we met Sharon as a sophomore, she spoke of her interests in computer science and engineering. Working with her parents, we explored ways that she could develop leadership skills in the field. During her sophomore year, she began pursuing opportunities through tech clubs and science fairs, and got involved in her school's Robotics Team. By her junior year, she'd earned the respect of her teammates and was chosen to lead the team. Dedicating herself to her passion, she coached her team in the invention of a brand new prototype robot, and earned a series of victories in science contests at the state, national, and ultimately international level.

Her achievement yielded her a story in a national magazine article celebrating youth in science, and her work garnered further recognition through a national "Women in the Sciences" award. She also earned a prestigious scholarship to attend USC.

Discovered Brand: Robotics Developer

We must note that some students will not feel comfortable pursuing third-party recognition for various reasons. Some don't enjoy being the center of the spotlight, and others may think that recognition is prideful. If your child feels this way, congratulate yourself on raising a sincere child.

At the same time, recognition is not about self-glorification. It's about building something much larger than oneself. Recognition can be used to raise awareness for worthy causes, unify the community, and inspire others to realize what is possible when a person takes action.

Exercise: Third-Party Recognition

(30 minutes)

Goal: To make sure your child's hard work and achievements get the validation they deserve.

Instructions:

1. Once your child has started developing in areas of leadership, service entrepreneurship, performance, art, writing, research, scholarships, or academic competition or scholarship, discuss ways that achievements can be used to:
 - Raise awareness for a worthy cause
 - Build community
 - Inspire or educate others
2. Explore avenues for achievements to get profiled, reviewed, or published through print, television, online media, or social media.
3. If your child gains recognition at the local level for good work, scale the recognition upwards to the state, regional, national, and even international level.

scaling upwards: balancing out a low grade

No one's perfect. All students has a place where they don't meet the highest standards. The bad news is that a weak spot in grades or test scores can significantly set your child back in the admissions process. The good news is that with a little focus and attention, potential deal-breakers can be improved or made up for.

In fact, the dedication and effort a student shows by overcoming weak spots in academics can actually inspire admissions boards to give a student added consideration.

Potential academic weaknesses include:

- Low GPA
- Low Test Scores
- Poor attendance

As admissions consultants, a big part of what we do is help students counterbalance the gaps in their performance. It's important to note, however, that **academic gaps cannot be filled by extracurricular performance.**

If grades are weak, extracurriculars won't help, whether it's volunteering or leadership, being an Eagle Scout or playing varsity sports. While those efforts are commendable, colleges need proof of strong academic commitment. They value academic performance first because they want to be certain that your child will not only survive, but thrive at their university.

At the same time, a few low grades don't have to ruin your child's college chances, and showing **excellence** in academic performance is the way forward. Here, Margaret did just that.

Margaret from Pasadena, California

Unique Sparks: Talented writer, imaginative, funny

Harnessing Fire: Balancing out low grades

Many students are creative, but some take creativity to new levels. When we began working with Margaret, she made it clear that she wanted to pursue creative writing at her dream school, Vassar College. The problem was that Margaret's GPA in math was several points lower than Vassar's cutoff GPA, and because she was already

late in her junior year, there was little chance of retaking courses to raise her GPA.

We created a strategy, and with the help of College Match’s writing specialist, Margaret compiled a scrapbook of poems, short stories, and humor pieces that she edited into a cohesive manuscript that she shared with her writing teachers and mentors who passed the manuscript along to other writers in the community, one of which happened to be a well-known novelist. This author loved the work and commented on it—praise that Margaret listed in her applications under Awards and Honors.

Next, we urged her to include an excerpt of her best writing, which had won her praise, in the Additional Information section of her Common Application, and finally, we had her send her manuscript to the head of Vassar’s English Department. This did the trick! With positive support from within the faculty, Margaret was able to balance out her low math grades, and she was admitted Early Decision to Vassar.

Discovered Brand: Acclaimed Writer

Exercise: Balancing Out Low Grades

(30 minutes)

Goal: To strengthen any gaps in your student's academic record.

Instructions: For all classes where your student scored a B minus or lower, meet with teachers and find out about ways where he or she can improve or make up for low scores.

Order the book, *What Smart Students Know*, which offers valuable tips for making the grade, and go through it with your student.

Next, decide on ways to balance out low grades:

- Summer school
- Private tutoring school
- University bridge program
- Academic research project
- Publishing

Make a plan with your student to strengthen any gaps. Consult teachers and guidance counselors as needed.

Exercise: Scaling Upwards

(30 minutes)

Goal: To help your child build on previous achievements.

Instructions:

1. See that your student begins keeping a master list of his or her experiences and achievements starting at the end of 8th grade.
2. Look for ways to keep building your student's passion and skill. If he has success at the school level, see if he can take it to the community level. If she has started a community organization, see if she can replicate it at a regional or even national level. Keep the fire going.
3. Explore ways that your student can raise awareness and get media attention to create community and momentum for his projects. Media awareness can also help causes your student cares about.

fire: parting thoughts

As we prepare to move on, we take stock in all the achievements your student has made thus far, the hard work of embracing one's uniqueness and pursuing one's path. These efforts will prove vital as we move forward into the second half of the book, through the work of college selection and college admissions.

In Part III, the fire your child has lit will provide the vision and enlightenment to see the future that feels best and to find the right undergraduate experience to achieve that future.

BRAND U

Fire

- We ignite the sparks of your child's unique talents and interests through developing transformative paths of leadership, service, creativity, and entrepreneurship.
- The **deep ambitions** underneath your child's hopes and dreams will fuel growth of transformative experiences.
- There are many different unique experiences to ignite your child's talents, passions, and ambitions, among which are **university programs, unique employment, research, scholarships and academic competitions, performance, and portfolio creation.**
- Incredible value can be found in **celebrating unique difference** and **overcoming adversity**, transformative efforts that reflect maturity and courage and ensure integrity in the challenges of life ahead.
- Build the power of past accomplishments by using the fire of motivation to **scale upwards**, gain **third-party recognition**, and **shore up gaps** in your child's academic record.
- **Welcome mistakes and setbacks** as learning experiences, and don't worry about failure or embarrassment.
- **Take small, incremental steps** to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- **Seek help from mentors and admissions consultants** if the process becomes too challenging.