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Featuring: Yvonne Espinoza, Yvonne Espinoza College Counseling Services

How long have you been a member of TACAC?

23 years

How has TACAC played a role in your career?

TACAC has provided me with a vehicle to connect with others in my profession, and to have a network of people for also being involved on a national level. TACAC has also allowed me to give back to this wonderful profession of college admissions and counseling through presenting and mentoring. TACAC provides such a wealth of resources to its members and is a great community of educators who genuinely want to impact positive change for both our profession and the students we serve.

Tell us a little bit about your career journey?

I fell into college counseling 24 years ago when I was recruited for newly funded college counseling positions in the Austin Independent School District. At that time, I had recently graduated from Boston University just a few years before and was still convinced I wanted to move back to Beantown and find my "real passion." I reluctantly started the college counseling position at the Title I public school, LBJ High School, with the intent of leaving after a year. Not to sound like a college essay, but walking into that high school changed forever. Although I grew up in the same city, I was still shocked by the disparity in resources and education that this high school had compared to where I attended. I stayed at LBJ for ten years, building the college access program. After LBJ, I moved to Garza Independence High School, a public alternative school, and spent 9 years there serving at-risk student populations and helping them to access higher education, including non-traditional pathways. While working at Garza, I started my college counseling practice as a part-time job to better afford the rising cost of living in Austin with my public-school salary. When my position at Garza was eliminated during COVID due to budget cuts, I transitioned to full-time private practice with my business, and just completed my 13th year of business ownership, with 5 of those being full-time. Being a private college counselor or "Independent Educational Consultant (IEC)" and running my own business has been challenging but a perfect fit for my skillset and desire to work closely with my students. I love the independence it affords me, the ability to work virtually from home, and the added time I'm afforded to give back to the college admissions and counseling profession through leadership and volunteer work.

What is your favorite part of your job?

Hands down, the best part of my job is working with students. Although I work with students in the 9th-11 grades, as well, I cap my Senior caseload at 15 students. I meet with my Seniors at least an hour a week, with communication in between meetings. After working in public schools for 19 years, I know what a privilege it is to have the time to meet with my students so often. This was always the part of the job that gave me the most joy, and I now have the time and energy to better understand my students and build trust with them and their families. Running my own practice means no one can pull me away from the time I devote to my students or prevent me from prioritizing the direct-services aspect of my job. The time I spend helping my students is what keeps me fulfilled in my career.

What do you think is the biggest challenge facing our profession today?

As someone who was born and raised in Texas, I am very concerned about education itself being under attack in our state, especially as it relates to public education. Texas ranks near the bottom in funding invested in public schools. Considering that 90% of Texas students utilize the public school system, this greatly impacts the well-being and educational attainment of students across our state.

However, it also impacts college admissions and counseling. Underfunded schools create challenging, sometimes unsustainable, environments for school counselors and college counselors (not to mention other school staff). Fewer resources in public schools mean families may not have access to the guidance they need to understand college fit and the college admissions process, impacting college admissions and enrollment during a time already filled with so many challenges.

Although there are private resources, like IECs, available to some families, IECs are never meant to replace the resources available to students in their own high schools; we are not school counselors. The decline in funding and resources for public schools is one of the many crises we face in Texas, but it is one with far-reaching consequences. Supporting public education means ensuring that all Texas students, regardless of their circumstances, have access to the educational resources they need to plan for their futures, while also providing public school educators with adequate funding and stability to serve those students.

What's a random fun fact about you that most people don't know?

I really love K-Pop and saw BTS in concert 3 times this past year. #ARMY

What's something currently bringing you joy?

I own five dogs, the smallest 9lbs and the largest 135lbs, which are a constant source of chaotic and unbridled joy.

What are you currently watching or binging on TV/Podcast/Netflix?

Lanterns on HBO and rewatching Bosch on Amazon.

If someone were to visit your town, where should they eat?

A landlocked city like Austin is not somewhere you would think to find good sushi, but I am not steering you wrong to tell any of you sushi fans OR veggie nigiri fans to check out Uchi on S. Lamar.

What do you like to do when you are not working?

Spending time at home with my husband of 15 years and 5 dogs watching tv shows, anime, or KDramas, eating out with friends, or planning my next K-Pop concert experience.

What is your favorite TACAC memory?

Presenting with Ismael Ayala and Ann Marano on networking at a TACAC Conference. Presenting with two people I had known through TACAC for so long felt more like a fun conversation than a presentation, and our audience participation was awesome! Those in attendance were willing to get out of their comfort zone to network during the presentation, ask questions, and talk with us panelists afterwards. It's one of the best presentation experiences I've had, and I know it was in large part due to the special community that is TACAC.