



The College Spy Podcast with Michelle McAnaney

Episode 6

Holiday Gift Guide for Parents of Teens

Welcome to the College Spy podcast, a podcast for parents and students addressing all aspects of the college selection and admissions process. I'm Michelle McAnaney, the founder of The College Spy. We offer college planning services to students and families across the United States and internationally. We are a team of dedicated educators who are committed to helping students and families identify the right colleges to apply to and get accepted. We offer our guidance and expertise in a way that improves student performance, increases confidence and promotes college readiness and maturity. The College Spy works with all students including students interested in the STEM fields, students with learning differences, international students, and third culture kids. To learn more about The College spy, visit our website at thecollegespy.com and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

Welcome to episode six of The College Spy podcast. This episode includes a holiday gift guide for teens, The College Spy's Tip of the day, and today's college spotlight is the University of Pittsburgh.

I'm excited about The College Spy's holiday gift guide for parents of teenagers. I just created this guide and I think it came out really good. It's unique. It's different from other gift guides, the kind where you click on the link and you get taken to Amazon to purchase the exact product. My gift guide is based on my conversations with students. For the most part, we talk about college admissions, writing effective college applications, creating college lists. But as we do that, I get to know them really well and they tell me stories and they tell me about the things that are difficult for them and the things that they're excited about. And I've used some of the conversations that I've had with students over the years to create this gift guide for you. In creating the gift guide. I also gave thought to what types of things you could purchase for your student that would help them either get into college or be successful once they got there.

My first suggestion as a holiday gift is for you to upgrade your teen's technology. I hear from many of my students that their laptops are old, the batteries are going bad, they're slow. Students are constantly apologizing to me while we're on Zoom that their technology is slow and that we have to wait. I think what's happening for some students is they're waiting to upgrade their technology until they get to college because they might think that there's something specific that they're going to need and they might find out about it over the summer. However, most students go to college with a laptop. And my suggestion for you is to upgrade their technology now so that they finish senior year strong and they're not struggling.



My second suggestion is to give the gift of learning to invest. I have students who are interested in investing their money either in the stock market or perhaps cryptocurrency, but they don't know a lot about it. And my suggestion is that you provide a small sum of money and it can be very small and set up an online brokerage or trading platform for your student and work together to make these initial investments. It's a good experience for students to do this, and they often find it really interesting.

My next suggestion is for you to give your student something that will help reduce their stress. For example, you could buy them a weighted blanket. Some students feel comforted watching TV under a weighted blanket or studying under a weighted blanket. Another thing you could buy is noise canceling headphones. This can often help students focus and also just to tune out what they need to tune out in order to feel less stress. And finally have a couple of warm and fuzzy suggestions for stress reduction. And they are a new bathrobes, slippers or sweatpants, something that will make them comfortable. I think that what's most important about these gifts isn't the gifts themselves. It's the fact that you're acknowledging to your teen that you know that they are experiencing stress and showing them that you care.

Another idea is to make a new memory with your teen. This can be something small, like purchasing a game and playing it with them or something large like buying tickets to a sporting event or a concert.

When your teen gets to college, there's going to be a lot of ways for them to get involved in activities. And they're going to become exposed to activities that they didn't have any exposure to before, or they didn't have any access to before. And so, the way that you can find out what kind of activities students will have access to in college, is to go onto a college's website, and look under the Student Life tab for clubs and organizations. Most of the time, you will find a lot of organizations that your student can join. I have seen 500 or more at some colleges. And my suggestion for this gift is for you to spend some time going through these websites and looking at clubs and organizations with your child, and talking to them about what types of things they might want to get involved in when they get to college. And then purchase lessons so that they can have some experience with this activity, and feel more confident joining it when they finally do get to college. So for example, if your child feels that they might want to sing acapella, you might get them some voice lessons, or if they want to do rock climbing when they get to college, you might find the local rock gym and sign your child up for some experience there. So the point here is to set your student up for success when they get to college by increasing their confidence now. Another idea is to buy driving lessons for your student. One of the things that I have noticed, and it's actually out there in research as well, is that Generation Z doesn't want to drive. When we were in college, or when the parents I'm Gen Z, were in college, everybody wanted to drive as soon as you could drive, you got your permit, you got your license. But this isn't the same for students now. Some students are willing to drive. But a lot of students don't



feel they need to. They have public transportation. They have Uber. They have left. And the other thing that I'm noticing is that students are much more anxious than they were at the beginning of my career in the late 90s. And I think that's one reason that they don't want to drive. My suggestion is, if it's feasible for your family and you live in a place that it makes sense to do, is to get your student driving lessons. Even if they don't choose to drive a lot, it's a really good idea to have a license for two reasons. One, convenience at times, even if they don't have a car at college, many colleges have Zip cars that students can use. And the other is simply for safety. There could be times in college, where your student will be super happy to say, "Hey, give me the keys, I'm going to drive us all home."

My next idea is for you to support a cause that your team cares about. So, the specific suggestion is to make a donation in your child's name to something that is important to them. It's a really nice gesture in general to do something like that. But for teens, they will feel that you recognize what they care about and value it and value them.

And finally, I want to encourage you that if there's something that your child has always wanted, or you've always had in your mind, that you wanted to purchase for your child for the holidays, but you haven't done it yet, do it. The holidays are going to change once your student gets to college. Now's the time Happy Holidays.

Each year, The College Spy offers a course called College Admissions 101 for parents. The course is live, it's interactive and online. In the course, you'll gain the knowledge and confidence to guide your students through the college admissions process. We meet four times over Zoom. And we will examine these topics closely: How to build a college list that best fits your child. How to research colleges to fully understand what they have to offer. How to choose between the SAT, the ACT or whether to go test optional. The college application timeline. College application strategies for success and an overview of financial aid. Each session is 75 minutes long. I pack a lot of information into these four sessions, but there's also time for q&a. And the next College Admissions 101 is in February. It's Tuesdays in February at 8pm Eastern Time and there is space available in the course if you're interested in joining. Check it out at: <https://thecollegespy.com/coursesandcamps>.

The College Spy's Admissions Tip of the Day:

If you've been following The College Spy, whether that be this podcast, on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, we're everywhere. You will know that there are two things colleges care about the most: GPA and academic rigor. Colleges care about the courses you took in high school, how hard they were, and they care about how well you did in them, what grades you got. Here's your tip: If you are the kind of student whose GPA is boosted by your grades in classes like gym, music, art or other electives, I want you to be careful when determining which colleges are, "safe" options. This is because colleges are mostly interested in the grades that



you got in core academic subjects. And those subjects are math, English, history, science and foreign language.

Today's college spotlight is University of Pittsburgh. University of Pittsburgh, known affectionately as Pitt is a public research university whose main campus is in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a city in western Pennsylvania, not too far from Ohio. Pitt is within walking distance of three other colleges: Duquesne, Carnegie Mellon and Carlow so the entire area is teeming with college students. Like many large research universities, Pitt is divided into colleges, some of which students apply directly into as freshmen and others students apply to once they are students at Pitt. These are the ones that students apply directly into as freshmen: The School of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business Administration, the School of Engineering, the School of Computing and Information, and the School of Nursing. Students interested in the following schools should start at the Arts and Sciences school, and then transfer and they usually do that junior year: School of Education, College of General Studies, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, School of Pharmacy, and School of Social Work. Compared to other colleges, Pitt offers a large number of LLCs. LLC stands for Living Learning Community, and they are opportunities to live with others who share an interest. There are over 20 Living Learning Communities to choose from at Pitt and they include things like sustainability, honors, music, business, nursing and appreciation of the arts. Pitt has some interesting majors not found at all other universities including bioinformatics, athletic training, public services, supply chain management and urban studies. Some unique minors include applied fitness, museum studies, petroleum engineering, Polymer Engineering, and creative writing. Pitt also offers an undergraduate certificate in ASL. Famous alumni include Gene Kelly, John Irving, Mr. Rogers and Dan Marino. One of my favorite things about the University of Pittsburgh is that they have rolling admissions. This means that students do not have to wait a long time after submitting their application to hear back from Pitt. Pitt will get back to you about three to four weeks after you apply. If you submit your application early, let's say October of your senior year, you will get an admissions decision sometime in November. And for a lot of students that can be a relief, a confidence booster or a reality check.

Thank you for listening to The College Spy podcast. For more information about The College Spy, visit our website at thecollegespy.com. For college admissions tips and up to date trends in admissions, follow The College Spy on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). Don't forget to like and subscribe to this podcast. We always appreciate five star reviews. See you next time.

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