

On Thu, May 23, 2013 at 5:08 AM

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Subject: Message from Bangkok Patana School: US University Admissions

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Dear Parents,

I am writing as a result of recent discussions with my colleagues the Secondary School Principals at ISB and at NIST and also following meetings between the Careers and Universities teams at the three schools. I apologise for the detail of the letter but I need to give a clear context to this concern and it is of considerable significance for our senior students. The meetings have concerned reports emerging over the last few months from some US based colleges and universities regarding the use of certain private college counseling agencies in Bangkok that are employing unethical practices. The unethical practices include:

- the falsification of student "achievements" both in school and out of school with respect to community service (CAS), sports team, leadership positions held, club involvement, and other so called "accomplishments".
- college essays written by "advisors" at these agencies and not by the students themselves.

As a consequence, US colleges and universities are becoming increasingly concerned about the authenticity of applications from Thailand. One university informed ISB that 25% of applications from Thailand were considered suspicious. Another highly selective university stated that no applications from Thailand were even considered for 2013/14. Subsequently our university advisors here at Patana have also contacted universities and have been given similar messages. We understand that some students from international schools in Thailand have had their applications rejected based on suspicions of falsification. However, at this stage I would like to stress that we have not been told that any applications from Bangkok Patana students have been rejected for this reason.

It may be useful to explain the nature of the US college application process at this point. The school is required to send some parts of a student's application including their transcript and the reference generated from teacher comments. At Patana this is now submitted online along with supporting documentation regarding the school and is all verified as correct before being sent. Additionally each student is required to personally submit additional items including their college essay, answers to short questions and non-academic activities for each university/college that they apply to. The fact that these are submitted independently means that this is an aspect of the application that external agencies may offer support on. Some, but not all agencies appear to be using this opportunity to exaggerate and actually misrepresent student's achievements at school and are informing families that this is crucial to support their application.

I'm sure you will agree that this is a very worrying situation for students, parents and schools in Thailand, and in close cooperation with our colleagues at ISB and NIST we are determined to safeguard the reputation of our students and our schools to ensure that current and future students are not negatively impacted by these concerns about application authenticity. All three schools from the Heads, Principals and University Counselors have agreed that we need to commit to specific ethical practices to safeguard the university aspirations of all of our students. There may be very minor differences in practice in each school but in principle they are the same. At Bangkok Patana, we are adopting the following measures to be implemented with immediate effect:

1. When students submit any US application materials in 2013/14 and beyond they will be required to simultaneously send an electronic copy of each submission to their university counselor and to submit to them a hard copy on the next school day. These will be reviewed by the advisor as soon as possible. (A large number of US admissions are actually sent by students at the end of December/beginning of January when school is closed.)
2. The hard copy will be kept on file in the event that verification is required. Please note that hard copies printed before the submission will not be accepted.
3. Students and parents must sign an agreement at the beginning of Year 12 stating that: 1) They understand that our counselors are obliged to report to universities any intentional misrepresentation; 2) If it is established that a student has submitted falsified information they will face sanctions that are likely to include immediate suspension, possible permanent exclusion from the school and not being awarded the Bangkok Patana School Academic Diploma which represents graduation from Bangkok Patana School.
4. Current Year 12 students and their parents will need to sign this before

the end of this academic year. This will be in addition to the declaration that students already have to make as part of the Common Application Form (used by many US colleges).

1. Students will be required to sign a release form allowing colleges and universities to release a copy of applications to Patana.
2. Students' applications will be cross-referenced with CAS records and meeting notes to identify any areas that may not appear to match. This will then be discussed with the student and confirmed with staff supervising specific activities.

7. Students will be required to inform their counselor if they are engaging any outside help with their applications. We do not believe that this is necessary but appreciate that some families may wish to have another person look at an application. This is acceptable but we can provide advice on where the boundaries are between support of a student's application and the unacceptable position where the application process is taken over by a third party.
8. In the student recommendation letter that we submit to each US college or university that the student has applied to we will state that these rigorous verification procedures have been applied. We will also emphasise this at every opportunity in all our contacts with US colleges and universities including: our visits to US universities; our representation at major US college admission conferences; the large number of visits to Patana by various US admissions representatives; in the Bangkok Patana School Profile that is submitted with all applications; in the very regular email and telephone communication between US colleges and our Careers Department.
9. Careers Counselors will meet regularly with students and parents in group and individual settings to warn against the inappropriate use of outside agencies, to explain the new procedures, and to make clear the consequences of not heeding this advice.
10. If an application has been submitted which is then identified by the Careers Department as a clear misrepresentation of a student's achievements, or is reported to us by a university, parents and students will be asked to meet with the Careers Department and the Secondary Principal to discuss the grounds for suspicion and potential consequences (as in point 3 above).

Again I would like to emphasise that we have not been informed of any suspected malpractice by any of our Bangkok Patana graduates from previous years or any falsified applications from our current Year 13 cohort. We do know though that many students and their families will ask for additional advice on applications from 'reputable' agencies outside school. Our concern is that some of these agencies may either blatantly misrepresent the genuine achievements of our students or that they will at least take away the personal 'voice' of the student that universities look for. By adopting this rigorous process with clear consequences for malpractice we are safeguarding not only the reputation of the school built over many years working

alongside university admissions officers worldwide, but also giving our students a fair chance of being considered for the university of their choice. At the moment we are receiving a very clear message that our students may not be given that opportunity because of the misguided actions of some students and their families in Bangkok and the unethical practices of some outside agents.

Our Careers Department will continue to work closely with students regarding the many advantages of honestly presenting their true character throughout their application and will share this in presentations to parents throughout the academic year. We have already had very positive feedback from college admissions offices in the USA either directly or through colleagues at ISB and NIST, that they really appreciate the fast and clear actions taken by the schools to address this problem.

Should you have any specific questions or concerns regarding this matter please email Andrew Haughton at anha@patana.ac.th (Head of Careers and University Guidance) and cc to me at mism@patana.ac.th

Yours sincerely

Mick Smith
Principal, Secondary School.