

Dear Watershed Community,

Now is the time for our seniors. They are in the thick of the college application experience. Everyone in Watershed's Class of 2024 has already submitted several applications (for the early deadline of November 1st), and they continue to work on others. They are interviewing with admission teams, putting together professional portfolios for art and architecture, and, with the support of our educators, they are working on supplemental essays for an impressive number of competitive schools. It can be a stressful time, but it is also a time of discovery and focus, a time when we support students to think deeply about their hopes for the future, and about where and how they want to make a contribution to our world.

Progressive schools sometimes shy away from talking a lot about college. Perhaps it's because we want to focus on great experiences in the here and now, instead of focusing only on an individual's future. Perhaps it's a reaction to conventional education becoming more and more transactional (credentialing for the next step), rather than transformational (truly developing expert learners and good human beings!). However, it's probably a mistake. We should be more clear about how our programs prepare students to thrive in college, and how we prepare students for admission to the college of their choice – for two reasons. First, because as colleges evolve, progressive education is better preparation for success than conventional education. And second, because if our goal at Watershed is to prepare students *to take on the world's greatest challenges* (as our mission states), a great college experience is going to be part of our students' paths.

While I cannot be exhaustive here, let me share a few ways we do this work:

- Watershed students develop the skills (e.g., research skills, communication skills, quantitative reasoning skills) that correlate with success at college. And we know they do because Watershed educators use rubrics based on rubrics developed by hundreds of professors who teach first year students (through a [project led by the American Association of Colleges and Universities](#)). And they demonstrate these skills (to themselves and to colleges) through the powerful projects they engage in, through the great work they do.
- In expedition courses, our students develop rich, interconnected understandings of real issues in the world – the kind of deep understanding that will serve them well in college.
- Our students travel the world as part of their academic work, developing a broad global perspective and deep, first-hand understandings.
- Watershed students develop agency over their learning. They are truly skilled learners (and know how to make use of all learning opportunities in college – from asking questions in class, to using office hours, to creating study groups, to working with professors on their research projects).
- Our college counselor works with students for 4+ years, truly learning who they are so she can then write incredibly strong school recommendations. Additionally, our educators write rich, detailed, highly personalized letters because they also work with students over multiple years and deeply know each student as an individual and a learner.

### Colleges are Changing

Not only are progressive schools like Watershed responding to changes in the world and new understandings of learning and teaching, colleges are as well. Colleges are different today than they

were 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 40 years ago (when I attended!). And they are looking for different things in their students. They are looking for students who are engaged in the world, who have the ability to build rich, interconnected understandings, who have well-developed research and communication skills, who know how to work with others for greater impact, and who have already worked to make a difference in the world. (See below for quotes about Watershed from a couple of college admission officers.)

Another way that colleges are changing is that they, like Watershed, are placing a stronger emphasis on real world learning – learning not just about the world, but in the world and for the world. More and more they are engaging students in academic work that makes a difference beyond the walls of the school. Three examples (in case you want to explore further): the University of Pennsylvania’s [Netter Center for Community Partnerships](#), Princeton University’s [Program for Community-Engaged Scholarship](#), and Eckerd College’s [St. Pete Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact](#). This change is important – for students and for our world.

I feel lucky to be at a school that is not stuck in the past but rather is on the forefront of education. And it is good to know that we are not alone – colleges and universities are also part of this change in education. It gives me hope that, together, we can educate a new generation of changemakers who will, with passion, joy, and skill, work to nudge our world into better shape.

Thanks for reading.

Warmly,  
Tim

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*“Watershed fosters terrific confidence in its students and allows them to develop great academic agility and a deep interest in learning. While we see students applying from nearly 4,000 high schools each year, the majority feed into a sea of normalcy that defines many applicant pools—Watershed is one of those few that really stands out.”*

— Matthew Hyde, Assistant Director of Admissions, Tufts University

*“At Pitzer, which is a member of Claremont Colleges, we have a specific take on the types of students we’re looking for. Watershed is pretty much an exact translation of what that student looks like in high school.”*

— Natalia Duran, Assistant Director of Admissions, Pitzer College