

Taking the Edge off College Admissions

By Florida Virtual School Faculty

In today's world where markets are global, competition is fierce and learning is constant, our students benefit greatly when we customize, personalize, and use communication tools to provide them with resources and information to make educated decisions about next steps. However, for many students, the college admission process – selecting a school, completing applications, and wading through financial aid packages – can be daunting and, too often, they are left confused, intimidated, and even overwhelmed. As K-12 educators, our single focus is to prepare young adults for college or the workplace, but we can also give students guidance and support as they embark on their mission to find the college or university program of their dreams.

Last fall, a team of teachers at Florida Virtual School (FLVS) embarked on a mission to use the latest communication tools to minimize the stress students experience with the college application process. The result was [The College Hub](#), an online resource and student network hosted within FLVS that provides students with 24-7 access to an online warehouse of resources that includes virtual tours of colleges, scholarship/financial aide links, test prep links, and college application links.

At The College Hub, students participate in webinars, hosted by Elluminate, a live web-conferencing technology, where they communicate directly with college representatives. Students and parents visit virtually with admissions experts or other college students, take virtual tours of the institutions, and gather information that will help students make decisions. During these virtual forums, students gather advice about effective test-prep programs and strategies on how to best prepare for the SAT and ACT exams. Over the past two years, eighty percent or more of students who take the SAT, the standardized test required for most college admissions, went on to attend a college or university – a trend that will continue to grow as the demand for highly skilled and informed professionals rises.

“Competition to get into college is fierce. Our goal in creating The College Hub is to help minimize the stress and anxiety for students while also giving them a venue for gathering valuable information about a wide variety of post-secondary options,” explained Rachael Sharpe, a teacher with Florida Virtual School and one of the creators of The College Hub. “Not only is participation growing, but students are getting almost immediate feedback on their college admission essays, which has led to many success stories of students getting accepted to their college of choice.”

In addition to gathering basic information and quizzing the representatives during the web forums, The College Hub provides students with valuable insights on the application process and resources for writing winning college application essays. Additional resources to answer common questions and gather tips on the application process are also available on the site.

Last fall, more than 850 students heard from representatives from both in-state (University of Florida, Florida State University, FL Gulf Coast, Rollins, and Florida Southern) as well as out-of-state institutions. Bucknell University, Boston University, Marymount University, Harvard, the University of Georgia, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Princeton, and Vanderbilt have all presented in The College Hub. Students also enjoy access to representatives and information from nontraditional colleges, such as The Art Institute, University of Phoenix, Colorado Tech Online, International Academy of Design and Technology, American Intercontinental University, Full Sail, and the Florida School of the Arts. Future College Hub activities along with the resources and archives of previous forums can be found [online](#).