

Prep Review: Boarding Schools

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978-1-4536-8248-7

Prep Review doesn't provide the latest statistics on student body, program costs, application deadlines, or admissions at college preparatory boarding schools. In fact, it makes no attempt to give a balanced picture of all available schools. There are other guides that do a good job of covering such information. The assumption made by author Ansoo Chang is that prospective students have already winnowed their choices down to the crème de la crème of college preparatory boarding schools. This is not the book that prospective students read first. It is the one that they read last.

Prep Review offers the juicy insider's scoop, a personal blast from *Gossip Girl*. The focus is limited to twenty-three college preparatory boarding schools in the United States, three in Canada, and sixteen in the United Kingdom. The list includes first choice, top-tier schools, including Phillips, Groton, Cate, and Westminster. Recent graduates from boarding schools who are now attending prestigious colleges and universities, such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, MIT, Oxford, and Cambridge, provide anonymous and candid opinions of their alma maters. In this way, readers learn more about the inner workings of the included prep schools than they might from standard guidebooks or campus visits.

Topics are limited to academics, college counseling, the admission process, extracurricular activities, and quality of life. Observations on day-to-day campus life will be of particular interest to prospective students. Parents will take note of revelations regarding the rigor of the curriculum and the competence of faculty. One former student remarks that there are "...an innumerable number of clubs and societies that launch each fall and flame out by Christmas break." Another states that, "I met with my adviser whenever I wanted (and I mean whenever)...and you can talk to them in the lunch room if you feel like it." Some glow with praise: "The bell in the academy tower may be ringing, signaling the end of class, but no students leave their seats. All too often, I found the discussions...to be so engaging that I couldn't quite leave." And some reveal shortcomings: "It [the curriculum] failed to prepare me well for the independent nature of study at university."

Prep Review is a bit more expensive than the average guide to boarding schools. But with tuition sky high at these schools, Chang's insider information is still a bargain. Prospective students will be fascinated by the candid observations of their peers. The book's unique approach makes it a worthwhile purchase.

MARILYN BERRY (August 31, 2011)

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