

PrepWell Academy
Student Readiness Assessment (Size-Up)

PrepWell Mentor: Phil Black

Session Date: XX/XX/XX

Session Type: Size-Up

PrepWeller Name: Pat Williams (alias)

Grade: Sophomore

Conscientiousness [4.0]: To date, Pat has been quite responsive when it comes to communications, answering emails, filling out Student Profile Form, scheduling our first call, arriving on time, etc. While this is expected by sophomore year, it's nice to know that he's tracking well in this important skill. Time will tell how long this lasts. Pat will be receiving a steady diet of "tasks" from me and I will be curious to see how he responds. It won't be a torrent, but instead a steady stream of to-dos that he should have time to complete. I just asked him to send me his mailing address at school so I can send him his Journals.

Presentation [3.5]: Unfortunately, Pat was using a Dell computer so I could not see him during our Skype call (no video capability). He could see me, but I was talking to a black screen. This wasn't ideal, and next time he will use his Apple computer which will resolve this issue. From what I could hear, Pat presented himself well. He was articulate, engaged, and gave complete answers. I could not assess his physical environment or hygiene this time around. Next time I will have a better overall picture of his situation.

I did find out at the end of our session that he was not taking notes. This was, in part, my fault. 90% of students I engage with show up to their first session with nothing (no notebook, pad, pen, pencil). They haven't been trained to do so (yet). I then ask them how they plan to take notes. They stammer and look embarrassed. I then hand them a notepad and pen and explain why it's so important to be prepared to take notes. Since I couldn't see Pat, it didn't occur to me to ask him about note-taking until the end. Presumably, students are meeting with me to learn something. An important habit to build is to take notes when meeting with teachers, mentors, bosses, advisors, etc. I asked him anything about our conversation was worth taking notes on – and he sheepishly said, "yes, of course". Regardless, I will furnish him with summary notes of what we discussed, but, as you know, it's always better to take your own notes.

Engagement [3.0]: Pat appears to have a strong, and growing, level of engagement. Other than a few small indiscretions in 9th and 10th grade (phone in class, tardiness, etc.), he appears to be adjusting well to school. He enjoys school and the structure. He has enjoyed his elective classes (mixing music and photography) and taken advantage of the diversity they have brought to his academic slate. Obviously, he's participating in the mandatory sports curriculum, but seems to enjoy them as more than just a requirement. His weekly schedule leaves little room to "engage" in much beyond academics/athletics. I didn't get a clear sense of what Pat does on the weekends. Was he hanging with friends, cruising around town, studying, playing videogames, etc.? We didn't get into too much detail this time around. I couldn't really put my finger on what Pat was super-interested in or passionate about. "Computer programming" was a close as we got. This is something we will dig into at a later date.

Academics [3.0]: As we discussed, Pat had a few bumps in the road freshman year. He appears to have ironed-out whatever issues contributed to his less-than-expected performance. Sophomore year has been better, but there is still room for improvement. We discussed his relationship with his current

college advisor. He said the relationship was “pretty good” as his advisor is also his soccer coach. I emphasized how important it is to nurture this relationship. When senior year comes around, that counselor will be responsible for writing Pat a recommendation. This gives the counselor an opportunity to “explain away” any missteps in 9th and 10th grade so that a college admissions reader can overlook any potential red flags. With a weak relationship with the advisor, there is less likelihood that he will go out of his way to advocate for Pat. Pat plans to make a concerted effort to engage early/often with his college counselor.

We discussed how important it was to finish strong this year on his exams. GPA (grades) and transcript (i.e. what classes you take) are the two top filters for college admissions. It sounded like he was in good control of his academics. Apparently, he won't select classes for junior year until the summer. This selection will be very important. It sounded like he was planning to drop Spanish and take AP Comp Sci and/or Robotics. Given his growing interest in STEM (comp sci, robotics, etc.) this is probably a smart move. He's certainly proven that he is a skilled linguist. Now, it's time to demonstrate that he excels in science as well. Mastering both sides of his brain may be a topic for a college essay.

I'd like to figure out why mathematics seems to be a sticking point for Pat. There may have been some building blocks that were missed given the regular moves from country to country as a youth. Hopefully, this is something that a tutor or Khan Academy can iron out.

Extracurricular Activities [2.5]: This is the area that I'd like to address most directly. From our conversations, Pat does not appear to be super-interested in anything in particular. This is okay, but I'd like to help him move a little closer to identifying “something” that gets him excited – even if it's a high-level idea like “STEM” versus “Humanities”. I don't want him to put his head in the sand and assume that he will figure this out sometime in college. That's not the worst strategy, but why not explore and challenge himself to see if we can help him find (or eliminate) certain options? Because of his busy sports schedule, he can't get a “job” or internship or even a shadowing session while in school. This is okay, but puts a little more pressure on him to do something different over the summer. We talked about this at length.

He mentioned that you, specifically, were mapping out his summer. The plan is to have a math and English tutor work with him this summer. Is this true? Is that for the whole summer? He said you wanted him around during the summer because you and your wife miss him and would like to see him. This is understandable. Unfortunately, if his only summer plan is to get tutored, he's leaving a lot on the table. We need to build some dimensionality into Pat's world view. He says that he likes “computer programming.” But does he really? The only exposure he has had was during his 2-week boot camp last summer. This was a great experience, but it's something to BUILD ON, not simply to have done.

I'd like him to spend the summer “testing out his theory” that he actually likes computer programming. If he must be home, there are certain things he can do from home. He can watch TED talks on computer programming, AI, machine learning, or other related topics. He can go through [Khan Academy](#) (Computer Science, Hour of Code, Pixar in a Box, etc.). He can look for online learning or job opportunities. This will take some discipline from him. Ideally, I would love him to go into town and try to find an internship (paid or unpaid) or set up shadow sessions in a related field (computer science, programming, management, etc.). Shadow sessions are when you simply hang around with someone in a field that interests you. This arrangement is usually initiated with your network of friends. Real-world exposure to computer programming will give him a lot of insight into whether or not he really does like computer programming. If he ends up hating it, that's okay, too. Better to find out now than junior year

of college. He may LOVE it, in which case, it will make it easier for him to build a case for college admissions.

Pat and I talked quite a bit about the difference between [being angular and well-rounded](#). These days, it's easier to get into college if you have an "angle". I sometimes call it a "brand". What is Pat's angle? Right now, it's pretty diffuse. I'd like for him to start narrowing down his scope of interests (understanding that it can change at any time in the future) in order to write a tighter and more compelling college app. An application that says, "I like everything" is tougher for an admissions counselor to support versus "I love computer programming, and I intend to pursue this passion in college with the goal of eventually...". Even if it's a rough idea or goal – at least it's shown that he's thought about it.

With his high school situation, the summer becomes VERY important because it represents a small window of time where he can pursue his own interests – untethered to the standard high school routine. Colleges will look closely at what he chooses to do. If he simply "gets tutored" that doesn't give him much meat to put on the bone. What will he say during an interview? Yes, academics are important and if he doesn't reach a certain level – then he'll hit the screen – so there needs to be a balance.

Speaking of admissions factors. You correctly point out that SAT or ACT score is very important. It is one of the top 3 criteria for admission. I always suggest that students spend about 50% of this summer (ideally toward the end) preparing for one of these tests. I do not want them preparing for this test DURING junior year – if at all possible – especially with the schedule that Pat has. I want the bulk of studying to happen during summer, when they have the time, energy, and attention to really study. You've been in that place yourself. I'd like him to sit for either test at the end of August or beginning of September. He should take it at the very end of his preparations – when he's primed.

Also, by taking the test early, he will still have a chance to take it again if things don't go his way. Ideally, he will do very well on the test and never look back. You bring up a good point about SAT vs. ACT. It sounds like there aren't many in-person options for tutoring in your town. Yes, Khan Academy has a great, free, online prep course. The ACT does not (yet). The ACT does have a science section, but it's more about interpreting graphs than actual science content. I advised him to take a diagnostic test of each under real test-taking conditions and see which one he scores higher on. Will they give proctored practice tests at his school before summer? Otherwise, he can sit in a library for 4 hours and take a practice test for each on his own. Hopefully, he'll perform better on the SAT and then use Khan Academy to study. If he does materially better on the ACT, then it may be worth it to explore other online ACT tutoring programs.

Athletics [3.0]: Pat seems content in his athletic pursuits. He doesn't claim to be an "athlete", per se, but seems to perform well and enjoy the sports he's participating in at school.

Work Experience [1.0]: Once again, in an ideal world, Pat would get a job where he makes money before attending college. This could be this summer or next summer. This is especially important for students with parents of means. Pat would learn a lot by searching for a job, working for someone else (doing anything), and coming home with a paycheck. This will teach him a lot of lessons.

Intellectual Curiosity [3.5]: Pat seems to excel when his interest is piqued. His interests are wide-ranging. He seems to be leaning toward the STEM fields. I'm confident that whenever Pat finds something that he wants to go "all-in" on, that there is no stopping him.

Leadership [2.0]: Other than being a “leader” during random class discussions, Pat does not seem to have had any leadership roles to date. I recommended keeping his eyes open for such opportunities. Colleges love leaders. They want students who will contribute to the campus and community. If a student has zero leadership, they may think the student will end up holed up in their room playing video games. I’d really like Pat to try out some type of leadership position prior to applying to school.

College Awareness [2.0]: Other than you wanting him to consider some very-selective local colleges, Pat had little awareness about other colleges. That’s okay. We will begin to explore colleges and which may be good fits for him. Again, the more focused Pat is (to industry, field, role, etc.) the easier it will be to match with colleges that have such programs. We don’t want to force him into a particular field or major, but having a general direction would be nice. We’ve got a lot of work to do to introduce Pat to the college scene. We discussed how difficult it will be to get accepted to schools like Yale. He will really have to string together a solid 10-14 months for this to be in the realm of possibility. He seemed excited at the prospects of positioning himself for this type of school. There’s no reason to start thinking about specific colleges quite yet. His SAT/ACT score will determine what “strata” of school to begin with. There’s no point in spinning our wheels now. His ACT/SAT score, his summer experience, and junior year grades will determine what level of schools he should consider.

Recommendations: My strong recommendation is to spend a lot of time mapping out what Pat will do this summer. This is important. He only has ½ summer left after this summer. Next summer he will be filling out his applications. The time to explore, engage, and make a difference is now. I’m happy to brainstorm options for him, but I clearly don’t know what the environment is like in your home town. Let’s try to get him to do something outside of 1-on-1 tutoring. It doesn’t have to be big or fancy or expensive. It could be shadowing a computer programmer in a few local companies – maybe even a startup? Let me know how feasible this will be. And, of course, figure out which test to take (ACT or SAT) and put a plan together for this.

Overall Assessment Score [2.75]

Feel free to reach out if you have questions.

Best wishes,
Phil Black