



“Chance favors the prepared mind”:

PURPOSEFUL ADMISSIONS

for

STRONGER RISK MANAGEMENT

Hey, that's us!

Where There Be Dragons 



Amina Simon
Admissions Director



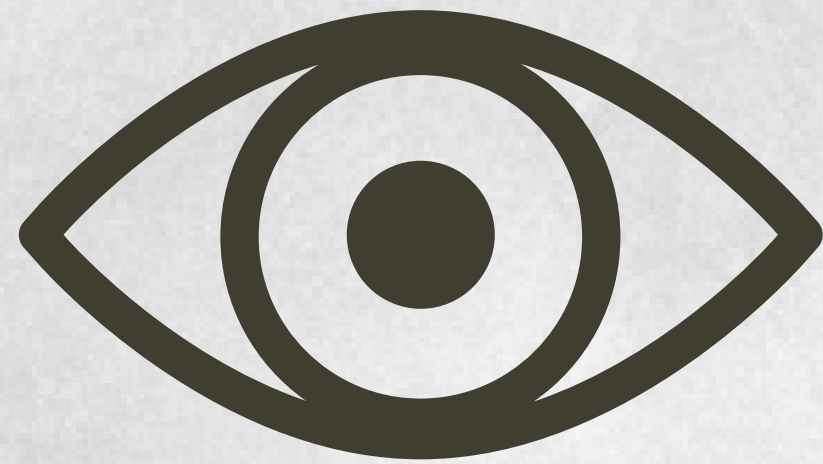
Dave Haffeman
Risk Management Director



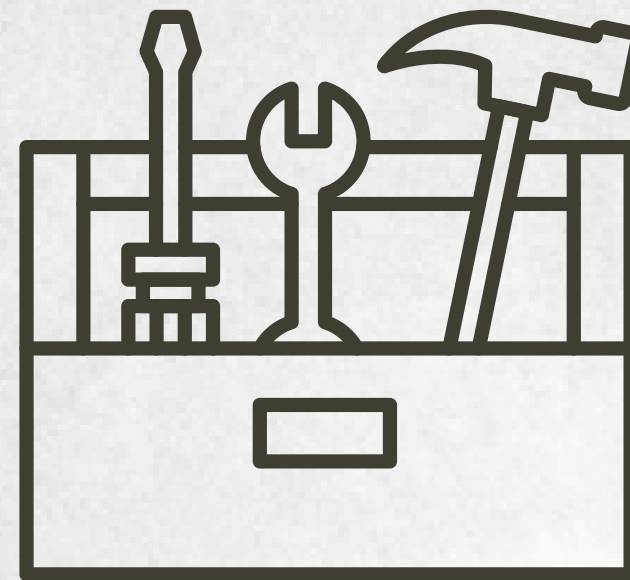
You All
Our Audience



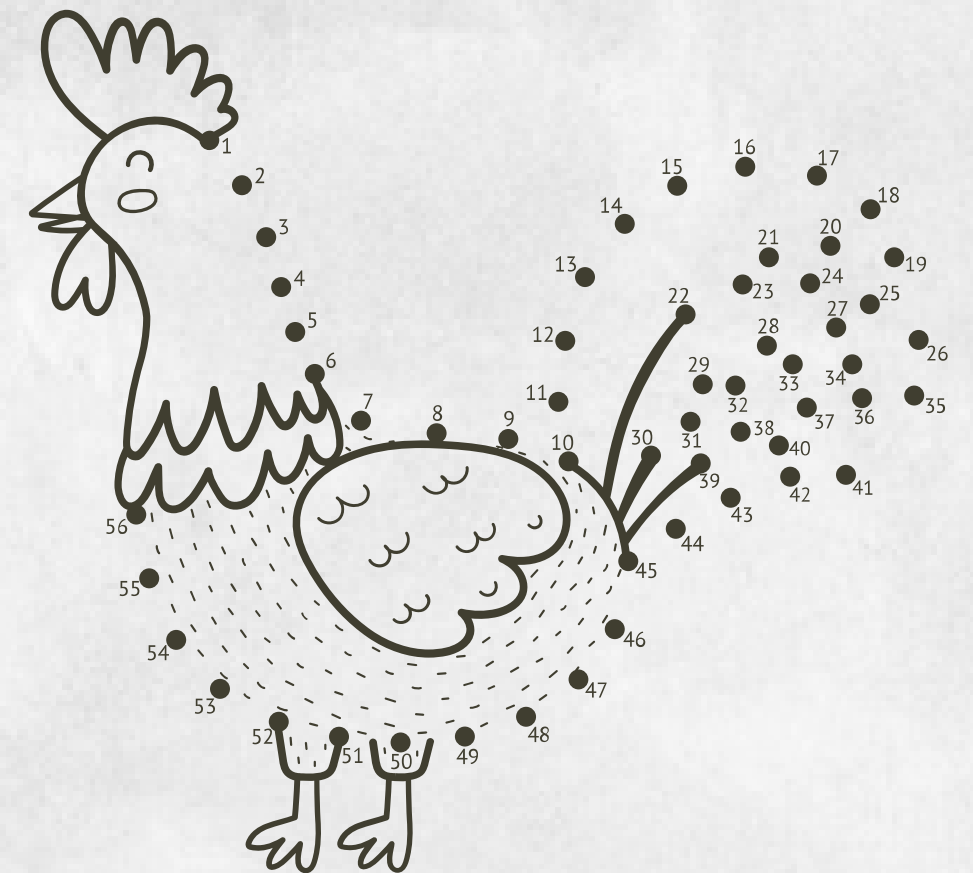
Session Objectives



Visualize your Admissions
Process & Mission



Introduce tools



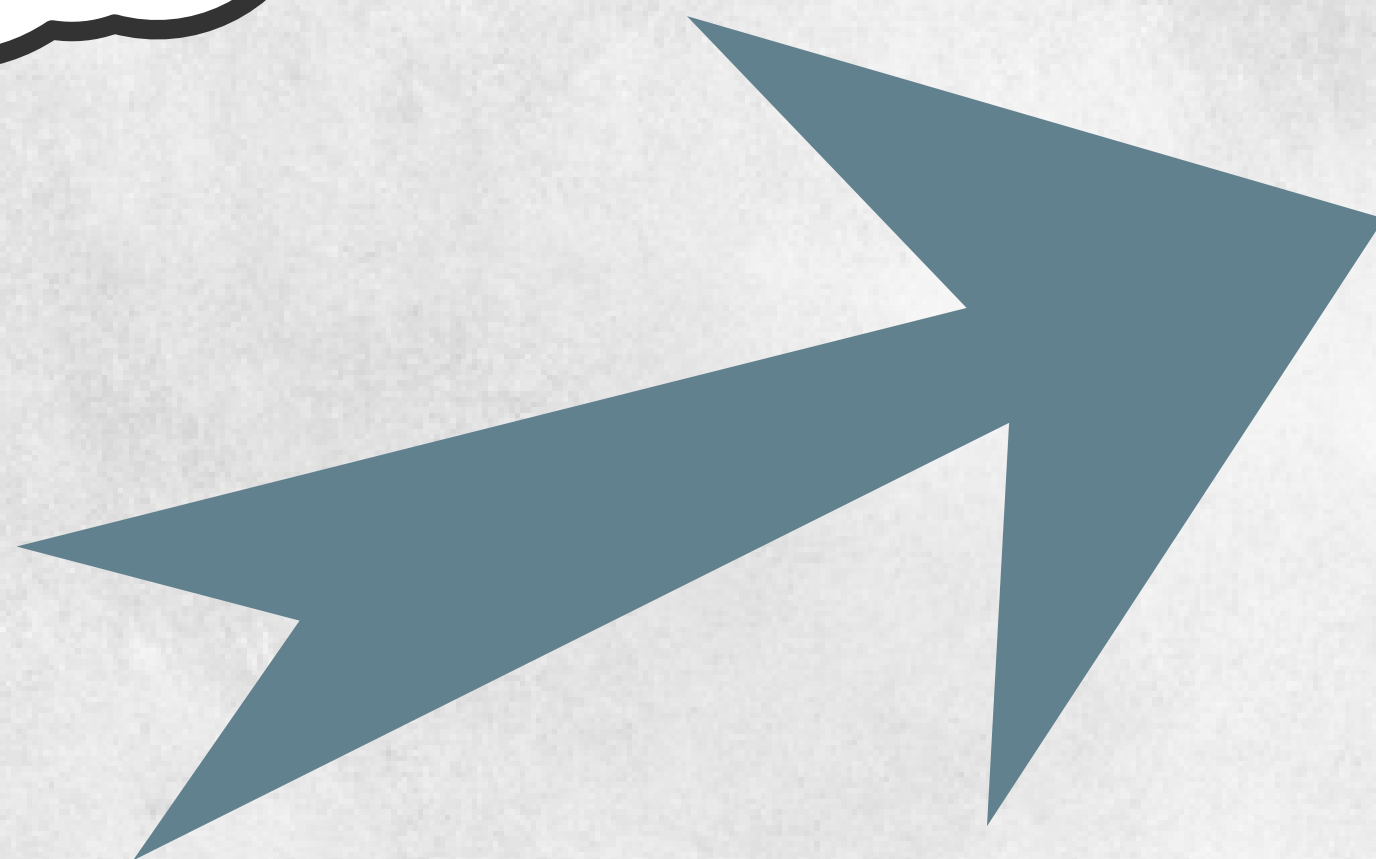
Connect the dots



What is “Admissions”?

Idea

Maybe I should do a
program this
summer...



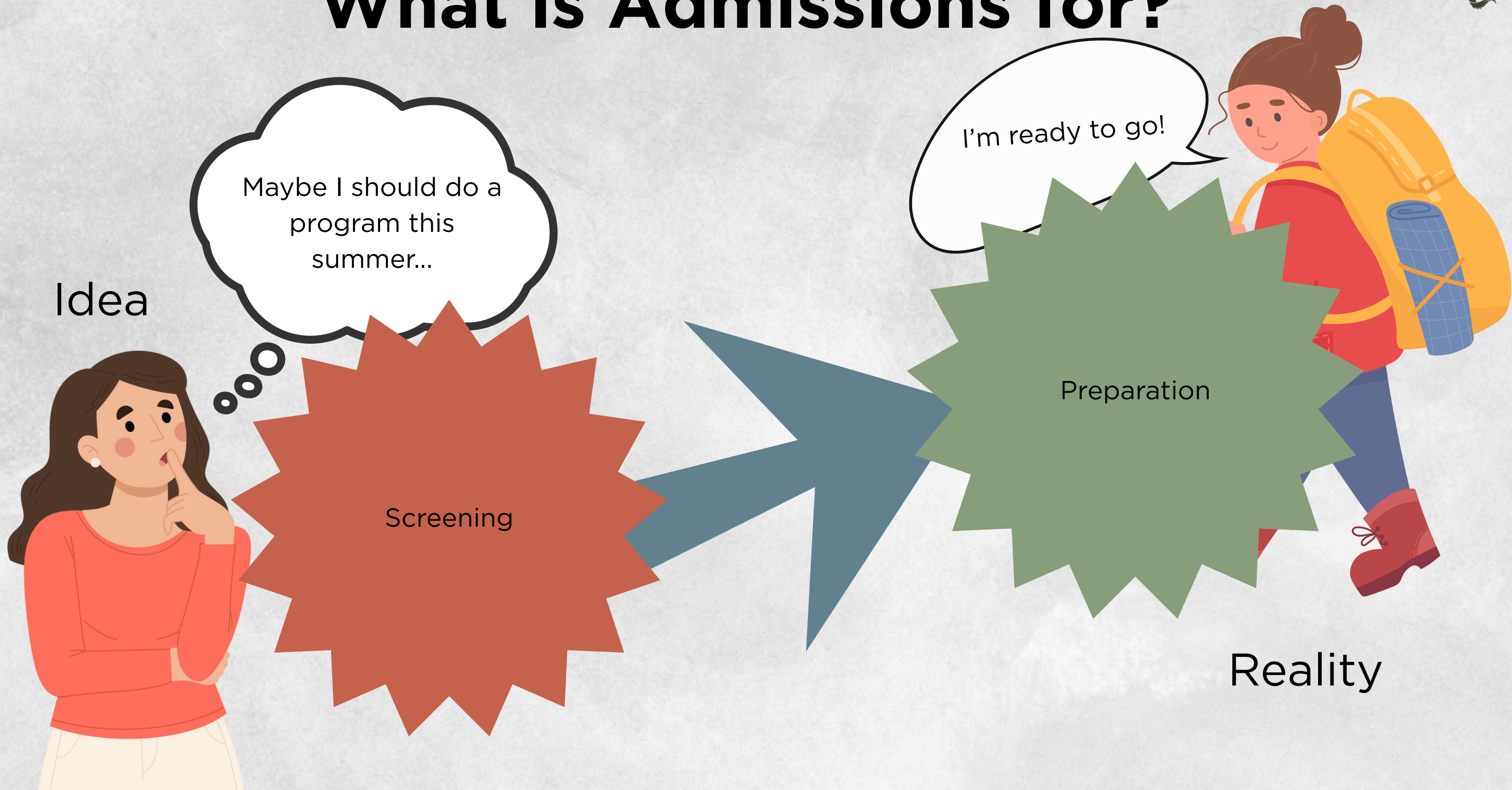
I'm ready to go!



Reality



What is Admissions for?



An “on-ramp” for your program

Maybe I should do a
program this
summer...

I'm ready to go!

Preparation

Screening

Marketing





The Admissions Trap



Avoid the Admissions Trap



Define Your
purpose





admissions statement

Mission

The Admissions Team:

- Ensures that all individuals who travel with Dragons are appropriate (meet EEC) for our programs, by conducting careful screening of applicants,
- Sets all types of travelers & instructors up for success by way of supportive, honest guidance & continued excitement as they prepare for travel, and
- Maintains clear and adaptable systems that give consistent but customized structure to client & staff stakeholders across types of programming (Partner, Open Enrollment, etc).





admissions statement

Vision

Our vision is one of abundant potential, swinging open the doors for participants to gain the most possible benefit from a Dragons program.

Philosophy

Our goal is not to eliminate student struggles or early departures from our programs. Rather, we aim to balance our desire to work with students in good faith while minimizing the risk of dangerous or harmful situations.





What's your (ad)mission?

- **Who are your stakeholders?**
 - Who benefits from the product of your processes?
- **What is the general objective(s) of your admissions process?**
 - What does a successful outcome look like?
 - What role does admissions play in your org as a whole?
- **What do your stakeholders need from you?**
 - Where are they at the beginning of the ramp? Where do you need them to be at the end?
 - How might the starting point be different for diverse participants?
- **What ideals does your (ad)mission serve?**
 - How does it relate to your organizational purpose/mission & vision?



An “on-ramp” for your program



Field Support

Acceptance

Preparation

Screening



An “on-ramp” for your program

3 main principles!

Screening

- Meets basic requirements?
- Baseline understanding of program?
- Wants to participate?
- Can participate safely?
- What might they need to succeed?

Clarify & Evaluate

Collect Preliminary Information

Establish Basic Requirements





1. Establish Basic Requirements

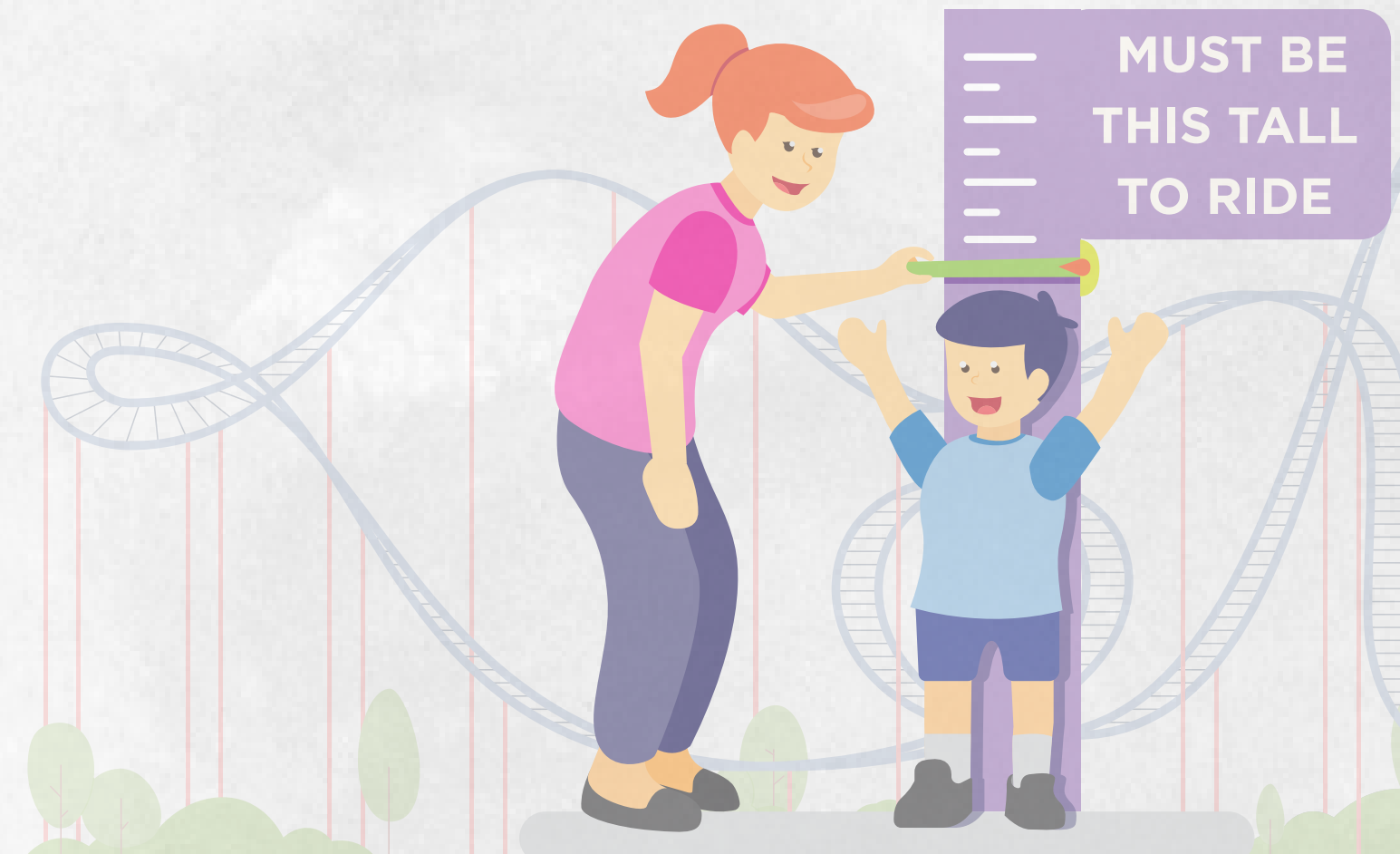
Essential Eligibility Criteria

- Self-assessment tool to determine the abilities needed to safely participate
- Publicly available before reaching the admissions process
- Participants can meet EEC *without or with* Reasonable Accommodations
- You may have cross-program EEC or program-specific EEC
- Reiterated in Application and Participant Agreement

QR CODE ON FINAL SLIDE!

In-Field Management

- EEC language is helpful when navigating complex behavioral and mental health incidents





2. Collect Information

Application & Interview

Application

- Collect personal information
- Basic medical and mental health questions
- Confirm key policies
- Balance getting the information you need and getting them in the door

Interview

- Differentiate student & parent
- Present organizational values
- Introduce thinking about agency
- More difficult to answer using AI
- Better sense of interpersonal skills/personality



Watch out for bias!

VIDEO INTERVIEW!





3. Evaluate Information

Clarification & Evaluation

Am I comfortable admitting this student?

Not sure yet?

- Ask for more information from student and/or parents!
- Ask for a reference from a therapist, teacher, etc.
- Have a conversation to directly clarify a policy or ask a specific question (e.g. “do you want to do this program?”)

Opportunity
to set tone &
build rapport!

Convos about
Reasonable
Accommodations
often begin here!
(more on those later!)



An “on-ramp” for your program

Preparation

- Collect more detailed information
- Set appropriate expectations
- Give practical information
- Prompt participant to understand their role in managing risk
- Cover legal bases
- Steward parent experience
- Allow for varied levels of engagement
- Maintain eligibility





An “on-ramp” for your program

7 tools for
success!

Information **for** participant

3. Participant Agreement & Liability

7. Open communication

2. Tailored resources

6. Supplemental forms & agreements

1. Course preparation materials

5. Course Wellness Plan

4. Medical forms

Information **from** participant



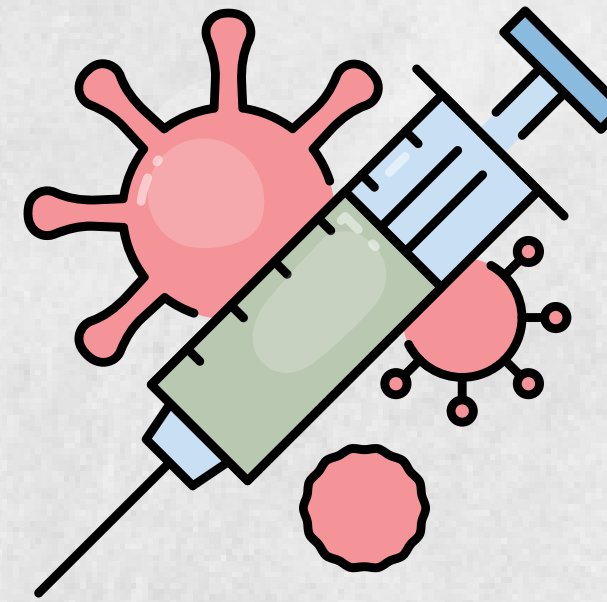
1. Prep Materials

- Cultivate trust: demonstrate your expertise
- Most important information up front, with option to go deeper
- Updated regularly in response to feedback / program outcomes
- Answer common questions, explain systems - establish a baseline

In-Field Management

- Refer parents to support documents
- Online course blog can build or erodes trust

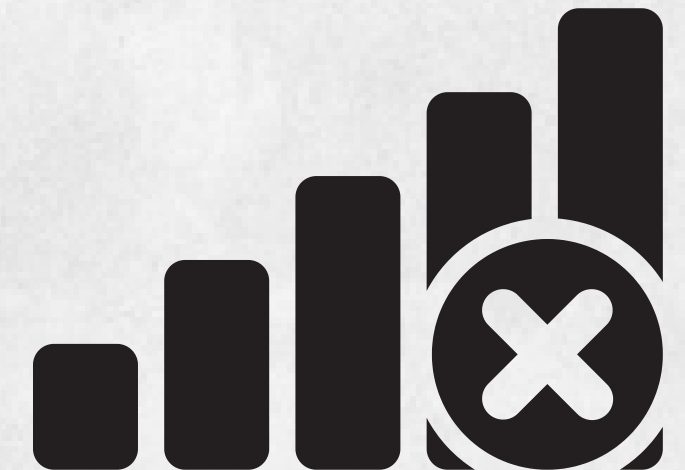
Course Preparation Manual



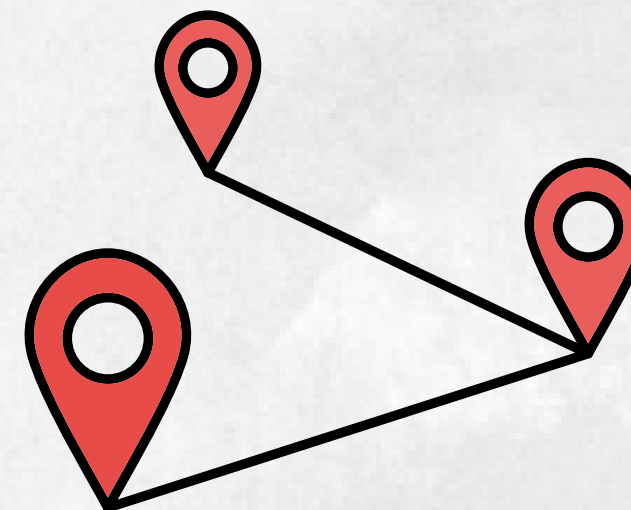
Videos



Parent Support Kit



Website Content



Yak Board (Blog)

2. Tailored Resources

- Acknowledge diversity of audiences/participants
- Can be internal or external

			Africa		China
Type of Identity	Specifier	Additional description	Morocco	Senegal	
Race/Ethnicity	Black/Afro-descended	Any student who phenotypically appears afro-descended		Travelers may be expected to speak local languages or understand local practices more readily than non-black peers, but often an affirming experience for African Americans to travel in Senegal.	
Religion/spirituality	Judaism	Jewish students		Judaism is largely unknown in Senegal. Students may need to explain or describe traditions, but anti-semitic sentiment is not common.	
Race/Ethnicity	Heritage Student	Student with family/life connection to destination		Past student reports tend to be positive	
Race/Ethnicity	Looks like a Local	Students who can be mistaken for locals, but did not grow up/have local association with country			
Sexual Orientation	Gay/Lesbian	Students who are gay or lesbian (or have family members who are)	Homosexuality is illegal in Morocco and not widely accepted socially. Students should be careful about revealing sexual identity.	Homosexuality is illegal in Senegal and not widely accepted socially. Students should be careful about revealing sexual identity.	
Sexual Orientation	Other queer sexuality	Students who identify with alternate sexual orientations (other than hetero/gay/lesbian)	Not safe to discuss	Not a topic of conversation in Senegal. However, polygamy is practiced so polyamory may be an accessible topic of discussion under certain parameters	

Address identity-related risks

TRAVELING AS YOU

Feel at Home in the World

Our programs are inherently designed to take us outside the world we consider normal so we can learn about different ways of doing and being. Learning how many different ways there are to live in the world is an opportunity to reflect on our own assumptions, change our minds about things, and broaden our view of the world.

In addition to learning from the people and places where you travel, you will also learn from rich experiences and differences within your student group. All of us hold many identities (age, gender, race, nationality, geography, class, religion, etc). On our programs, you will reflect on your many identities and how they fit within your peer group and within a new cultural context. This process can lead to powerful awareness of ourselves, and how we can be allies for *all* people. Below is a guide for how specific identities may influence someone's travel experience.



Traveling As You: A Guide for Specific Identities

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3a. Participant Agreement

- Reiterate EEC and Reasonable Accommodations policy
- Explicitly outline participant's role in managing risk
- Clearly defines boundaries & expectations for participation
- Define consequences for violations of agreement



Addresses
behavior-
related risks

3b. Liability Form

In-Field Management

- Direct to specific language for behavioral management.
- Focus families on tangible policies during challenging conversations.



Risk & Release

- Lawyer stuff!
- Keep it updated

and legal
risks (for
your org)

Addresses
most possible
risks (for
participants)



-
- A watercolor-style illustration of a clipboard with a light blue clip at the top. The clipboard has a yellow border. On the white paper, there is a red cross in the top left corner. Below it, there are several horizontal lines, some green and some dark grey, representing a checklist. In the bottom right corner, there is a square box containing a green checkmark.

- Admin review of med forms during in-field medical visits

Use an "X" to mark the degree of impact on a spectrum from "I have barely noticed it," to "It's been present, but I have been managing it confidently, safely & independently," to "this condition is a significant challenge every day."

[illegible]

5. Course Wellness Plan

- More qualitative - short answer format
- Asks participant to actively reflect on mental & physical wellbeing
- Required for ALL participants

In-Field Management

- Review CWP during checkins between field staff and participants
- Guidance for field staff and admin to support physical, mental, and emotional challenges



COURSE WELLNESS PLAN

While immersive travel can offer a break from the rhythms of our "normal" lives back home, we do not leave our personal histories behind when we travel. Being constantly on the move, unfamiliar surroundings, new foods, new cultures, and a small group environment can present a unique set of challenges and opportunities. For some students, these experiences can specifically trigger underlying physical, mental, and emotional health challenges which need to be addressed without the benefit of regular access to a health professional or therapist.

It is important to note that Dragons is **not** a therapy program, and our instructors are **not** licensed counselors. While they can provide certain emotional support, they cannot provide therapy or mental health treatment. With these considerations in mind, **this document is a proactive tool to help you maintain your overall well-being on-program.** We require that ALL students complete this plan, regardless of whether you have a history of diagnosed or documented physical, mental, or emotional health conditions. Put simply, we ask you to thoughtfully consider your plan for wellness and self-care, in ways that can best prepare you and your instructors for a constructive and safe experience.

The information you provide here will be kept in strict confidence and only shared with your program instructors and relevant Where There Be Dragons administrators.

Part 1: Cultivating Self-Awareness

Briefly describe any physical, emotional, or mental health challenges, diagnoses, or conditions you have or have experienced in the past and how they affect you currently. What background would be helpful for us to know about you as we work to support your well-being on the program? Please be as specific as possible.

**QR CODE ON
FINAL SLIDE!**

5b. Internal Forms Review

- System for determining level of follow up & support needed
- Can help determine student group roster
- Transparency for field staff to access essential information about the student

In-Field Management

- Dedicate time for program director and field staff review
- Tools for instructors to support field incidents
- Watch out for bias. Correlation of flag level with in-field incidents?

Mental Health Flag (What's this?)	Mental Health Summary See Course Wellness Plans (CWP), Mental Health Details Forms (MHDF) (when applicable), and Medical forms for more information. Contact Admin with further questions!	Therapist form?
Green (Level 0)	IV: No challenges reported	MHF not required
Green (Level 0)	██████ has seen a therapist in the past for academic anxiety, and may seek a new therapist after the summer, but is feeling solid without on.	MHF not required
Blue (Level 1)	██████ described a bit of social anxiety, which usually just comes up in really crowded, open environments. If there are a lot of people talking at the same time, he might close off talking-wise. He says he's a little modest, so bathrooms and getting changed can be uncomfortable for him as well. He deals with his anxiety by breathing - focusing on his breathing and moving. (MC)	MHF not required
Red (Level 3)	██████ has a history of anxiety, panic attacks, and depression. Their anxiety may look like picking skin or shaking legs, and they sometimes experience panic attacks. They have participated in group and individual therapy programs over the course of this past year. Since attending weekly therapy they have learned a lot of coping skills and resources to manage their symptoms effectively. They do have a history of suicidal ideation and self-harm, over a year ago, but they do not like to speak about these topics. Therapist notes that both instances were a year or more ago and that Indrid is no longer at risk for these behaviors after learning positive coping mechanisms. ██████ was able to name some of their coping strategies which include listening to music and taking deep breaths. ██████ identifies as non-binary, and having a supportive group environment that works hard not to misgender them will be important for ██████'s sense of belonging.	MHF received

2025 Flag + Behavioral or Mental Health Field Issue	2024 Flag + Behavioral or Mental Health Field Issue
7.89%	3.13%
32.00%	26.32%
16.67%	15.38%
75.00%	0.00%





6a. Supplemental Agreements & Forms

- Additional tone/expectation-setting for OR additional information about participants who may be higher-need
- Lays foundation for later conversations if issues come up/can't be supported
- Can also include individualized accommodation plans



Emotional Support During a Dragons Program: Limits and Expectations

Dragons Gap Semester and Summer Programs are multi-week travel programs that differ from other study-abroad programs and group travel experiences in the degree of ruggedness, remoteness, intense cross-cultural immersion, and interpersonal demands that participants may face. Thus, **Dragons programs can be demanding intellectually, emotionally, and physically.**

Dragons is committed to supporting the learning and personal growth of all participants, with safety at the forefront. **The following points are intended to clarify what we can offer in terms of emotional support and our basic expectations for a student's participation.**

6b. Reasonable Accommodations

Americans with Disabilities Act

A disability is a mental or physical impairment that impacts one or more major life activities.

Not our job to determine disability status. The EEC helps us determine if we can support any person with or without accommodations.



How do we determine if an accommodation is needed?

- Requested by the participant
- Identified by your organization
- Identified after the program has begun

What is an unreasonable accommodation?

- Creates an undue burden for the organization
- Alters the essential nature of the activity
- Compromises the safety of participants or staff



In-Field Management

- Written plans for admin, participant and staff reference.
- Guidance for field staff to navigate unforeseen circumstances



7. Open Communication

- A personal touch builds trust!
- Allows admin to anticipate family personality
- Information may come to light that was not in the normal application process

In-Field Management

- Established trust = easier communication if issues arise





Admissions procedures must also convey participant information to staff in an effective & secure way.

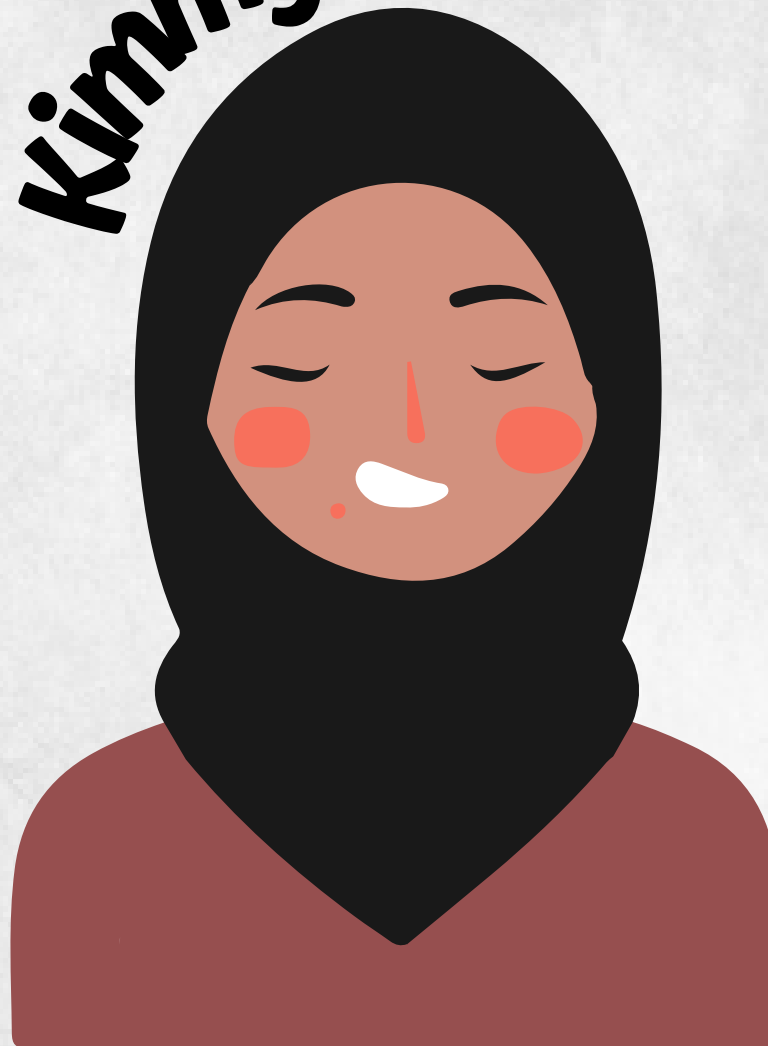
- Establish good data security & confidentiality practices.
- In an emergency, can admin and field staff easily access what they need?

Wade



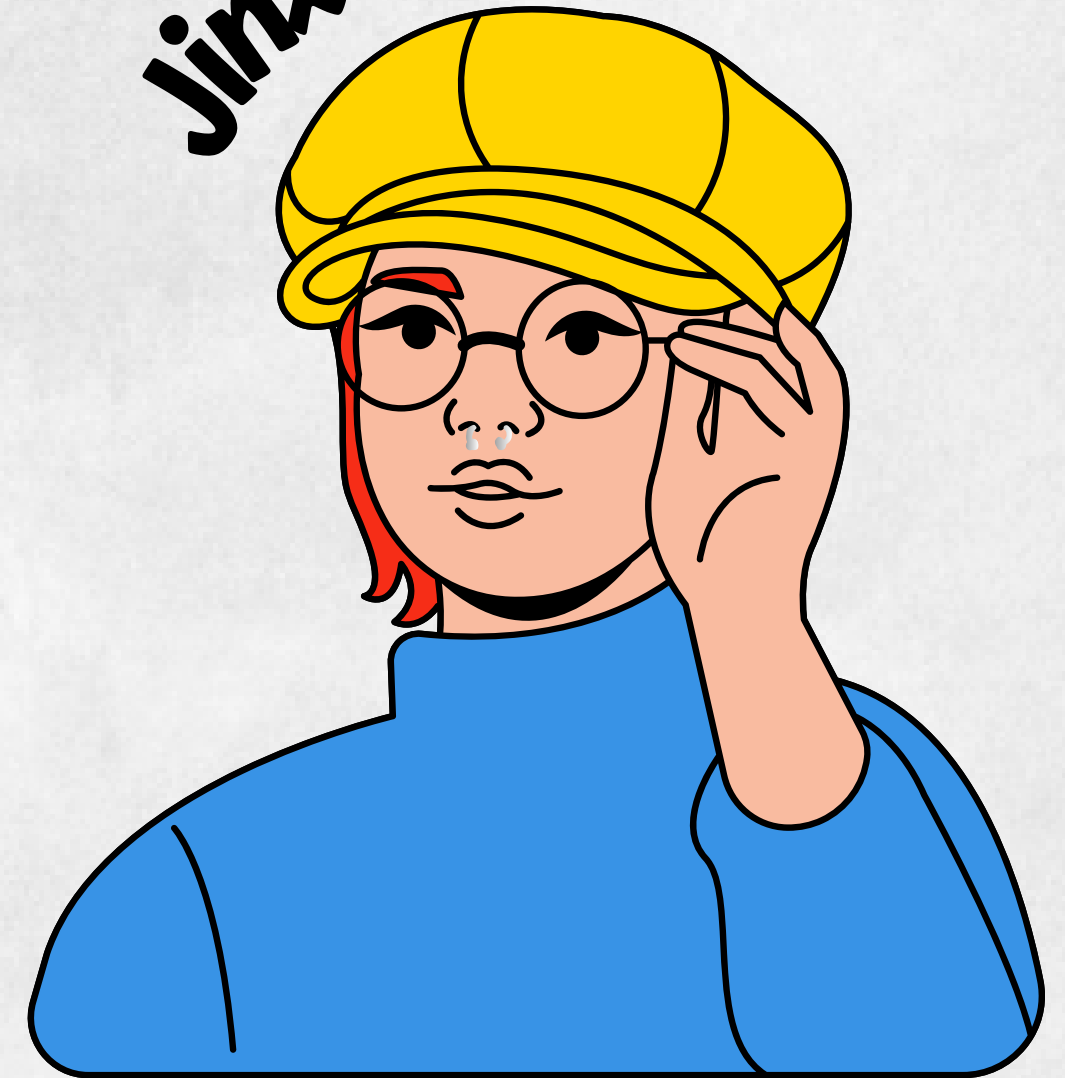
- Recently diagnosed with T1D
- Confident in managing T1D
- Parents are both lawyers
- Application is otherwise unremarkable

Kimmy



- No therapist
- Reports anxiety & concern to leave home
- Never been out of NYC
- Has 2 jobs & attends school

Jinx



- Non-binary
- Takes hormone therapy
- Hx of mild dissociative episodes
- Therapy 1x week
- Turns 18 during program

**Think about these applicants in your current admissions process.
Which points on your admissions ramp are especially relevant for each applicant?**



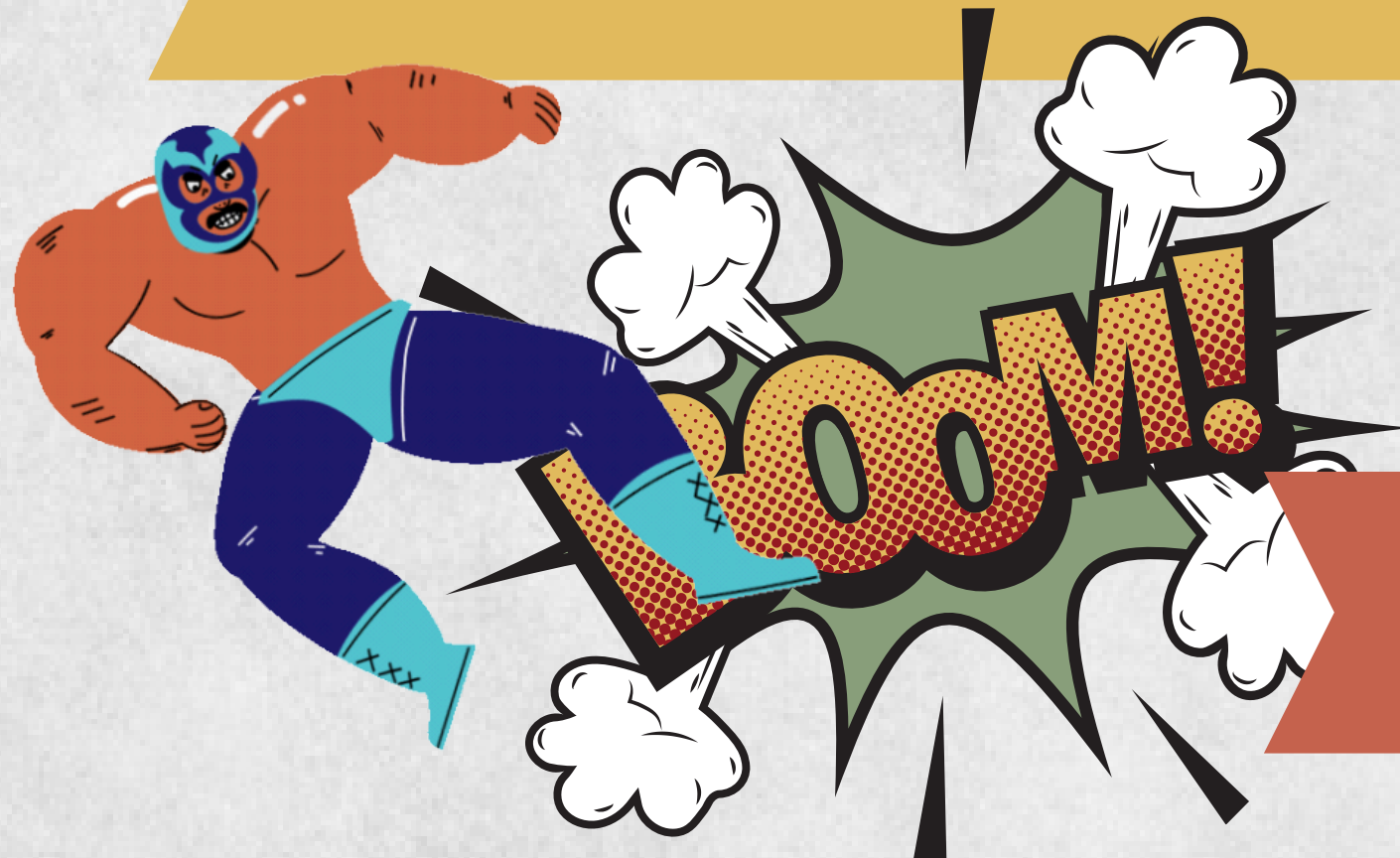


Action Items!

Draft your adMISSIONs statement

Map out your ramp (& stairs)

Fill any gaps with these tools



Questions?





RESOURCES



EEC



Course
Wellness Plan



Yak Board



Traveling as
You