

The Garden City News

College admission process ‘Early Start’ presentation at GCPL

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A presentation by Mike Binder, founder/owner of Syosset-based consulting firm Your College Navigator LLC is scheduled for Monday evening, November 25 starting at 6:45 p.m. at the Garden City Public Library, 60 7th St in Garden City.

The way to get into the college of your choice, according to Your College Navigator, is taking a proactive stance earlier in your high school years and identifying potential best matches for your strengths, interests and abilities.

Binder’s biggest piece of advice for those attending high school in 2019- 2020: “Don’t wait until you have a painful toothache to deal with — go check in with the dentist regularly and do preventative maintenance. Don’t just wait.” By that he means there’s too often the scenario where parents or students are contacting him or other college admissions prep services to “make miracles happen” and push students’ applications over the top for their destination schools, once their fate has likely been sealed already.

In order to get ahead, high school junior-year students can start reaching out to college campuses and contacts in specific departments of study they are interested in. All it takes is a simple email introduction, a call or message to inquire about program information, scheduling visits, and finding out the contact persons for college departments.

Binder stresses that students do not wait until the summer before the start of 12th grade — by January of their junior year in high school, he suggests students decide or at least compile a list of up to ten schools they are thinking of applying to or visiting with their families. More 11th graders are currently working with him for applications and essays as they eye starting college in academic year 2021-’22. He’s commented and informed many area parents on the distinctions between Early Decision, Early Action and Rolling Admissions for students preparing to apply to college.

“The consistent message is START EARLY. A November 1 deadline is set in place for Early Decision or Early Action applications. I have a student who applied on August 10 to a Rolling Admissions program at the college she wants to get into, because there are only 50 admitted per year but the end of October (almost a year prior) that program gets filled,” Binder said.

During the summer prior to a student's junior year of high school families have an opportunity to visit some colleges and make better informed decisions. Binder learned that every year in September, the University of Wisconsin holds a special three-day event for exploration of programs and careers in the Accounting field. The key for exploring colleges and eventually applying to them and getting in, Binder says, is rooted in finding the information that will guide you. It is available if you look.

"Ask real questions — and there is no magic question to ask to impress a college. But if you ask the right questions, that might impress them once you demonstrate an understanding. Students come to me for the college admissions essay and ask me, 'what should I write?' in applying to Duke or the University of Michigan. My answer is I know exactly what they should write — Why do you want to go there? You (a student) have made this college your number one top pick, you have been looking at it for six months, but you come to me to tell me what makes the school right for you. You have to explain that. Have an answer for them that demonstrates you and the college are a great match for each other. Don't just explain how great the university is — that tells them something they already know and hear from the other applicants. But why is it that you are a good fit for them?" Binder asks.

Students should engage in research about colleges online and based on that, they can easily receive answers to their specific questions early in the process — this helps tremendously to narrow the list for their applications and choices. MIT offers prospective students an online admissions "Road Map." Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh has dedicated staff contacts "for every major offered at the university," Binder says.

The college essay, while daunting for many applicants and their families, is one more aspect to figure out. Binder reminds students that there are no magic words; colleges are not looking for uniform examples of great essays that help a competitive student get admitted.

"If there were magic words everyone would know it and that would no longer be magic. I want to read the essay and know why you'd want to attend that college. Don't tell them how great the school is and how popular it is, they are looking for you as a match. You can't compliment a school and say, 'I want to go there because they're highly ranked. Duke or University of Chicago knows they are attractive to applicants, they don't need you to tell them — that's why they'll only have a 10% admit rate," he said.

Binder spoke about an example of a student preparing to apply to Stanford University, and she and her family were planning to visit California and see Stanford during President's week in February of her junior year. The student wanted to major in East Asian Studies, and there was an online form to schedule a visit for the school and program. But when the student tried the website, every visit had already been booked, mainly by kids in their senior year.

Binder says persistence will always pay off. The student looked up a contact who works with current collegians in the East Asian Studies program, a counselor, and she wrote an email introducing herself and her interests in courses in Chinese culture and history. Not only did that outreach and little extra effort put her in touch with the right person, the contact at Stanford went out of her way to schedule a separate visit and tour on the campus for the applicant and her family. Months later, a follow-up series of emails earned the applicant a good word during her application process from the person she reached out to.

"The contact put the date together for her, met her there and she got her to tour two classes and spend a few hours at Stanford with professors and students in the East Asian Studies program. The young lady went out and showed the true interests she had in this course — not thinking at the very last minute, 'what can I do to impress Stanford, one of the most competitive colleges?' That initiative impresses Stanford,. Many students

who seize control early on and often continue doing so, and persistence and follow-up assists in getting them into schools they dream of attending. They are the top students," he explained.

A few increasingly popular college picks in 2019 among competitive students Binder has met with include Duke, UPenn, Brown University, Johns Hopkins and Vanderbilt. But some families of students in top Nassau County school districts still express distaste and issues with a lack of namebrand recognition, and that has impacted the lists students' have for applications. Binder educates both parents and students about colleges and particular

S.T.E.M.-focused programs they had never given a chance to because the name seemed unusual, especially among their peer groups.

"I've had clients referred to me, and parents jump at the opportunity for me to meet with them and their son who had average grades around 84. Some of the target schools were unrealistic based on his qualifications, and they were unaware of some other schools that would make a good fit. He/ they had not looked beyond name brands everyone else would apply to," he said.

Binder says for students not ready to examine particular majors and programs at the college level, they and their families should start by visiting schools and contacting admissions to ask one great question: "Could you help us better understand what resources the college has or programs that exist to help a student determine the program they would want to major in?" Too often, considering the assistance comes secondary to the name brand and reputation for quality, or popularity, a school carries.

For over four years Binder has email-blasted out and posted monthly newsletters, offering a free report on college admissions and trends in higher education. Binder authored two recent articles in his October 2019 newsletter, including a report examining college majors and "career choice" with the theme of Public Administration. Each newsletter examines a different career field to broaden perspectives of students, families and prospective applicants. His Public Administration careers topic lists positions students may become familiar within their hometowns and counties, such as jobs like urban & regional planners, city managers, foreign service officers, auditors, budget analysts, political scientists, labor management relations specialists, industrial relations specialist, public utilities specialists, health care administrators, criminal investigators and customs inspectors.