

## Tips for College-Bound High School Students and Future Professionals

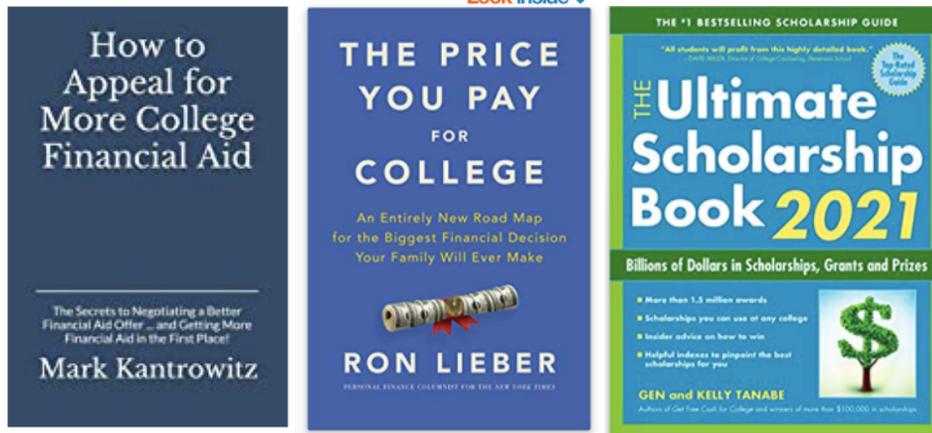
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The following is advice that I share with my college applicant clients. Of course, none of this is a silver bullet that will guarantee your acceptance at a single dream college, internship, or graduate program. But, these are easy steps that you can take in high school and college to maximize opportunities available to you.

### **Have a long conversation with your parents or guardians about educational financing ASAP.**

College and graduate school are expensive investments. Some kids are able to ignore the economics of higher education because their parents/grandparents can afford almost any option, but the vast majority of students have to think carefully about financial planning as it relates to their educational goals. Ask your parents how much money, if any, they can provide to your post-secondary education. Talk about how you are going to fill in the gaps. Loans? Scholarships? Grants? Military service? Work? Get a scholarship book and dutifully commit to applying for 5 scholarships a week. Watch the Quest Bridge Scholarship program video on YouTube with your parents/guardians and determine whether you qualify and should apply.

- These books are must-haves and must-reads. You can order them on Amazon or Barnes and Noble, but they are also widely available at schools and libraries.



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### **Do Not Get in Trouble and Closely Monitor All Social Media Accounts**

One of the fastest ways to tank an application is with disciplinary and legal actions. If you have already gotten in trouble at school more than a detention, email me, and we can talk strategy. Also, just because you haven't been caught doesn't mean your teachers don't know what you're up to and that can affect your letters of recommendation. Kids talk, and what your math teacher overhears while supervising study hall can haunt you. It always used to amaze me what my high school students would say right in front of me about their weekend plans while I was returning tests or proctoring study halls. Those students would then ask me for letters of recommendations.

Think of your social media presence as a part of your application that will stay with you for life. The internet is forever and don't trust that privacy settings will do anything. Kids have gotten admissions, internships, and scholarships revoked because of what is on their FaceBook, Instagram, TikTok posts, Google Docs, SnapChat, and I'm sure more that I'm too old to understand. Before you type or post anything, make sure that you would be totally good with it being a part of your college application.

Second piece of homework from me tonight is to go through all your online presence and clean it up! Show a parent or teacher your social media presence and see if they have any further edits.

### **Get a professional email address that will travel with you for life.**

Many of you have school email addresses. That's fine, but your school has the right to terminate them after graduation. I encourage my college applicants to use a Gmail address for all professional work. This way, you can also always save a resume in Google Drive/Docs and people from various points in your life can always reach you. Make it your name or your name with a number.

### **Dress nicely for school.**

Even if you wear a uniform, take increased pride in your appearance. I call this the Patrick Monaghan rule because when I was a teacher, I had a student who was a nice, polite kid, but not a stellar student. However, his parents made him wear a button-down shirt to school every day. One day, a government official made a surprise visit to our high school, and we needed a kid to give him a tour. Pat was tapped because we knew that he would look presentable in the photo-op and because he was reliably polite and articulate. Pat's tour turned into a summer internship at the State House, acceptance at his "reach" college, and now a public policy job.

Similarly, you never know when one of your professors in college will bring in a last-minute guest speaker with whom you would love an internship. Are you really going to go up to this person after class looking like you rolled out of bed?

### **Talk to every adult about their work.**

There are so many cool jobs that you might not know about. Ask adults around you about their professional life, the training that they needed, and what they like about their jobs. You might be inspired to explore a different career path.

I realize that job titles might be misleading or confusing. Truthfully, when many of my friends tell me their official title, I have a hard time picturing their work life. I have learned to ask: "So what does a typical workday look like for you?" if I'm unclear.

### **Take the hardest level of math available to you in high school.**

So many fields at the college level and beyond require a strong mathematics foundation. When I am working with an applicant interested in highly selective colleges and careers, the first that

that I look at is their math level. At minimum, try to get one year of calculus in high school. If you are not on track to do this, there are lots of ways to jump a math course including taking a summer course or self-study via Khan Academy and taking the final exam in late August. If you are debating between two levels of a class, my breaking point grade is a C+. If you can get an 80/B- in a higher level class, take the higher level. If you are going to earn a C/75 or lower, take the lower level class. If you are in that C+ range, it can go either way depending on how closely aligned the class is with your prospective major.

### **Learn to seek out mentoring.**

A great mentor can open a lot of doors for you and inspire you to try new things. If there are adults in your life who have jobs that you're curious about, attended a college that you're interested in, or have made some interesting life choices that you want to learn more about, seek them out. Ask them to meet you for coffee or to eat lunch in their classroom. Ask them about their careers and lives. You are not being a pain or too forward! A really smart young person once told me that a student could get a great education at his underperforming school if they knew where to look for it. What he meant was that he would listen to his friends talk about the teachers whom he didn't have in class, and if they seemed interesting, he would go and introduce himself.

I taught high school for six years before incorporating my consulting practice. I am still in regular contact with over 50 of my former students and about 40 of my former clients through email and texting. We FaceTime to talk about course selection in college and graduate school or I'll text them an opportunity for an internship that I come across when looking at summer programs for a current client. Because they make the effort to stay in touch with me, I know what they're interested in and can point them in the right direction or to someone who I know that might have a good answer to their questions.

### **Write thank you notes to everyone.**

Along your educational journey, you will encounter a lot of people who help you directly or indirectly. You need to reach out and offer some kind of formal thanks in the form of a handwritten note or an email. Did one of your teachers tip you off to this program? Send her a thank you email explaining what you learned. Did your dance teacher connect you with a college dance coach? Send him a thank you. People are willing to go out on a limb for you if they feel appreciated.

If you don't already do this, you should be writing a thank you note/email to each of your teachers at the end of each school year after grades are posted (so it doesn't seem like you're angling for a higher mark). It doesn't have to be long or saccharine, but it should acknowledge your appreciation and what they taught you. Handwritten thank you notes are absolutely mandatory for college interviewers. Hint: send the mentors with whom you interact a thank you email!

### **Pare down your extra-curricular activities.**

Can you throw a football like Tom Brady? Did you play the cello at Carnegie Hall? Has your artwork received national level awards? If you answered no to all of these questions, the reality is that your extra-curricular activities are not going to be the thing that gets you into college, medical school, or beyond. Of course, you need to do something, but the biggest challenge that I am currently facing with my top college applicants is that they are doing too many things.

As a junior or a senior, feel free to quit any activity in which you do not have a leadership or prestige role. Do not be afraid that you will look bad if you quit. In fact, it's a really good idea to quit any minor extra-curriculars in order to devote your time to academics and the activities that matter most to you. It's also okay to quit activities to get a job if you need to help pay for your education.

### **Keep a constantly updated electronic resume.**

Over the next few years, you will have a lot of academic and professional experiences. If you do not track them, it is likely that you will forget what you have attended and accomplished. Every time you do something, notate what it was, what adults were in charge, how many hours, and any important take away information. This is particularly important for community service hours which tend to get lost. Start today with ILLC!

### **Do not pay for community service!**

Spending a week in Haiti (or Appalachia or India or wherever) tells me that your parents had enough money to send you on a service trip, not that you are committed to community service. Further, there has been recent backlash against the influx of eager young Americans doing service abroad in that they are often unskilled in what they are doing, are taking jobs away from locals who need them and who do have the requisite skills, and potentially lead to further lack of stability for the children with whom they interact. Something like 90% of the wells built by mission trips around the world are not functional. Children in orphanages in developing nations need qualified, permanent math teachers, not a teenager who recently completed geometry and will be swapped out in a week for another group of teenagers.

Instead, save your money and actually develop a meaningful relationship with service in your own community. Develop and execute a meaningful project such as starting a middle school girls reading group at your local library or commit to regular hours at a local non-profit such as spending every Sunday afternoon at a food pantry.

### **Learn How to Take Standardized Tests**

Standardized tests are a reality of professional life. Even after you are admitted to college, you will have to take standardized tests for graduate and professional school admission and to be licensed in your field. Seriously, ask the mentors here how many standardized tests they have to take to become cardiologists. Taking these tests is a skill that is separate and apart from knowing the information. There are many great resources online. If you still have to take the SAT, I recommend the free online Khan Academy tutorials.

## Assume More Adult Responsibilities

College professionals have begun commenting about how many of their students are academically well-prepared but socially and emotionally not ready for the realities of college because their parents were too involved in their lives. A college-bound high school student should be making his or her own doctors/dentist appointments, setting up meetings with teachers, and finding his or her own internships and jobs. I believe that all students AND parents should read *How to Raise and Adult* by former Stanford Dean, Julie Lythcott-Haims.

