The Class of 2017: A Guide for College Counselors & Administrators
By Tom McBride and Ron Nief

Authors of The Beloit College Mindset List®
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A note about this Guide:

Each year we travel the country talking about the Mindset List and its value for appreciating the assumptions of the latest high school graduates. While we meet parents seeking a guide to help them “get” their teenagers, or hear from marketers who find the List useful when tailoring their pitch to savvy and suspicious 18 year-olds, it is mostly educators—people like you—that we meet. This is especially gratifying to us. The List is compiled to identify both the common ground that teachers and students share, and the mine fields of misunderstanding that seem to grow wider with every forgotten reference to the Berlin Wall or Monica Lewinsky.

Many of you have told us how the Mindset List is useful to you: how you use it to inform your work with your students, and share it with colleagues and even parents. To aid you in this work, for the second year in a row we’ve produced an accompaniment to the List: this guide. We hope you find it helpful in your work to support the next class of high school graduates. If you see room for improvement, we hope you’ll share your ideas. We are, after all, still learning (and yes, aging) ourselves.

All the best,

Tom McBride, Keefer Professor of English and Humanities, and Ron Nief, emeritus director of public affairs (Beloit College)

The Class of 2017: A Guide for Counselors

1. The List as prompt (among peers)

As you begin the academic year at your institution, share the Mindset List for the Class of 2017 with your colleagues. You’ll find that even if
you don’t agree with all our characterizations, the List will be a great conversation starter about today’s up-and-coming youth—and especially about the next college class: 2018.

We’ve heard many times that the List is a good way to get teachers and administrators alike to examine their own expectations about students—their needs, habits and reference points. Some things to consider regarding this year’s findings:

- This generation is starting to college at a time when there is increasing anxiety about its costs and benefits. Recently at Knox College President Obama urged educators to find ways to make their product more easily affordable and more economically advantageous. How much does this new emphasis affect the process of education and the attitudes of students and in what ways? Should colleges and high schools try to work around it or discuss it out in the open, even with its students?

- In this year’s List, we note that just as they began to crawl, so did news and information begin to do so—at the bottom of TV news channel screens. Thus has the age of “multi-tasking” been launched, because you’re suppose to be able to watch the sports scores even as you listen to the latest news from Egypt. Should counselors and professors address the question of multi-tasking and warn that those who try to do several things well at once end up doing none of them well? Or is multi-tasking here to stay, so educators should just learn to live with the fact that many of the scholars we confront are going to use g-chat to decide where to go for pizza with friends while trying to solve quadratic equations or pick out image patterns in Sylvia Plath’s poetry?

- This generation has grown up with social media, which may mean that unlike previous generations, their “gang” will never really break up. Already, we get reports of how ex-significant others will text a young person while he or she is engaging in affectionate terms with the current significant other. Many couples that have broken up remain “friends.” Should universities and counselors be aware of this trend, address it by raising questions about the true nature of friendship and community, or just ignore it as a quirk of the current group of new students?

- We note that a “tablet” has never been just a pill and that a “wiki” is no longer just a Hawaiian tour bus. So we are confronted again with the vexing problem of memory for this
generation of students. They can look anything up. They don’t even need to read a map any longer. So in this realm of instant access to information—“my laptop knows, so I don’t have to”—should colleges and counselors address the proper role of memory in today’s educational and professional milieu? Should it try to clarify the differences between what you must, as a competent student, recall and what you don’t?

2. The List as icebreaker (counselor/teacher to student)

Sit down with your new counselees this fall and use the current List as an “icebreaker.” We’ve found that the Lists are excellent ways to thaw out inter-generational discussions. But here are two words of advice:

- **First**, be aware that some young people resent the Lists as “adults” talking about them condescendingly behind their backs. So make sure they know the List isn’t a judgment, just a series of observations that they should feel free to have opinions about.

- **Second**, be sure to share what it was like when you were eighteen. We have discovered that it’s when the conversation is two-sided that the ice is really fractured and mutual discovery and friendliness begins.
  - As one idea, consider your own high school self. What did you do/know that was foreign to your parents/teachers? Do you have any old stories about parents who were sure you were going to wreck the car when eight tracks came out—or similar tales of generational tension?

- Some students will see the List and punch holes in it. “I know what the Interstate Commerce Commission did, and I do know something about the Clinton years.” Ask them to identify some of those areas where they disagree with our inclusions. Then, ask them to consider their teachers. What might be on their Mindset List?

3. The List as a college essay tool (for students)

Counselors and teachers do the good and difficult work of pointing high school juniors and seniors toward the college and university options available to them. As a part of this work, it may be that you routinely hear from students about the college essays they’re preparing. The List, we think, can be useful in
helping some students think about both their audience (and their mindsets) and themselves. Here are some ideas.

- The reality is, many college admissions counselors aren’t far removed from college (or high school). Students should be mindful of that. If they look back at the Mindset Lists from classes past (available at www.beloit.edu/mindset), your advisees may no doubt find that these young adults have a worldview very much like your own. As a result, students may find it helpful to imagine a younger peer on the receiving end. How about an essay on “The Mindset List for the College Class of 2027”?

- The Beloit College Mindset List purports to give the mindset of today’s 18-year-olds. Your students will no doubt disagree with some of the assertions and observations included. The question is, did we get it wrong entirely? Or, perhaps, does it say something about your advisee, their habits, and maybe even their upbringing, that some of these aren’t true of them. If so, this may expose some distinctive elements that they could highlight in their college or personal essay, as well as any admission interviews with recruiters/counselors.

These are just a few ideas offered in an attempt to aid you in your work. Let us know the results! Did you find the Beloit College Mindset List for the Class of 2017 helpful, and what suggestions would you make for how it could be made more helpful for future classes? On the other hand, what didn’t work? And what did we get wrong about the class of 2017?

Of course, feel free to tell us what we got right, too!