The Class of 2018: A Mindset List Guide for College Counselors & Administrators

By Tom McBride and Ron Nief


A note about this guide:

Each year we learn of new uses for The Mindset List. This past year for instance it has been used by counselors in Mumbai for students studying abroad, by faculty as a classroom resource, and by a bride seeking a guide to her much younger husband-to-be. Of course, we hear regularly from parents wishing to better understand their teenagers and from marketers trying to tailor their pitch to a new generation.

Mostly however, as we speak around the country, we encounter educators and counselors on all levels who want to discuss The Mindset List and its value for learning the assumptions of the latest high school graduates. After all, the List is compiled to identify both the common ground that teachers and students share and the blank stares that seem to grow more numerous with every forgotten reference to the Berlin Wall or Monica Lewinsky.

Many of you have told us how you use The Mindset List to inform your work with your students, colleagues, and even parents. So once again, we’ve produced this Mindset List Guide for College Counselors & Administrators. We hope you find it helpful in your work. If you see room for improvement, please share your ideas. We ourselves are still learning (and yes, aging).

All the best,

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The Class of 2018: A Guide for Counselors

1. The Mindset List as Prompt (among peers)

As you begin the academic year at your institution, share The Mindset List for the Class of 2018 with your colleagues. You’ll find that even if you don’t agree with all of our characterizations, the List will be a great conversation starter about today’s up-and-coming youth and a good starter with next year’s college class of 2019.

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

• This generation starts to college as one that watches TV everywhere—except on TV. They are able to access “TV shows” on their laptops, tablets, and smart phones. Thus they can “binge-watch” virtually every available episode of Girls or Orange Is The New Black. They are also entering college at a time when there is unprecedented discussion of the role video might play in their education, via webcast lectures, “flipped classrooms,” and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). Will the new “cramming” become “binge-watching” lectures? What are the educational implications, as to quality and cost, of these developments?

• This is a generation that enjoys an unprecedented amount of privacy, thanks to digital technology. They don’t have to hide dirty magazines under the bed because they’re all electronic. They have precious passwords they can conceal from their parents, who can no longer look out the window to see whom their offspring are gathering with at the local park—because the gathering now is online, on Skype, and on their phones. And yet for all the privacy from parents, this is also a generation that has no privacy when it comes to the massive mining of big data by NSA and Facebook. Should American higher education address this “paradox of privacy,” and if so, how? Should there be courses on the history of privacy so that the new generation can become better informed about the values, context, and limits of an important right?

• This is also a generation that has grown up with ethnic and gender
diversity as both normal and desirable. Nelson Mandela has always been a hero, and there has always been a WNBA and female refs in professional basketball. But given this constant emphasis on the diversity of humankind, is it time for some balance: for some study of what human beings have in common as well as how they differ from each other? Where would such a study of human commonality be housed—in biology, sociology, or philosophy or all three or elsewhere?

•This is a generation for whom political polarity has always been “normal.” They have little idea that once upon a time in American politics the term “bipartisan agreement” was not a dirty word. What should be the response of higher education to this fact? These students were born six years after the Cold War and during the super-ascent of Cable TV. Did these two forces come together to promote pronounced political divisions, as the ending of the Cold War robbed the American polity of a common foe while “cable” produced narrowcasting with small, but devoted and ideologically driven, audiences? Should there be more courses trying to understand the rise of a politically riven America?

•This generation will enter college during a time when concern about sexual assault is at an all-time high. They are also coming to school during a period when more and more women are not only in college (where they are a majority) but also in graduate and professional schools. AIDS is no longer a death sentence, yet cases of HIV are on the rise. Is there any linkage between these trends, and should faculty and administrators raise this question?

•Finally, this is also a generation for whom “meds” have always been an extenuating circumstance for academic difficulty. Is this a new sensitivity to neurological factors in the life of the student or an overused excuse, or some measure of both?

2. The Mindset 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, some young people may perceive the Lists as “adults” talking
about them 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 track tape cassettes came out—or similar tales of generational tension?

Ask student to identify some of those areas in the list where they disagree with our inclusions. Then, ask them to consider their teachers. What might be on their Mindset List? (Some teachers have used the List at the AP history level as a model for student discussions with parents and grandparents about their youth.)

3. The Mindset List as a College Essay Tool (for students)

Counselors and teachers do the difficult work of pointing high school juniors and seniors toward the college and university options available to them. You may routinely hear from students about the college essays they’re preparing. The List 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 2028”?*

*The Beloit College Mindset List sketches the mindset of today’s 18-year-olds. Your students may disagree with some of the assertions.*
The question is, did we get it wrong entirely? Or, perhaps, does it say something about your advisees, their habits, and maybe even their upbringing, that’s off the mark? If so, this may expose some distinctive elements about themselves that they could highlight in their college or personal essay, as well as any admission interviews with recruiters or 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 2018 helpful, and what suggestions would you make for how it could be made more so? On the other hand, what didn’t work?

Keep in touch.