

Choices: School selection is simplified with help

By Michele Glance
staff writer

AS THE BEGINNING of the school year draws nearer each day, high school juniors and seniors are forced to confront important decisions about college.

Some students have known since middle school what college they want to attend. But for others, choosing a college seems like such a big step — they are terrified of making the wrong choice.

As an admissions counselor at the University of Michigan for nine years, John Concannon saw many students who were overwhelmed by the transition from high school to college.

"Too often, they were getting the information they needed too late," Concannon said.

So he decided to become a full-time independent educational consultant. From his West Bloomfield office, Concannon advises area high school students on strategies they need to combat potential problems in college before they arise.

"I think it can be advantageous for a student who's considering certain types of schools," said Courtney Carr, a guidance counselor at West Bloomfield High School when talking about educational consultants. "Students who are considering schools out-of-state or out of the Midwest area might benefit from using such a service."

"But if they're going to school within their own state, they can probably get all the information they need from their high school counselor," Carr said.

KEEPING TRACK of college entrance test requirements, deadlines for college applications and financial aid

and scholarship procedures can take up a lot of time, Concannon said.

By using the services of an educational consultant, parents can save time and prevent their children from making a mistake, he said.

"One family had seven college applications sitting on their kitchen table when I went over," Concannon said. "I could tell by looking at the student's transcript and test scores that he wouldn't have a chance of being accepted at five of them."

"The other two he had a reasonable chance of being accepted at," he said. "At \$20 an application, that saved him a lot of money right there. Plus, that saves the college senior from getting those rejection letters in the mail. They can really hurt a senior's ego."

THE MOST IMPORTANT thing for getting into a good college is to take a college preparatory program," Concannon said.

College-bound students should be taking four to five academic courses every year, he said. They should have a solid background in science, English, foreign language, social studies and humanities.

"Sometimes I don't see a student until he's almost graduated from high school," Concannon said. "And if they haven't taken college preparatory classes, it's too late to change."

"But if there's younger brothers or sisters, you can be sure the parents will make sure they take those classes," he said.

Starting to plan a college education when the student is in junior high school is ideal, Concannon said. That way the quality of their academic classes and their grades can be monitored carefully.

Many high school students are frightened by the idea of going to college but are afraid to admit it.

"Every student, from the A student to the C student, has doubts, fears and concerns about going to college," Concannon said.

Not knowing what they want to major in frightens many college-bound seniors, Concannon says.

SOCIETY SOMETIMES pressures seniors into making a premature decision, he said.

"Believe me, 80 percent of college-bound seniors don't know what they want to go into," he said. "And that's OK."

"When I tell them that they always breathe a big sigh of relief because no one's told them that before," he said.

At Southfield High School, freshman students meet with a career specialist to take a realistic look at their interests and abilities and the job market, Paul Rubenstein, the school's director of guidance, said.

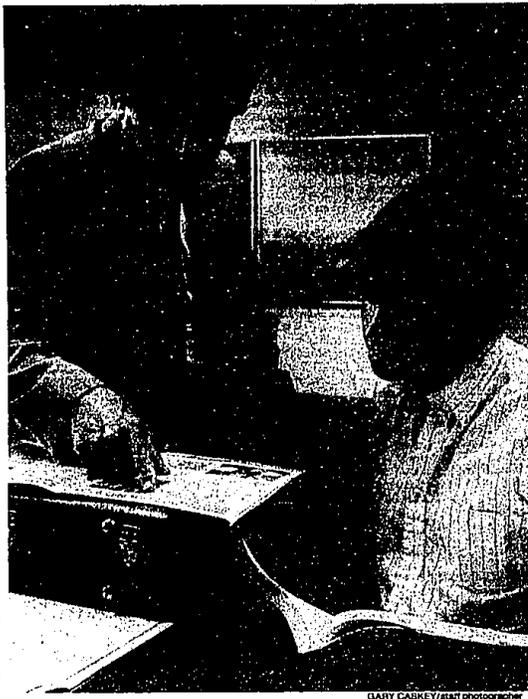
"The information is then coordinated with a counselor so we can see if they're taking the right courses to meet their goals," Rubenstein said.

Two students who are now college sophomores and have used Concannon's services say they're glad they did.

Chuck Stefano of West Bloomfield opted to go to the University of Michigan, Mike Forberg of Bloomfield Hills decided Michigan State University was right for him.

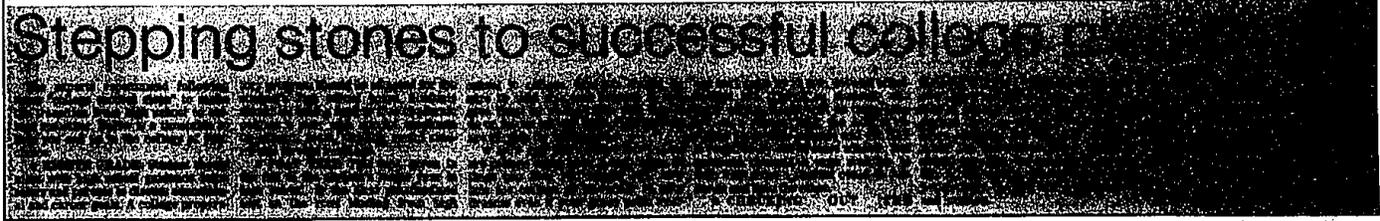
Looking back on their high school years, they had several pointers for college-bound students.

"Have a set plan," Stefano said. "Be organized right from your freshman year so you know what courses to take and what not to slack off in."



Educational consultant John Concannon confers with Mike Forberg of Bloomfield Hills. Forberg, a student at Michigan State University, used Concannon's services when he was deciding where to pursue a college degree.

DAVEY CASKEY/staff photographer



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