

## Winning Applications

# New firm helps students with college admissions process

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In the highly competitive college market, high school students and their parents who may feel overwhelmed by the lengthy application process now have a local resource to help ease the stress.

Stephanie Klein Wassink, a former college admissions officer from Redding, has teamed up with Kristina Larson, a college professor from Ridgefield, to start Winning Applications, a college application consulting firm, to help guide high school students along the college admissions process.

"Stephanie and I have complementary skills and we work very well together," said Ms. Larson. "With her background in admissions and my experience teaching at Stevens (Institute of Technology), we are able to provide expert guidance, which is critical in an increasingly competitive admissions environment."

### The right school

Finding the right college that fits with the individual involves picturing oneself at the campus, taking classes, and living in the dormitories, said Ms. Klein Wassink, who emphasizes how important it is to visit the school.

"You need to really have been there to see if you would fit in or not," she said. "You need to do an overnight or attend some classes and have a definite sense of yourself... Look at your own perimeters."

Ms. Klein Wassink and Ms. Larson travel around the country to check out universities and to meet with alumni to set up networks for their clients. Firsthand



**Stephanie Klein Wassink, left, and Kristina Larson have started Winning Applications to help students navigate the college application process.**

personal experience with individuals who went to the schools is one of the most important things to look into, said Ms. Klein Wassink.

"We tell clients to talk to alumni to get a better idea of the school," she said. "If you speak to the alumni and learn the ins and outs of the program, it makes you much more knowledgeable about the school and gives you a better idea of how you will fit into it."

### The interview

One of the most intimidating parts of the application process is the interview with the admissions officer. As someone who has spent a number of years on the other side, Ms. Klein Wassink has some invaluable tips for her clients.

She suggests preparing a list of concrete experiences to touch

upon in the interview, which can be elaborated on to give the admissions officer a better idea of the applicant.

"You want to make sure you give concrete data about yourself," she said. "If someone says I have a history of giving back to the community, it's too vague ... You have to support the statement that you make... if you say I give to charity, it's not concrete. You really need to plan out what it is what you want to get across in that interview before you have it."

### References

When students seek references, sometimes they make the mistake of choosing people who don't know much about them.

"As an admissions person, I've seen references come from senators and congressmen," said Ms. Klein Wassink. "It doesn't mean

much unless this person is really able to characterize who you are and why the school should admit you. It's really more important to get someone who knows you very well."

Getting a favorable recommendation is not the most difficult thing to do, but students do need to work on cultivating relationships as early as possible in their high school career, she said.

### The college essay

The most important part of the college application, beyond the basic grade point average and standardized test scores, is the long essay where "you're boiling yourself down into 500 words," said Ms. Klein Wassink. She and Ms. Larson work mostly in an editorial capacity with their clients on this part of the application.

"Over the years, I've reviewed and graded countless undergraduate essays," said Ms. Larson. "I am familiar with the quality of writing expected at the collegiate level and have experience helping students improve their written work product. As a professor, I recognize the importance that colleges place on diversity, and I work with our clients to showcase their unique attributes to the admissions officers."

"Diversity is a huge selling point," said Ms. Klein Wassink. "You can't just write about the classic summer trip. Those things are now becoming mainstream... Now you have to determine what makes you stand out beyond the next person's application."

More information about the company may be found at the Web site, [www.winningapplications.net](http://www.winningapplications.net). The company provides pro bono services to students affiliated with "A Better Chance."