

**Suggested Summer Reading**  
**for all students (and their parents):**  
*Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be*  
by Frank Bruni

If you have experienced even a moment of anxiety about college admissions, then you should read *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* by Frank Bruni. While it may not completely change your feelings about this process, if you read the book with an open mind, it can help you enter the process from a calmer, more informed place.

But don't take our word for it. Here is what some South High graduates thought about the book:

As a school, as a community, and as a society, we need to begin reassessing the value we place on college admissions. Frank Bruni's *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* is the wake-up call that high-school students (and their parents) need. It knocks the reader over the head with the stories, statistics, and inspiration we need to stop valuing the names, the rankings, and the reputations of universities and begin valuing who we are. The four years we spend in high school are perhaps some of the most formative years of our lives. At peak teenage years, we should be discovering what we like to do, what our passions are, what kind of people we'd like to be. If we can focus on the development of our character instead of the development of our GPAs and resumes, we are more likely to be both happy and successful. *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* has the power to raise awareness of this notion and invite conversation among students and parents about what matters and what does not. For students already submerged in the college process, this book is a breath of fresh air—*OK, if I don't get in, I'll survive. I can be happy. I can be successful.* For parents, this book should be a reminder to raise children who want to try new things and find a passion, learn for the sake of learning, work hard because it is rewarding, and build relationships with others and give back to build character. We need a mindset adjustment. We need to spend our years in high school growing into ourselves *for ourselves*, not for college admissions officers.

~**Lauren Reiss**

Kindergarteners learning a foreign language before they know over 100 words in their native language. Elementary schoolers being shuttled from school to clarinet lessons to soccer practice. Middle schoolers being transported from school to religion school to basketball practice. High schoolers being driven from school to track practice to ACT practice.

The stress starts early, and it simply never ends. Parents have 5-year-olds going to bed in their alma-mater college apparel every night. Parents have 12-year-olds getting grounded for bad grades. Parents have 14-year-olds starting SAT tutoring. Parents have control over the stress of the college application process.

In a competitive time like this, it is important that parents and their children understand what stress actually is in order to deal with it the correct way. Stress is not always a bad thing. It is human nature to experience stress, and that is what makes us passionate and motivated in life. Stress becomes a bad thing when it overpowers our ability to operate in a positive way.

In Frank Bruni's *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be*, Bruni writes pages full of anecdotes in the hope of getting through to those who feel overwhelmed and defined by the college application process. One particular story stuck out to me. Matt Levin's parents, Craig and Diana, handed him a letter prior to his receiving admissions responses from multiple elite colleges. This letter aimed to explain to Matt that his parents are proud of him regardless of the outcome and that his worth as a student is not determined by these college decisions. Though this letter may have helped make Matt aware that his parents are supportive of his future path, it was not enough to prevent him from storming up to his room and isolating himself once he got numerous rejections. Additionally, they could have acknowledged that although he may be disappointed, these apparent setbacks could help make him into a more resilient and determined person.

**~Samantha Greben**

Some children have it ingrained in their minds that they *need* to attend one specific university before they even get into high school. It's an all too familiar story: several family members attended a certain school (let's say Cornell University), she had every variation apparel from the Cornell Store, and she knew all the ins and outs of the school because she had been there so many times. She never really bothered to plan many other college visits or take the time look up other institutions on the Internet because she knew she would go there and follow in the footsteps of her family members. While she may have applied to other schools as a "back up," she wasn't *actually* going to go to any of those schools.

However, once that fateful day in late December rolled around and she got deferred from the school of her dreams (then rejected later on in the year), she wished that she had had the opportunity to explore the other available college options like so many of her peers had during spring break of junior year. If she had read Frank Bruni's *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be*, this idea may have been planted in her head. Although Bruni may seem a little bit repetitive as he lists the names of several successful men and women who did not attend an Ivy League or "highly ranked" institution, the message he creates by listing all these people is truly very important: there are plenty of other schools besides the top 10 on *U.S. News and World Report's* list, and it is very important to spend a lot of time visiting a large variety of schools while you still have the time.

While Bruni doesn't explicitly state the importance of taking the time to explore and visit several colleges before committing to a top choice, I think it is a logical conclusion to come to after reading this book, and one that I definitely wish I had known before I began the college process. Being the girl who got rejected in the beginning of this review, I might have found Washington University in St. Louis (the *real* school of my dreams) in April of my junior year instead of April of my senior year, saving myself a lot of unnecessary stress during my senior year.

**~Elizabeth Smith**

As I sat in Temple Sinai, something the speaker Frank Bruni said stood out: "Students today want a recipe and it's the wrong thing to want. Recipes create cooks, not chefs." In South, there seems to be a pattern; students often join clubs not based on their own interest but

because they think that a specific club is a necessary addition to their resume in order for them to get into their dream school, but joining clubs that you have little interest in is neither helpful nor fulfilling.

I happened to find my fulfillment in Key Club—a club with neither the most members nor the most school trips. I dedicated my four years to all things Key Club, and the memories made in that club helped to make my high school experience so enjoyable—a positive within itself. While I did not intend for Key Club to take up the bulk of my applications, it did. I wrote about it in essays and talked about it in interviews. But what made the papers and conversations so interesting was the passion that was conveyed.

In Frank Bruni's book *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be*, Bruni provides examples of individuals who did not attend the most exclusive schools and yet still ended up becoming extremely successful. You see, it wasn't the college that put these people on the path to success but the passion that was established in high school and strengthened in college.

While I found my fulfillment in Key Club, you can find it in any of the multitude of clubs that South offers. I encourage you to find that passion—find the club that will help you become a chef and not a cook.

**~Bella Harnick**

Today everywhere you go people are talking about money, whether it is how much you have or how to retrieve it. When you are looking at colleges you see two things: first, how much the college costs and second, what connections or upperhand does your competition have. Whether you have the better grades or you are the ideal student for a certain college, sometimes the people with money can trump you. "Rich people know rich people" and frankly that can get kids into a college, even if it is not deserved. Well, if you can't get into a school because you don't have the grades or the hard work, do you deserve to be at that school? Maybe, but do you want to go there because when someone asks you where you are going, you don't want to be judged? Well, no matter where you go, people will assume things of you because of the name, size, type, and popularity of the school, but if you care so much what people think of your own happiness, is it worth it? You might have donated a big grant or you know someone on the admissions board, so when you tell people where you are attending college, is it because you got yourself there or because you had to cheat the system.

You should be comfortable going to a small school and get in with your true grades, rather than be in a university where you don't belong. In *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be*, Frank Bruni mentions lots of different stories of people who went to less familiar, smaller schools who turned out just fine. Bruni offers advice on deciding between the most selective and less selective schools, and the truth is that there are just as many successes at big name schools as there are at smaller ones. A guy I know went to Princeton for a year and hated it, so he decided to go to St. John's in Annapolis, a small liberal arts school. He was so happy there, and he came from little money, yet he was determined to do well. He ended up working on Wall Street, producing a movie, having houses all over, has a personal chef, and rents his own private jet. He is now worth millions, not because of where he went but because of what he did with his knowledge. Where you go does not decide your future, but your hard work and dedication will.

**~Parker Spector-Salwen**

It was December 16—the day after I was accepted to my ED school. Decked out in my college apparel, I sat at my kitchen table wrestling with my math homework, as per usual. With each subsequent problem I attempted, my thoughts wandered further and further away from the integrals awaiting me on the page, and I suddenly arrived at the most perplexing question of them all: I got into my “dream school,” now what?

After I got into college, I felt as though I had been stripped of a piece of my identity. From the very first day of ninth grade, I always did my homework, always took the Honors and AP classes, always studied for my tests, always bounced around from club to club. While watching me furiously scribble a Ko cheat sheet late one night, my father asked me why I worked so hard. I stared blankly back at him. The answer was simple: to get into a good college. Duh.

Sure, I stumbled upon some activities and subjects that I absolutely fell in love with; however, my passions for those were often eclipsed by other work I needed to do. Looking back, I can see that I wasn't living my life for me but rather for some imaginary admissions officer sitting in a hot, stuffy room with thousands of names of students and a list of their activities and GPAs sprawled out before them. And for what?

As Frank Bruni's book demonstrates, what college you attend is no indication of your intelligence, your worth, or, yes, even your future success. Success isn't determined by the name on your college diploma but rather by what you do with it. And that is determined by what type of person you are rather than where you go. We must let go of particular brands of colleges and instead start thinking of creating a particular brand of ourselves. Our high school years are extremely formative both socially and intellectually; they should be spent enjoying the moment and the learning rather than focusing on what comes after.

So on December 16, for the first time since middle school, I put down my uncompleted math homework and picked up a book. After reading for an hour, I truly couldn't comprehend why I sacrificed an activity I enjoyed for classes and clubs that I didn't.

Yes, I am aware that this sounds hypocritical coming from me, but do what you love. Work less. Cultivate your intellectual interests. Learn from my mistakes. (I promise that my next four years will not look anything like the previous.)

**~Haley Raphael**

A year ago, I sat in front of my laptop and nearly deleted the school where I will be spending the next four years of my life off the Excel spreadsheet of all the colleges I was going to apply to. This extensive spreadsheet contained schools I had never visited before in my life, schools that were on there merely because of the prestige that came with their names, and even a school that I didn't particularly enjoy. It was a list born out of a groundless emphasis on renown and reputation, and looking back, there are many things I would have changed about that list.

One year later, I sat in front of my laptop again, opening rejection letter after rejection letter. I moped and cried for a little bit, ate some frozen yogurt a wonderful friend brought for me, and thought about where I had gone wrong. Don't get me wrong, I had been blessed with some acceptances to amazing schools, and I couldn't be more excited or grateful to be a Trojan next year; however, the consecutive rejections and waitlists I received briefly left me thinking, what

didn't I do? Throughout my four years of high school, I did everything I loved while excelling academically, so what more could they really want from me?

Reading *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* before embarking on the hectic college application journey would have helped lessen the emphasis I placed on a school's name brand. However, reading it after committing to a school was equally, if not more, helpful. *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* affirmed that all my thoughts about what I had done wrong were unnecessary and even unhealthy. If I knew my worth, what was the use of reflecting upon the uncontrollable nature of the college admissions frenzy? As the title of the book states, a mere degree from a certain school is not nearly as important or defining as your accomplishments or the ways in which you flourish while at that school. I know many who have been disappointed by the college admissions process, including me. However, despite what a faceless admissions officer has to say, those that achieved highly in high school and tackled the past four years ambitiously will continue to do so in college, no matter where they are. *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* dispelled all my unhealthy thinking through a quote from a girl who was in a similar situation as me: "I never would have had the strength, drive, or fearlessness to take such risks if I hadn't been rejected so intensely before. There's a beauty to that kind of rejection."

**~Amanda Shen**