

# suburban life



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**Nazareth Academy High School's** dedicated college counselors equip students with the tools needed to make informed decisions about the future. *page 86*



# Ready for the Next Step

**Nazareth Academy High School's** DEDICATED COLLEGE COUNSELORS EQUIP STUDENTS WITH THE TOOLS NEEDED TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE.

by **MATT COSENTINO**  
photos by **JODY ROBINSON**

**O**f the many concerns that today's high school students face on a daily basis, perhaps none is more stressful than planning for the future. For those who view college as the next step on their journey, trying to navigate the process alone can be a worrisome ordeal.

At Nazareth Academy High School in Northeast Philadelphia, a dedicated college counseling office ensures that they don't have to.

Nazareth, the city's only private, Catholic high school for young women, has a rich history of enabling students to reach their full potential academically, spiritually, and personally. Nurtured by the school's family-like atmosphere, students prepare for college with the guidance of two college/school counselors who go above and beyond to get to know each student and assist her on the path to higher education.

"I believe we do a great job of preparing our students, in all aspects," says Alyssa Scheerbaum, a Nazareth alumna from the Class of 2012, now the school's director of college counseling. "We switched to a block schedule in 2017, which mimics more of a college schedule so they can get used to the timing of classes and not having eight classes every day. The classes are rigorous, our teachers are fantastic, and we do our best in the college counseling



Director of College Counseling Alyssa Scheerbaum and College Counselor Maria Kaloudis (both standing) help Nazareth Academy students on the path to higher education.



**It's honestly a joy to watch them all grow."**

—ALYSSA SCHEERBAUM,  
NAZARETH ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL

department to help students find their best fit for life after Nazareth."

Each girl is assigned a college counselor as a freshman, establishing a relationship that will include regular communication with the student and her family, as needed. Throughout their time at Nazareth, students will be educated on the ever-changing college admissions process and receive assistance on course selection, building an activities résumé, how to apply for college, and much more.

In a class called "freshman seminar," first-year students set up their College Board accounts and are introduced to other resources such as Scoir, a college and career exploration platform. Most colleges have a profile on

Scoir listing their admission statistics, the programs they offer, and financial information. The resource also enables students to take interest surveys to see which fields they might want to pursue.

"One of our goals in freshman seminar is to facilitate those thoughts about what their interests are, and what that could relate to as far as a career," adds Maria Kaloudis, a college counselor at Nazareth.

As students move into their sophomore and junior year, small group educational sessions will cover a wide range of topics. The school's college counselors work hard to stay current on admissions trends.

"Had we looked at colleges 10 years ago, most schools required submitting SAT or ACT scores, and that was a big factor in whether or not students were admitted into college," Kaloudis says. "Ever since the pandemic, it has switched over to test optional, which is a whole new world. So one thing we do is meet with students and families individually and look at their overall academic and activities profile, and suggest whether to submit test scores or not. We also work with admissions reps to find out how important test scores are at a test-optional school."

Nazareth prides itself on developing the whole student—a significant advantage when applying to college in today's highly competitive environment.

"Every college is looking for someone who is well rounded," Scheerbaum says. "Make sure you're involved in a lot of activities, but not involved in too much where you're spread too thin. Make sure you have a strong GPA, you're taking rigorous classes, and you're challenging yourself. If a student can put forth a genuine effort and describe themselves in an authentic way in their essay, that's what colleges are looking for. They want to understand who the person is and see if they're a fit for that particular college."

In large-group sessions during junior and senior year, students dive further into preparation for the college essay, learn how to set up

college visits, and understand which questions to ask while touring college campuses. They also learn about scholarship opportunities and how to access financial aid information. Nazareth has relationships with college representatives from several local schools, such as La Salle University and Holy Family University. Furthermore, representatives from St. Joseph's University visit Nazareth each year so students can ask questions and gain experience in the college interview process.

Counselors will also talk to students about creating a list of schools they would like to apply to, offering positive encouragement along with setting expectations with a balanced list of "reach" schools and safety options.

"One thing we find very important for students is recognizing why a school is your dream school," Kaloudis says. "Is it your dream school because it has a big name that you've heard, or because you want to go to an Ivy League school? We want them to realize how competitive some of these schools are. For instance, for every 100 students who apply to the University of Pennsylvania, only seven get in. It doesn't take away from your application or who you are in any type of way if you are not accepted. That's why we encourage students to have a well-balanced list with some schools that aren't as competitive and might be more affordable for them."

Getting an answer early is important as well, which is why Nazareth hosts Instant Decision days with several colleges, where students can receive on-the-spot admissions decisions.

All of these programs add up to a history of successful outcomes. Nazareth has a 100 percent college acceptance rate, meaning every student is accepted into at least one college. For Scheerbaum, who knows firsthand how well Nazareth prepares students for college, seeing unsure freshmen blossom into confident seniors ready for the next chapter of their lives makes her work so fulfilling.

"It's honestly a joy to watch them all grow," she says. "These four years go so fast, and I get focused on a particular class and making sure that they're doing everything they need to do. But when I step back and think about it, they really have come such a long way, especially the past few graduating classes, having been so impacted by the pandemic. They've adjusted and overcome so much, so it's nice to watch them grow and see how they've matured."

"Knowing they're ready to tackle what's coming next, I feel reassured that we're doing the right thing for our students. I'm confident that they're going to be OK and will succeed when they graduate." ■



→ **Nazareth Academy High School**

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