

Focused on the Future

Gearing up to choose a college?

Take the advice of Justin G. Roy, dean of admissions for Georgian Court University. *by BILL DONAHUE*

Justin G. Roy had a plan. Leading up to his final year of high school, Roy had his sights set on continuing his studies at a large university, preferably far from home. He wound up doing exactly the opposite, choosing to attend a small liberal-arts school in New England, not far from his hometown.

"It was the best decision of my life," he says. "I loved it because it was big enough for me to explore new things and small enough for me to have the familiarity of my surroundings and a sense of safety. I am who I am today because of how I was able to explore in that kind of an environment."

Today, Roy is the dean of admissions for Georgian Court University in Lakewood, N.J., a small Roman Catholic liberal-arts college much like Assumption College in Worcester,

Mass., where he earned his degree. He says having an open mind, and taking the time to visit schools apart from what he considered his "ideal," made all the difference. He advises prospective students to do the same as they prepare for the academic year ahead.

"Every student should be looking for a school that 'fits,' and you find out what fits by doing some exploring," says Roy. "When you find the right school, you'll feel it in your gut. The school I graduated from is almost exactly like GCU. It was the right fit for me, because I felt it would be a safe place for me to try new things and to fail, which is how we learn. There was always someone to pick me up and tell me why I failed and get me back on the right track."

With the fall 2018 term within reach, Roy has some advice for prospective students: Start preparing now; there's still plenty of time to move through the admissions process, but the window closes a bit with each passing day. For the fall 2018 semester at GCU, for example, students must complete their application for admission by Aug. 1.

"Preparation" may differ from student to student, depending on his or her circumstances. For high school juniors, now is the

time to start researching schools based on "personality," location and academic programs/majors, as well as other offerings to stimulate one's intellectual curiosity.

"Think about the type of school you want, but keep an open mind," Roy says. "Have a plan, but be prepared for the plan to change. If you think you want a big school, take a tour of a few small schools, too. Doing so may very well reaffirm what you think, or it may open up a whole other set of options."

For high school seniors, now is the time to "buckle down," as Roy says. For starters, he suggests every college-bound senior take the SAT at least twice. That having been said, any senior who does not score well on the math- and science-heavy SAT should also consider the ACT, which is geared for more "creative minds." Roy says most colleges and universities will use either test as a tool to determine admissions and merit-based scholarships.

"Spending a Saturday taking a test is no one's idea of a good time, but just by increasing a score by 100 points, it could be worth thousands of dollars per year," he says. "Also, take the time to ask schools about the potential for merit aid, based on your grades and other qualifications."

For transfer students and adult learners, now is the time for evaluation. Perhaps a community college student wants to acquire a more advanced degree in lieu of entering the work force. Or maybe the dawning of the

New Year has a working professional eager to complete a degree or change course mid-career. Either way, students should begin the process of interviewing colleges and learning which of their earned credits will transfer so they can plot out the cost and time required to complete the degree.

"Start having those conversations now rather than in the summer," Roy says. "Talk

with faculty and explore the grounds of the 156-acre campus.

Adding Value

Founded in 1908 by the Sisters of Mercy, GCU offers a comprehensive education with a liberal-arts core, in an environment that promotes intellectual inquiry, diversity and academic excellence. It's also the only university in Central and

of 13:1. More than 90 percent of GCU educators hold doctorates or advanced degrees in their field, and Roy says all educators are considered experts in their respective industries. For example, Janice Warner, Ph.D., professor and dean of GCU's business school, was recently named one of 2017's "Best 50 Women in Business" by the business journal *NBIZ*.

GCU students have reaped the benefits of having such expertise at their disposal. GCU alumni have gone on to become CEOs, entrepreneurs and leaders in education and medical research. But no matter what career path a GCU student chooses to follow after he or she graduates, Roy believes all alumni share one essential characteristic.

"I expect each of them to be a contributing member to society," he says. "Our graduates are going out into the world and making a difference. If you major in business here, we want you to become a successful businessperson who runs a good business but who also values compassion, service and respect. We want you to have the skills to make good decisions and to become part of the community, someone who continues to give back long after you've left here."

And give back they certainly have. Last year, GCU faculty, staff, students and alumni contributed nearly 95,000 volunteer hours to local and national nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, GCU's student-athletes earned



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GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

Open House

Saturday, Feb. 10
9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
visit georgian.edu/openhouse.



to schools' admissions departments. Tour the campuses. Think about the next steps now before the busyness of summer kicks in."

When reviewing potential schools, Roy says students should evaluate each candidate using quantitative and qualitative measures. Sources such as the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard can offer tremendous insight from a quantitative perspective, while taking the time to visit the campus will paint an accurate qualitative picture. Open houses are a fine way to gather information and evaluate the campus, faculty and student body, according to Roy.

For those interested in seeing what GCU has to offer, the college will host an open house on Feb. 10, from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., where visitors can meet current students, talk

South Jersey to provide education in the Catholic Mercy tradition, which promotes the values of justice, integrity, respect, compassion and service. Nearly 2,400 students of all faiths and backgrounds—1,600 undergrads, 800 graduate students—pursue 33 undergraduate majors, as well as more than 10 graduate programs.

GCU ranked No. 25 on *MONEY* magazine's 2015 list of "Top 50 Colleges that Add the Most Value," based on numerous metrics, including the average annual earnings of graduates. Roy attributes this achievement in large part to a highly skilled faculty and intimate class sizes; GCU has a student-to-faculty ratio

first place in the 2017 NCAA Team Works Helper Helper Community Service Competition, Division II category, for their community outreach efforts.

"It's a whole different dynamic coming to a small community like this," Roy says. "People take care of each other here—students and faculty alike. As a student, you have a network of people with experience outside of higher education at your fingertips. If you want to explore and flourish and say, 'I want to find out more about this or that,' a small, close-knit community like ours gives you the ability to become the person you want to be." ■



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