

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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Talent is marker of new class standouts

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Spectator Summer Board

A Long Island opera singer, a Kansas City poet, a tennis champion from the Bronx, and an AIDS-crusader from Fort Lauderdale by way of Montreal.

While undergraduate admissions officers stress that every student admitted to Columbia College or the School of Engineering and Applied Science is a standout, the office released the names of the “most notable” students admitted early decision.

Hayley Kabilinsky, who taught herself opera in three months at age ten, said a campus visit sealed her choice of schools.

“As soon I set foot on the campus, I knew it was the place for me,” Kabilinsky said. “I loved the architecture and the way the students were bustling around campus. Everyone was so New York.”

A veteran of over twenty operas, Kabilinsky will participate in the joint degree program at the Julliard School of Music. Her career includes solo performances at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, where a former conductor of the Metropolitan Opera composed a piece for her debut.

Kabilinsky, whose father is a CBS consultant to the O.J. Simpson trial, said she plans a career as an opera singer, but views her Columbia education as a means of security.

“You have to have something to fall back on. What if you don’t make it? What happens until you make it? That’s why the [joint degree] program is perfect for me,” Kabilinsky said.

Like Kabilinsky, Scott Watnik is no stranger to juggling his extracurricular and academic obligations. Watnik, a straight-A student at Bronx High School of Science, led his school’s tennis team as both its captain and number-one player for all four high school years. He was undefeated in regular season play and won the city-wide Mayor’s Cup twice

Watnik said he was recruited widely by other Ivy League schools, but credited Columbia's men's tennis coach, Bid Goswami, with attracting him to the college.

"[Goswami] was interested in my well-being, not just in what I could do for the team. He didn't talk about whether I could beat this or that person like other coaches were," Watnik said, adding that despite victories on the court, academics are his top priority.

"I can't play tennis if I'm doing poorly in a class that's the reason I have lost matches," Watnik said.

Academic life was a strong attraction to Columbia for Gina Kaufman. Kaufman directs the Kansas City Youth Poetry Symposium, a poetry contest, workshop, and public reading that draws about 100 students.

Kaufman said she started visiting colleges in seventh grade, tagging along on the trips of her ten older brothers and sisters, but didn't see Columbia until her junior year.

"The people didn't seem as snotty as at other Ivies. People were doing their own thing," Kaufman said.

Additionally, Kaufman said she was impressed with Columbia's commitment to the subjects covered in Core Curriculum courses.

"Requiring specific courses in history, philosophy, and literature is a lot different than other schools. I saw other schools had distribution requirements, but it's just not the same," Kaufman said.

The Core Curriculum also drew Eric Pflanzer, an AIDS advocate from Fort Lauderdale, to choose Columbia. In tenth grade, Pflanzer, a bilingual native of Montreal, wrote a term paper on multiculturalism within Columbia's Core classes. From then on, Pflanzer said he had a "gut feeling" Columbia was the right school.

Pflanzer said he disliked the "haughty" attitudes of the admissions officers and students from other eastern schools.

"I think the [Columbia] attitude is tougher, realistic," Pflanzer said.

Three years the president of his high school chapter of Youth Against AIDS, Pflanzer organized programs to staff an AIDS information hotline, renovate a hospice, hold food and clothing drives, and plan a week of AIDS awareness at his high school.

Pflanzer also said New York beckoned him as a place to escape "movies, chicken sandwiches, and bottomless sodas," as well as other perils of suburbia.

"The city is amazing. The cultural, social, and employment opportunities are great," Pflanzer said. "I feel like I'd be rotting in a town like Hanover."