

# Episode 19 - Julie Kim

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## SPEAKERS

Julie Kim, Moira McCullough

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Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. I'm your host, Moira McCullough and today we are talking with Julie Kim, founder of Julie Kim consulting about passion projects, empowering students in college consulting



Julie Kim 00:11

First step is strategize, which is strategizing your theme. You need to know what your theme is because otherwise how are you going to present yourself to the college admission officers if you don't even know what you stand for?



Moira McCullough 00:32

This is the college scoops podcast and I'm your host Moira McCullough, we focus on everything college related from the admissions process to where to eat, stay and explore on and around campuses. Our guests include founders, educators, authors and experts in the college space. Join us as these experts share their knowledge, experiences and lessons learned to help you have stress free, informative and tasty college journeys. Whether it's your first or last child going to college For you're just interested in going to a college town for a game or male, we've got you covered. If you haven't already, please subscribe to the College Scoops podcast to get the inside scoops on everything college related, and leave

us a review. Thanks to all of our sponsors partners in the entire College Scoops Ambassador team for helping us bring valuable content to our community. If you would like to support college scoops as a sponsor, please head over to [patreon@patreon.com.collegescoops](mailto:patreon@patreon.com.collegescoops) and sign up as a sustaining listener, insider or Deluxe sponsor. We have exclusive benefits for our members free ebooks and even a College Scoops care package. Julie Kim is a Harvard Graduate College consultant founder of Julie Kim consulting and the host of demystifying college admissions podcast. Julie focuses on helping her students get into top colleges by strengthening their applications using her passion project project process. Julie empowers and guides students to create websites, books, exhibits and other projects that reflect their interest. Then Julie helps turn these intriguing projects into college application material. Julie, thank you so much for joining the College Scoops podcast today.



Julie Kim 02:18

Thank you for having me. It's great to talk to you again.



Moira McCullough 02:22

To see your smiling face. We connected on social media. I don't know how long ago but I was a guest on your podcast, Demystify College Admissions. So I'm so thrilled that now I'm inviting you to my table and introducing you to our audience so you can share all the wonderful information and insights you have on passion projects and how you have helped students with how to develop their projects and hopefully get them into the dream schools that they are striving to attain. So can you just tell us a little bit about yourself?



Julie Kim 02:57

Absolutely. So Hello, everyone. My name is Julie Kim and I'm a graduate of USC and Harvard now entering high school students to get accepted into their dream colleges using passion projects. So that's what I do. And I absolutely love it.



Moira McCullough 03:15

So wonderful because it's such a opportunity to really get to know a student at a different level and help them create something that they enjoy. They're proud of, and sometimes that they don't even know that they had an interest or a strengthen. So I think fulfilling on both ends for you and the students. So passion projects. Tell us a little bit about it.



Julie Kim 03:40

So passion project is a project that my students worked on. And we have about three to four different types. First one being, you can create something that aligns with your academic interest. And you can also create a project that aligns with your personal interest. And you can also reach out to professors and land your own research. system positions or you can reach out to professionals and land your own intern positions as well. So, some of my students actually work on one of them. Some of them work on too. So a few examples of passion projects include, one of my students created a woman empowerment website platform, and wasn't just her talking about how we need to stand up for ourselves and her passion for women empowerment. She brought all the other women into her platform to share their perspective and their history and their stories. So if you visit our website, it's not just a portfolio of her passion. She's really making a difference. And so that's one of the examples she got into Princeton. Another example. We have so many fashion projects I've just started to think through what am I see is created a stem camp for middle school students because he used to attend the middle school there, and it was a public one and he was like, wow, like in terms of stuff. Education, it is so underfunded. So for high school, he ended up going to a boarding school with full scholarships. So he was like, You know what, I want to go back to my middle school and help these kids break down some computers and teach them some coding. So he got recognized by the superintendent and district and all of that kind of stuff. Of course, our purpose and goal is not to get recognized it's to make a difference to even if it's a local one, and and sometimes a lot of mission officers say, just making local impact, like what's up with all this, like, go to like China or Africa do all that kind of stuff. While they are great. Try to start from where you're currently at and how you can make a difference there. So that's another example. So yeah, it's really fun students thoroughly enjoy what they do. And the best part about this is that you are putting yourself out there.



Moira McCullough 05:57

I just want to go back to that one student. I Wish I came to my middle school and, and shared his project and I learned how to code What a great opportunity for a student to give back and do something that they love. So to your point, sometimes we try to do something, travel somewhere, do something extravagant. And really, as you said, it's taking an interest and finding out how you can make an impact locally and bring that to life. When when you say students come to you do they come to you with like a framework, and they're a junior in high school, and it's specific, you know, this, I have this idea helped me develop it and implemented. How does that work?



Julie Kim 06:38

Yes, so we have a passion project framework, the four step process that we share that with our students, and I could talk a little bit about that after this. But basically, some students come in with no idea but they're like, Julie, you sold me on that passion project idea, like teach me how to do it. So some students have no idea and that's really fun too, because we actually dive into their theme and theme. Finding your theme is our step one for this passion project framework. So what is your academic interest? What is your personal interest? And what is your SPV? SPV stands for a strength, personality and your values. And those are the things that, you know, colleges look for very carefully. And so we identify that, and some students find their personal interest. Some students are like, what are my values? Like, I never thought about that, like what is important to me and my education and my life. And they're like, oh, okay, it's giving me a time to reflect. And a lot of high school students think about this right before they apply. Like when we sit down to write college essays. They're like, Okay, so what is my value, like what is important to me? So we have students thinking about that earlier, and you don't need to make your values permanent, they will change over time. Maybe it's a minor adjustment. Maybe it's a major adjustment, but just new Knowing where you stand currently is very important. So that's what we do for the students who don't know where they stand. And then some students obviously come in with a couple of ideas. And they're like, Julie, I've been thinking about this, and I need your guidance.



Moira McCullough 08:16

So when you talk about that, so you can come and you don't have to come in with something prepared. You held up, start and come in with a blank piece of paper, and you'll help them delve into that.



Julie Kim 08:27

Yeah, I would say for our group program, where we work on passion project for six months, no one really has anything. They're like, okay, let's get started. You know,



Moira McCullough 08:38

it's kind of fun because some at some point, you might be intimidated, oh, I need to come in with something but sometimes going in open minded, and then as you say, brainstorming through that program that you have, allows students to share ideas. Is it a group program as a one on one How does that work?



Julie Kim 08:57

It's a great program is called the Ivy League formula. program we launched this last year. And this is our, we have four cohorts now. And we're going into our fifth next quarter. And it's so good. It's such a great program. It's a group program, and students get my one on one support within the group setting. So the reason why I made this into group program is because I don't want to one college consulting for like, 10 years. So one of the things that I saw was other students were the students were like, well, am I the only one working on this? Like, I don't feel motivated or like, is this really gonna work? And they also don't feel too inspired? You know, when a college consultant is like, Okay, let's go ahead and do this. Right. So I wanted a program where everyone could come in and just feel so inspired by other students like, ah, wow, Katie's working on that, oh my gosh, I need to get something started to you know, or, oh my gosh, you're working on something that's education related. I am too. Let's collaborate. So a lot of our students are collaborating together or feeling inspired by other people. And that is The energy that we hold in these zoom rooms, is working really, really well, actually. So we're really happy about that.



Moira McCullough 10:08

Well, I think sometimes as adults too, when you get into room, you have an idea. Now I'm sending, you get 510 different personalities in the room. And so many ideas are presented. And you may come in with one idea and walk out with a totally different project, rich and had so many different angles and ideas that you never even considered. So I think that's part of the beauty of working with a group. So you have four different groups and you have it's a six month process that students work with you and their cohorts on.



Julie Kim 10:37

Yeah, so out of the four to graduated already. So we have two ongoing right now. And then we'll have another one next quarter. So we space it out so that you know obviously I'm not burnt out



Moira McCullough 10:50

and it must be draining after one of those sessions because exciting and challenging and then just draining because there's so much energy and thought that goes into the pressure. framework and hosting it and being a team leader and yeah, collaborator. So you mentioned in terms of four different steps and you talked about the first step, can you walk us through the next couple steps?



Julie Kim 11:15

First step is strategize, which is strategizing your theme. You need to know what your theme is, because otherwise how are you going to present yourself to the college admission officers if you don't even know what you stand for? So doing your theme is so important, regardless of whether you have a passion product or not. So that's first thing second is brainstorm. So we brainstorm the passion product idea together. A lot of students make mistakes in this face because they're like, Okay, let me just create something that's like super unique, and it's going to help me stand out. No, no, no, no, no, that the fact that you're saying that you're already making that mistake. You need to align your academic interests or personal interest here. SPV. So if you see another student doing you know like a podcast because that student loves to talk have conversations and you're like, Oh, that sounds really good. Let me just copy her. Well, is your strength also talking and making conversation? If the answer is no, you need to figure out what your string does. I knew that a lot of students when they do something that they feel like they should do or they're copying other students, it doesn't look very authentic, you know. So that's the brainstorming step. that's step number two. And step number three is execute. So we now put our ideas to work. So my students reach out to professors. We provide the email template and we give guidance on how to edit it and make it better. And they land research positions, like it's so crazy. All they do is follow our system and write the email, have it interview and they're in. So basically, these students are creating opportunities that do not exist.



Moira McCullough 12:50

So they're actually reaching out to current college professors.



Julie Kim 12:53

Yeah. Okay. And a lot of them are like, really, I think at a position I'm like, yep, you can just the way that you need to present yourself. And obviously we have this step for the students, the students don't need to figure out what I say, What do I need to do? Or how do I send this email. So they land research position from you, Penn, Princeton, USC, Stanford, all of these schools, even like their state schools. So that's execution. Another part of execution is creating your website, starting your podcast, starting your YouTube channel, hosting live events or virtual events nowadays, because of COVID. So we actually have something tangible that you can always have with you and create more content than ever before is scale. So I also help my students get their work published in newspapers and magazines, and do collaborations with organizations that maybe have the same mission as your passion project. So it's important to put your work out there, not

because you need to get published, but because you need to spread your message is that is Your passion, you need to put yourself out there and say, Alright, this is what I've been working on with my team. And I want people to know, I want to put it out there. So that's step number four scale. So that's our fourth step. Right, Mike for the passion project.

**M** Moira McCullough 14:15

So do you have these relationships with these professors? Or is it really just saying, okay, based on that particular theme, and that idea, here are the people that you would want to reach out to.

**J** Julie Kim 14:27

So I do not have any relationships with these professors. That would be a lot of connections that I have. Now I really despise programs where they're like, here's a program, if you go to this program, you get in, or here's a contact, reach out to this person, and then you'll get a position. I don't like that, because that's not real life. In real life, you have to face rejections. You have to do things that scare you. And that's the place of growth. And so some of my students, you When they reach out to professor's and maybe they send three emails and they're like, Julie, no one got back to me, I'm like, great. That's the way it works. Let's send out 10 more. And if they don't get back to you, then something's wrong with an email. So let's fix it. I want to teach my students how to deal with these real life scenarios early on, because I feel like Personally, I experienced them after graduating from college. After graduating from college, I was looking for jobs. And I was like, getting rejected. I'm like, Well, I went to USC, and I did business and like, I can't even get hired. No, feel like teaching our next generation to, you know, deal with objections and learning how to solve these problems head on is really important. But anyway, I'm going into a totally different topic. So I don't have any context. I

**M** Moira McCullough 15:48

think that's part of the whole, as you said, education aspect of it. I mean, students need to learn how to communicate and as you said, if you've sent out 20 different cover letters, Email introductions and no one has returned an email or response, you have to say, am I sending the right message? Those people are not the right contacts. You're right teaching them how to communicate effectively, and then deal with, okay, the response or lack of, and then I'm a research person. So I, I'm always like, well delve into a little bit more if that person is not responding, let's find 10 other people and approach it that way. So you're teaching them all the skill sets of life skills that they would then use and be more

successful in college.



Julie Kim 16:38

You can write about rejections in your college essays. Duh, right? This generation, you know, not all parents, I assuming but a lot of parents I feel like are very, very on top of their children trying to protect them. You can't get hurt. I don't want you to get rejected. But that is actually the opposite of what We need to do for our children, you know? So,



Moira McCullough 17:04

it well, it's it's so true, as you said, there's growth in that. So how can you learn from that? And then as you know, as an entrepreneur and running your own business, every day is a challenge. Every minute is a challenge, you have to adapt.



Julie Kim 17:17

Mm hmm.



Moira McCullough 17:19

So you help them identify how to connect with people in order to obtain research positions or connections in the industry that may help them with their particular project. Yeah. Okay. You know, when you talk about actually implementing and executing this, do you find that a lot of students carry this on? Is it something that oh my gosh, I absolutely love this. And I'm bringing this along to college and it's no longer a passion passion project, but it's something that they are interested in pursuing.



Julie Kim 17:56

Yeah, so for our graduating seniors, I sort of like you know, to Check their Instagram, like check. They're really like, What are you up to? And we actually still work on their passion project, it's only getting bigger and better, right? And it's a great portfolio for internships in college. Oh my goodness, it's a great asset that you get to keep for the rest of your life. And, you know, it doesn't always have to be the same, you're gonna probably change. You know, what you offer will change, your content will change a little bit, but it's something that you get to keep forever. So I think I'm not sure if everyone continues, but I think a lot of students do.

M

Moira McCullough 18:41

Have you heard about anchor, it is the easiest way to make a podcast and it's free. You can use their own creation tools to record and edit your podcast right from your phone. Anchor will distribute your podcast for you. So it can be heard on Spotify, Apple podcast, iTunes and many more. You can make money from Your podcasts with no minimum listenership. If it sounds easy it is because it is, here's how you do it, download the free anchor app, or go to anchor.fm to get started.

J

Julie Kim 19:16

We really want our focus to be about passion projects and helping you create that standoff factor. And at the same time feeling really passionate and confident in this process. And I know there are other college consultants out there who love Shalimar colleges and I know you love You know, so I think there is a time and a need for everything and we're like, okay, you know, we can work with another person when it comes to college. To be honest, I'm not too passionate about talking about colleges. So, we really want to focus on what we're truly passionate about as a team.

M

Moira McCullough 19:53

At various stages because it is such a it's, you've said it a structure up where you know, There's a certain framework, there's a cohort. How do you continue to motivate students throughout? Like, I've hit a wall? Julie, I can't think of anything help me. My passion project is stopped at stage two.

J

Julie Kim 20:16

Mm hmm. I think us meeting because it's a six month program, and we meet twice a month. So we do meet quite often. And also, we have a Facebook group for our students only where, you know, other students are sharing their wins, or maybe what they're frustrated about. So they always feel like they're in a community and that's really important in the college admission process, because a lot of students share with me that they feel lonely. You know, I can't share this with my best friend, you know, or like, I couldn't share this with someone in my school, because I think students feel like what you're doing like college admission stuff, like it's so early or you know, something like that. So there's that, but also, I am a coach. So I really helped me My students find the root cause of where this frustration or lack of motivation is coming from. And we recently hosted a seven day except the challenge and it's a free challenge that I host every year. And we talk about mindset like 90% of the time, because a lot of students feel like they

can't start something or that they are not good enough to start something because of belief that the whole and that belief probably came from their parents or from their cousins or from their uncles or from their friends. And so, the goal is to get rid of that, identify that belief and get rid of it and create another one that's going to serve you, too. When I first started, I was like, you know, when students came to me for you know, college admissions help, I was working at a company back then. And I would be like, Alright, like, let's like get a new planner and let's like set your schedule up. But I realized over and over again, that's surface level strategy, you need to dig deep and find the the real cost Have the problem. So that's how we help students motivate. And I don't give them the answer. That's not the role of a coach. They need to tell me the answer, and they have it in them. But it's just so blurred by societal expectations, peer pressure, parental expectations that they sort of don't know that. So the goal is to like, pull it out of it.

**M** Moira McCullough 22:20

How hard is it, but as a coach, that's your job. That's their, and that's what makes you so good at what you do because you help them achieve something you as you said, You're asking the right questions or asking questions that make them dig deeper and think more about themselves or the project. And interesting when you say mindset, I always think to my mindset, I was the biggest problem with my mindset. So sometimes it's not everyone else, you can blame it on everyone else but in your mind you have it were no I can't do this for whatever reason. But having somebody like yourself, kind of ask those probing questions allows them to come to the realization that maybe they are the biggest stumbling blocks in that entire process.

**J** Julie Kim 23:06

Yeah. And what I actually am finding is that it's easier to work with high school students with mindset than adults. Yeah, high school students. their belief wasn't there for a long time, maybe one year, three years. That's easy. But, you know, for me, I also had to work on a lot of my mindset to start this business and, you know, so when I was digging into my mindset, it was like, 30 years, I'm like, this belief that I was holding on to, it was so hard to get rid of. And to be honest, I'm not, you know, perfect. You know, I still have to work on my mindset. But with high school students, they are very easy. I mean, easier than adults, I would say, so we all need to have our kids their mindsets.

**M** Moira McCullough 23:51

When you said that, you know, you still have to work at yours. I thought if you're so good,

and you have it down pat, then you could have a whole nother business. It's something that everyone Working out. But that's interesting. I kind of agree with you because I think kids in general, if they're presented with some questions or working together, they're pretty flexible, and they're willing to take a risk. I think as you get older, it becomes less and less likely that people are to take or



Julie Kim 24:17

they don't have rent and pay right, our bills to take care of so like, start a passion project. Exactly.



Moira McCullough 24:25

What have been some of your really, like, unbelievably unique or really fun ones to work on?



Julie Kim 24:31

Yeah, I have a few unique ones. I mean, they're all unique in its own way, because every student is different, but I wanted to give some examples. So one of my students, his personal interest was photography, and his economic interest, his business administration, right. So he started taking photos for their prom. And he would it was like a business that he created just like it just kind of happened. And so he came to me out Like, how can I take this to the next level? So he actually started two different programs, one where he is taking photos for small business owners, he started this idea after COVID hit because the business wasn't happening and everyone had to shut down. So, online presence is so important. So he found a problem and created a solution. That's a business, right? And he helps small business owners in his local community, how to level up their social media presence using photography and taking good pictures. So important, like when we check Yelp, we looked at photos, right. So he started that, and he's also writing blog posts to help other high school students to start their photography business. There are a lot of high school students who love photography, but they for some reason think, well, I don't think it's for some reason, it's, you know, they just think like, I can't make money off of this or like I can't, but I think it's so important for high school. He wants to make money, like saving up for college, like, get some textbooks, you know, like, Don't rely on your parents. And so he also wrote some blog posts to help other high school students with that. So with his interest, he's doing many different things. But he's doing it because he's identifying the need and the problem. So that's one that I really love. And he's an amazing, amazing kid. And so I just can't wait for him to get into a good college. And

another student, she just started this passion project. She wants to be an ophthalmologist. And she wanted to become one because one of her family members, they had visual impairments. And so what she realized was that a lot of people who had visual impairments or they couldn't see fully or their vision was lost completely. They were very lonely, like, they obviously like they can't see and so she realized that through the family member, so what she's doing right now it's just starting a podcast and a community for visually impaired teenagers and adults. Like, she's gonna have people come on and just share their story. I think sometimes we just we just need to hear from other people like, it is so hard. It is so lonely. And the person hearing that podcast episode will be like, yeah, I guess I'm not alone, right. And she's also going to invite experts over to help this community out even more. So she's not providing a service, but she's providing a community. So that's, I think, very, very unique. So those are the two ones that I thought were really great, but we have many, many more.

M

Moira McCullough 27:32

The two that you mentioned, just because you look at like photography as a simple example. When you talk to about getting paid for I think sometimes we have to say, Okay, how are you going to pay for the equipment? How are you going to continue to enjoy that? Well, you need money for it. And I think nowadays more than anything, I think it's important that students have jobs, so finding the ability to help others and fill a need. That taking pictures that are prom or helping small businesses who can't afford a large photography company or somebody who's well established, students can fill that need. And I love the story too about the podcast because as we all get a little bit older, it's you know, vision is going or the hearings going to have students kind of take that and create a medium to help, especially in this environment, when you can't see other people and that building a community is so important. being okay with saying, I can't hear, I can't see but now I have a community that I can talk to about that. So you must have a whole Journal of think that you've heard it and think this is a great project, you have somebody else that comes in, so it must be very rewarding and in terms of what you do,

J

Julie Kim 28:50

yeah, after every call, I just feel so like out of this world. They're really amazing.

M

Moira McCullough 28:57

This is the one aspect where you want To focus as a business because it is so rewarding and that sense, and it's something where it's continually evolving into something else. Is

there anything that you would advice that you would give to a student as they're contemplating starting a project?



Julie Kim 29:17

My advice is, don't try to be perfect. A lot of students are free to start on something because they're like, it's not gonna be good. And let me just tell you, yeah, it's not gonna be good. But all of our students passion projects, they improve over time, who starts off like, in a perfect condition. Like I look back at my business, like something that I wrote like three years ago, and I'm like, Well, like I wrote, how did I get customers? So you work with what you have, and you always look for improvements. So don't aim for perfection and colleges are not looking for a perfect student. A perfect person doesn't exist. Let that just sink in. So that would be My advice.



Moira McCullough 30:01

I think that's something that you have to continuously reinforce and say to yourself each and every day or week, because that's the first mindset issue that you have to overcome. Yeah. What do you wish you knew before you attended college?



Julie Kim 30:18

I wish I knew the beauty of just being honest and being vulnerable with myself. I was so caught up in how I was presented to other people. And going to USC was like a huge ego boost, you know, and that identified me. So I identified myself with surface level accomplishments. While they are great, they should not define you. So I wish I knew how beautiful life is. Once you start to be honest with yourself, and, you know, be vulnerable with who you are.



Moira McCullough 30:57

I can see why you're a coach. I always like to end with, is there a favorite dessert that you had on a college campus at USC?



Julie Kim 31:07

Yeah. So when I was at Harvard, we ate insomnia cookies. Have you had them?

**M** Moira McCullough 31:14

Well, I've had them on not just Harvard, but every other campus that I go to.

**J** Julie Kim 31:20

Oh, it's not it's like everywhere.

**M** Moira McCullough 31:21

It is.

**J** Julie Kim 31:22

Okay, got it. So anyway, like, my everyone's in Sonia cookies, and we were like doing a group project. And they're like, yeah, we can just order a box. And I'm like, and I had one it was like, so good. I gained a few pounds but worth it. That was really

**M** Moira McCullough 31:35

good. It's no, it's so good. And I think too, sometimes when it's in the middle of the night and you get a warm cookie. I mean, what's better than that? Right. Julie, thank you so much for sharing your passion project, outline and program with us because you provided a really great overview of what you offer and how students can really look at it and approach it in a manner that They will have fun. First off, they will learn something about themselves. And they may even give back to the community, which is even a greater joy to experience and everything else.

**J** Julie Kim 32:15

Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. Thank you.

**M** Moira McCullough 32:21

Many thanks to Julie for joining me today. I really enjoyed our conversation and all the helpful information Julie shared with us. Her ability to get students to come out of their comfort zone take a risk to pursue their hobbies and interests, and eventually create a passion project that will help them get into their dream college. She encourages students to reach out to professors and experts in the field that help them with their projects, land

internships, and or research opportunities. Don't try to be perfect, you will face rejection and you will do things that scare you. But knowing how to deal with these real life situations will help you and create lifelong skills. You can learn all about our show notes. helpful links to the resources mentioned throughout our conversation on our website at college scoops comm slash podcast. You can learn more about Julie on her website at Julie Kim Consulting.com, at Instagram at Julie\_Kim7 or on Facebook. Please take a couple of minutes to rate review and subscribe to College Scoops. Thank you for listening to our College Scoops podcast. Our entire College Scoops team strives to make the college journey a little bit easier, less stressful, fun and tasty by sharing all the inside scoops we have curated along the way. We would love to hear from you about topics to cover and your ideas and everything college related. Reach out to us at College Scoops.com or follow us on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.