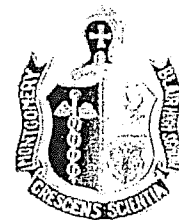


Blazing a Path to College and Career

Montgomery Blair High School Counseling Department



RANGE OF SCHOOLS CHART

Name _____ SAT/ACT _____

GPA _____ WGA _____

Selectivity Code	SAT/ACT	School(s)	GPA	WGPA
R+				
R				
R				
T+				
T				
T				
S+				
S				
S				

R = Reach

T = Target

S = Safety

+ = More Difficult

“Wild Card” Factors:

College Comparison Worksheet

COLLEGE NAME			
Location —distance from home			
Size —enrollment —physical size of campus			
Environment —type of school (2- or 4-year) —school setting (urban, rural) —location & size of nearest city —co-ed, male, female —religious affiliation			
Admission Requirements —deadline —tests required —average test scores, GPA, rank —notification			
Academics —your major offered —special requirements —accreditation —student-faculty ratio —typical class size			
College Expenses —tuition, room and board —estimated total budget —application fee, deposits			
Financial Aid —deadline —required forms —percentage receiving aid —scholarships			
Housing —residence hall requirement —food plan			
Facilities —academic —recreational —other			
Activities —clubs, organizations —Greek life —athletics, intramurals —other			
Campus Visits —when —special opportunities			

Speak the Language: College Admissions

If you're not familiar with the college admissions process, it probably seems like it has a language all its own. To help you learn the lingo, here are definitions of some of the college admission terms you're likely to come across.

Acceptance Rate: The percentage of applicants a college accepts for admission.

Accreditation: Certification that a college meets the standards of a state, regional or national association.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA): This agreement, sponsored by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, states that in order to allow students to consider all their college options, students have until May 1 to accept any college's offer of admission.

Common/Universal Application: Standardized application forms accepted by many colleges. After you fill out the Common or Universal Application, you can send it to any college that accepts it as the institution's own application.

Competitive College: A college with a rigorous, highly selective admissions process. Competitive colleges typically admit fewer than 25 percent of applicants.

Deferred Admission: A student's option to defer an offer of admission for up to two years.

Personal Statement: Sometimes referred to as a college application essay, personal statements are essays that give admissions officers insights into your character, personality and motivation.

Reach School: A college where admission might be a stretch for you, based on the average GPA and test scores of accepted students and the college's overall admission requirements.

Retention Rate: The percentage of students who return to a college for their sophomore year. An indicator of student satisfaction.

Safety School: A college where, based on the average GPA and test scores of accepted students, you have a high likelihood of being admitted.

Student-Faculty Ratio: The number of students at a college compared to the number of faculty. Some colleges see this as an indicator of class size and professor accessibility, but a lower ratio doesn't guarantee either. For a true indication of class size and professor accessibility, speak with students and professors at a college.

Supplemental Material: Items you include with your college application to provide more information about your talents, experiences and goals. Materials could include work samples, additional essays, newspaper clippings, music CDs or art slides. Verify if a college welcomes (or requests) these materials before sending.

Transcript: An official record of classes you have taken and the grades you received. Usually you must provide a high school transcript with your college application.

Waitlist: A list of students a college may eventually decide to admit if space becomes available.

Yield: The percentage of accepted students who go on to enroll at that college. Competitive colleges have high yield rates.

Cappex Fit Fact: More than half of all students enrolling said a "very important reason" for going to college was "to find my purpose in life." Go to Cappex.com today to see which colleges match your fit factors. It's free and easy!

DEFINITIONS OF ADMISSION OPTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION



National Association for
College Admission Counseling
Guiding the way to higher education

STUDENTS: WHICH COLLEGE ADMISSION PROCESS BEST SUITS YOU?

Non-Restrictive Application Plans

Regular Decision

DEFINITION:

Students submit an application by a specified date and receive a decision in a clearly stated period of time.

COMMITMENT:

NON-BINDING

Rolling Admission

DEFINITION:

Institutions review applications as they are submitted and render admission decisions throughout the admission cycle.

COMMITMENT:

NON-BINDING

Early Action (EA)

DEFINITION:

Students apply early and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date.

COMMITMENT:

NON-BINDING

Restrictive Application Plans

Early Decision (ED)

DEFINITION:

Students make a commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. The application deadline and decision deadline occur early.

COMMITMENT:

BINDING

Restrictive Early Action (REA)

DEFINITION:

Students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision early. They may be restricted from applying ED or EA or REA to other institutions. If offered enrollment, they have until May 1 to confirm.

COMMITMENT:

NON-BINDING

Students are not restricted from applying to other institutions and have until May 1 to consider their options and confirm enrollment.

Students are responsible for determining and following restrictions.

SAT vs. ACT

SAT or ACT? Do you know which test is right for you?

Colleges accept both test equally, so the choice is up to you! Here's what you need to know to compare the exams.

	SAT	ACT
Why Take It	Colleges use SAT scores for admissions and merit-based scholarships	Colleges use ACT scores for admissions and merit-based scholarships
Test Structure	3 tests Math Reading Writing and Language Essay (Optional)	4 tests: Math Reading English Science Essay (Optional)
Length	3 hours (without essay) 3 hours, 50 minutes (with essay)	2 hours, 55 minutes (without essay) 3 hours, 40 minutes (with essay)
Reading	5 reading passages	4 reading passages
Science	None	1 science section testing your critical thinking skills (not your specific science knowledge)
Math	Covers Arithmetic, Algebra I & II, Geometry, Trigonometry and Data Analysis	Covers Arithmetic, Algebra I & II, Geometry and Trigonometry
Tools	Some math questions don't allow you to use a calculator	You can use a calculator on all math questions
Essays	Optional. The essay will test your comprehension of a source text	Optional. The essay will test how well you evaluate and analyze complex issues.
How It's Scored	Scored on a scale of 400–1600	Scored on a scale of 1–36

SAT and ACT Conversion Chart

SAT Composite Score (Math, CR & W)	ACT Composite Score	SAT Composite Score (Math & CR only)
2400	36	1600
2340-2390	35	1540-1590
2280-2330	34	1490-1530
2220-2270	33	1440-1480
2160-2210	32	1400-1430
2100-2150	31	1360-1390
2040-2090	30	1330-1350
1980-2030	29	1290-1320
1920-1970	28	1250-1280
1860-1910	27	1210-1240
1800-1850	26	1170-1200
1740-1790	25	1130-1160
1680-1730	24	1090-1120
1620-1670	23	1050-1080
1560-1610	22	1020-1040
1500-1550	21	980-1010
1440-1490	20	940-970
1380-1430	19	900-930
1320-1370	18	860-890
1260-1310	17	820-850
1200-1250	16	770-810
1140-1190	15	720-760
1080-1130	14	670-710
1020-1070	13	620-660
960-1010	12	560-610
900-950	11	510-550

The ACT [®] Test (ACT)		SAT [®] (College Board)
Test Fee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$93.50 \$109.50 (with writing) <i>Pricing subject to change</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$78.00–\$107.50, depending on location
Test Purpose	Designed to measure academic achievement in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Mathematics English Writing (optional) Science 	Designed to measure: ² <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Mathematics Writing and Language The SAT Essay (Optional)
Accepted for University Admission	The ACT is accepted by all colleges and universities in the United States and more than 225 other universities around the world.	Accepted by all US colleges. ³
US High School Graduates Tested in 2015 ⁴	1,924,436	1,548,198
Test Content	<p>ACT Mathematics Test (60 items, 60 minutes) Multiple-Choice 100%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing for higher math <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number & Quantity Algebra Functions Geometry Statistics & Probability Integrating essential skills Modeling <p>ACT Reading Test (40 items, 35 minutes) Multiple-Choice 100%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key ideas and details Craft and structure Integration of knowledge and ideas <p>ACT English Test (75 items, 45 minutes) Multiple-Choice 100%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production of Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topic Development Organization, Unity, and Cohesion Knowledge of Language Conventions of Standard English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentence Structure and Formation Punctuation Usage <p>ACT Science Test (40 items, 35 minutes) Multiple-Choice 100%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpretation of data Scientific investigation Evaluation of Models, inferences, and experimental results <p>Passage Formats on the Science Test:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data Representation Research Summaries Conflicting Viewpoints <p>ACT Writing Test (optional) (1 prompt, 40 minutes) Measures writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses. Consists of one 40-minute essay.</p>	<p>SAT Mathematics (Total 58 items, 80 minutes) Calculator Portion (38 items, 55 Minutes) Multiple-Choice 79%, Grid-In 21%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heart of Algebra Problem Solving and Data Analysis Passport to Advanced Math Other Topics <p>No-Calculator Portion (20 items with 25 minutes) Multiple-Choice 75%, Grid-In 25%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heart of Algebra Passport to Advanced Math Other Topics <p>SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing Reading Test (52 items, 65 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> US and World Literature History/Social Studies Science <p>Writing and Language Test (44 items, 35 Minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers History/Social Studies Humanities Science <p>No Science Test Note: Reading subject test is constructed of 40% science and the Writing and Language subject test is constructed of 25% science.</p> <p>SAT Essay (optional) (1 task, 50 minutes) Tests reading, analysis, and writing skills; students produce a written analysis of a provided source text.</p>
Method of Scoring	Scores based on number of right answers. No penalty for incorrect answers.	Scores based on number of right answers. No penalty for incorrect answers.

1. Every effort has been made to represent the ACT and SAT information accurately and concisely. All information has been drawn from official publications and websites of the organizations.
 2. www.collegeboard.org/sat/sat/2014/expand-opportunity-redesign-sat
 3. Information from <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/about/benefits>
 4. Figures are from the test publishers' Program Results Reports, and include US students in the 2015 high school graduating class who took the ACT or SAT.

The ACT [®] Test (ACT)		SAT [®] (College Board)
Test Score Scales	<p>ACT Composite Score: 1–36</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Average of four test scores ▪ Does not include writing <p>ACT Mathematics Test: 1–36</p> <p>ACT Reading Test: 1–36</p> <p>ACT English Test: 1–36</p> <p>ACT Science Test: 1–36</p> <p>ACT Writing Test (optional): 2–12</p> <p>Additional Scores and Indicators (New readiness scores and indicators give students, parents, and educators more detailed insights to better plan for future success.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ STEM Score: 1–36 ▪ ELA Score: 1–36 ▪ Progress Toward Career Readiness Indicator ▪ Text Complexity Progress Indicator 	<p>SAT Composite Score: 400–1600</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sum of two section scores ▪ Does not include essay <p>SAT Mathematics: 200–800</p> <p>SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing: 200–800</p> <p>No Science Test</p> <p>SAT Essay (optional): 2–8</p>
Student Information	<p>Student Profile Section When students complete the Profile section, ACT connects their unique interests, abilities, and values with potential education and career paths.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Admission/Enrollment Information ▪ Educational Plans, Interests, and Goals ▪ College Extracurricular Plans ▪ Financial Aid ▪ Background Information (Demographics) ▪ High School Courses, Grades, and Extracurricular Activities ▪ Out of Class Accomplishments <p>Educational and Career Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACT Interest Inventory⁵ ▪ ACT World-of-Work Map⁶ ▪ College Majors and Programs 	<p>Student Descriptive Questionnaire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Background (Demographics) ▪ Academic Background ▪ High School and Community Activities ▪ Sports ▪ Student Plans for College
Common Uses⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Admissions ▪ Talent Identification ▪ Academic Advising ▪ Freshman Course Placement Decisions ▪ Awarding Course Credit, Especially in English and Math Courses ▪ Awarding Scholarships (not sole criterion) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Admissions ▪ Talent Identification ▪ Academic Advising ▪ Awarding Scholarships (not sole criterion)
Research Services⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Class Profile Service ▪ Admissions Service ▪ Course Placement Service ▪ Retention Research Service ▪ ACT Enrollment Information Service (ACT EIS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Class Profile Service ▪ Validity Research Service

5. ACT Interest Inventory matches your interests and skills to job descriptions. One of the most difficult tasks faced by students is to find occupations appropriate to their goals and personal characteristics. The ACT Interest Inventory provides a focus to career exploration by pointing to world-of-work regions individuals may wish to explore. Through exploration, people can find occupations they might otherwise have missed.

6. The ACT World-of-Work Map organizes occupations into six clusters (occupational types), 12 regions, and 26 career areas (groups of similar jobs). It shows how occupations relate to each other according to primary work tasks.

7. These are common uses by universities to identify and qualify students for admission.

8. These are common uses by research services groups to study demographics and comparative analysis.

SAT Subject Tests

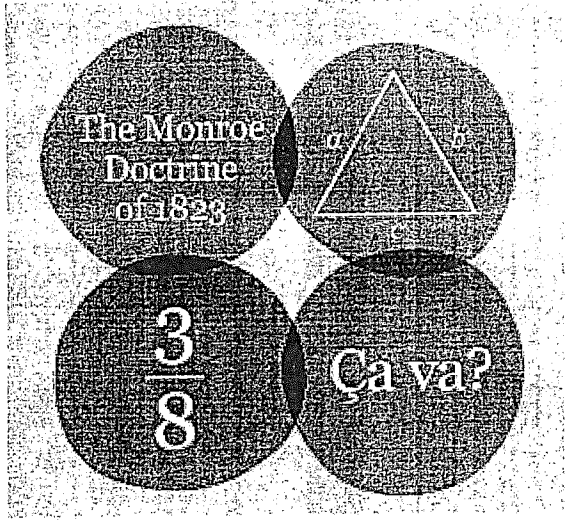
There are 20 SAT Subject Tests divided into five categories: English, history, mathematics, science and languages.

Here's a complete list of all the Subject Tests:

- English
 - Literature
- History
 - U.S. History
 - World History
- Mathematics
 - Mathematics Level 1 (Assesses knowledge from 2 years Algebra & 1 Geometry)
 - Mathematics Level 2 (Includes material from Mathematics Level 1 test — with the addition of trigonometry and elementary functions (precalculus))
- Science
 - Biology E/M (Ecological or Molecular)
 - Chemistry
 - Physics
- Languages
 - Chinese with Listening
 - French
 - French with Listening
 - German
 - German with Listening
 - Modern Hebrew
 - Italian
 - Japanese with Listening
 - Korean with Listening
 - Latin
 - Spanish
 - Spanish with Listening

Which SAT Subject Tests Should You Take

Stand out in the admission process



Wondering which test to take?

There are 20 Subject Tests across five general subject areas: history, mathematics, science, English, and foreign languages. The SAT Subject Tests that you take should be based on your interests and academic strengths. The tests are a great way to indicate interest in specific majors or programs of study (e.g., engineering, pre-med, cultural studies).

You should also consider whether the colleges that you're interested in require or recommend Subject Tests. Some colleges will grant an exemption from or credit for a freshman course requirement if a student does well on a particular SAT Subject Test.

Think through your strengths and interests

- List the subjects in which you do well and that truly interest you.
- Think through what you might like to study in college.
- Consider whether your current admission credentials (high school grades, SAT scores, etc.) highlight your strengths.

Consider the colleges that you're interested in

- Make a list of the colleges you're considering.
- Take some time to look into what these colleges require or what may help you stand out in the admission process.
- Use [College Search](#) to look up colleges' test requirements.
- If the colleges you're interested in require or recommend SAT Subject Tests, find out how many tests are required or recommended and in which subjects.

What if I don't know which colleges I'm going to apply to?

You should consider taking Subject Tests in the subjects that you're interested in and have completed course work for, particularly if you think you may wish to concentrate in that area in college. Many times, students are

surprised to find out in the fall of their senior year that a college or a program they're interested in requires or recommends SAT Subject Tests. You can avoid this last-minute stress by building your credentials along the way when you're most prepared to do well on these tests. Many colleges that don't require or recommend Subject Tests will still consider them when reviewing your application.

What if the colleges that I'm interested in don't require Subject Test scores?

You may still want to take Subject Tests in the subjects that you excel in and submit those scores. Many colleges may still consider Subject Tests when reviewing your application, since they give a more complete picture of your academic background and send a strong signal regarding your readiness to focus on a specific major or program of study. Subject Tests can also help you place into the right courses once you get to college, or potentially receive credit for subjects you've performed well in.

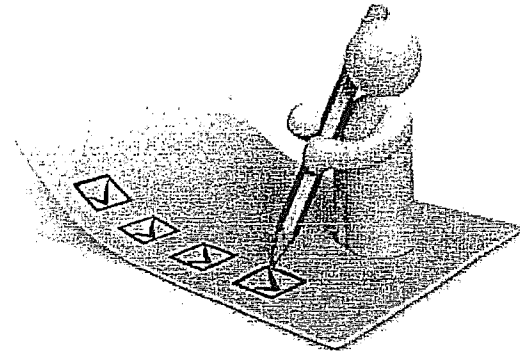
Take a look at your current and recent course load

- Have you completed the required course work? The best time to take SAT Subject Tests is at the end of the course, when the material is still fresh in your mind.
- Check the recommended preparation guidelines for the Subject Tests that interest you to see if you've completed the recommended course work.
- Try your hand at some SAT Subject Test practice questions.

Still thinking about which SAT Subject Tests to take? Talk to your teacher or counselor to see which SAT Subject Tests are right for you.

Developing a College List

Why college? Whether you've known your entire high school career that college would be your next step or you've decided as a junior or senior to pursue that option; that question is the key to which schools you want on your list. The answer is less about what to major in and more about how you want your college to impact you, help you grow, and challenge you personally and academically. To answer that question, focus on what factors in college are most important to you, especially as they relate to people, program and place... then ask yourself more questions like these:



PEOPLE: College will give you a chance to branch out and interact with new people—professors, roommates, classmates, advisors, participants in clubs, perhaps teammates—all of whom make up the personality of the campus. Do you want that “personality” to be like your high school experience or not? What level of academic competitiveness do you want? Do you want to meet people from different parts of the country, different countries, different perspectives? To connect with professors, will you learn best in small classes or can you handle large lectures at first?

PROGRAM: What majors and minors are important or interesting to you at this point (most freshmen change their minds about a major so be flexible)? Do you want to do undergraduate research, study abroad, have an internship? What clubs and organizations would you like to join? Is Greek life important? Are you looking for a school that emphasizes community service? Do you want to play intercollegiate, club, or intramural sports? How important will it be to have tutoring and/or academic advising services?

PLACE: How far from home do you want to be (college is a great time to explore a new part of the country)? What's important to you in terms of size, proximity to a city or recreational areas, climate and weather, attractiveness of the campus and its surroundings? How competitive is the admissions process and what's required for admission? Does the school offer merit scholarships, meet 100 percent of aid? Do you want to live on campus all four years? Would you want a separate freshman dorm, co-ed dorms, residential fraternities/sororities, specialty dorms (foreign language, ethnic, etc.)? Do you need special food options for religious or other reasons? Are computer labs accessible 24/7? Do you need to bring your own computer or do freshmen receive laptops?

This is your process, with parents and counselors serving in supporting roles. Once you establish the criteria that are most important to you, the next step is research. No one source has all the answers. Talk with your

parents and your school counselor; attend college fairs; meet with admission reps who visit your high school; view college Web sites; consult other resources, such as *The Fiske Guide*, *Colleges That Change Lives*, *Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges*, *College Board Book of Majors* and *College Guide*, and Peterson's.

After all the research, create your list of schools. While there's no magic number of how many or how few to include, the average number of applications most seniors submit is five–nine. The real keys are to be sure every school on your list is a place you would seriously consider attending and to have some reach, some target, and some likely schools on the list.

Knowing “Why College?” and having your list in hand, you're ready for the next step!

by Phyllis Gill, Associate Director of College Guidance Providence Day School

Back to: Guidance for Juniors

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GET THE MOST OUT OF A CAMPUS VISIT IN 6 STEPS

1 DECIDE WHERE AND HOW

See if your school arranges group trips to colleges or if you could get a group of friends together and visit the campus. A family trip is another option and allows you to involve your family in the process.

2 PREPARE FOR YOUR VISIT

Before you set out, get a map of the college campus and pick out places of interest. Call the college's admission office to schedule a guided tour of the campus.

3 TAKE YOUR OWN TOUR

Just wandering around the campus on your own or with friends can be the best way to get a feel for what a college is like.

4 EXPLORE THE FACILITIES

Find the spots on campus where students gather or ask a student where the best place to eat is to get a feel for the character of the college. Visit the library and check out the gym or theater. Ask an admission officer if you can tour a dorm and a classroom.

5 MAKE CONNECTIONS

Talk to current students. Ask the students at the next table or sitting nearby what they like best about the college.

6 TAKE NOTES

During your visit, write down some notes about your experience. What did you see that excited you? Are there aspects of the college that you don't like? If so, what are they?

Questions to Ask During Your Visit:

ASK TOUR GUIDES/STUDENTS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- What's it like to go from high school to college?
- What do you do in your free time? On the weekends?
- What do you love about this college?
- What do you wish you could change about this college?
- Why did you choose this college?
- What is it like to live here?
- What does the college do to promote student involvement in campus groups, extracurricular activities, or volunteerism?

ASK PROFESSORS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- Can a student be mentored by professors, graduate students, or upperclassmen?
- How are professors rated by the college? Does the college think mentoring and meetings for project guidance are important?
- How does the college help students have access to professors outside class? Do professors join students for lunch, help with community service groups, or guide student organizations?
- How many students do research or other kinds of projects for a semester or more?

ASK THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

- How much has your total college cost for each student risen in the past year?
- How much do your students usually end up owing when they graduate?
- What is the average income of graduates who had the same major that interests me?
- Will my costs go up when your tuition goes up, or can we use the same tuition rate I started with so I'll know the costs for four years?
- How many students usually graduate in the major that interests me? How long do these students usually take to get their degree? In what ways does the college help students graduate in four years?

Campus Visit Checklist

Visiting a college campus helps you get a sense of what a college — and life at that college — is like. This can help you decide whether the college is right for you.

GATHER INFORMATION

Find out what you need to do to apply, and see if the college's class and major offerings are what you want:

- Take part in a group information session at the admission office.
- Interview with an admission officer.
- Pick up financial aid forms.
- Sit in on a class that interests you. If classes aren't in session, just see what the classrooms are like.
- Meet a professor who teaches a subject that interests you.
- Talk to students about what they think of their classes and professors.
- Get the names and business cards of the people you meet so you can contact them later if you have questions.

EXPLORE THE CAMPUS

Get a feel for student life, and see if this college is a place where you will do well:

- Take a campus tour.
- Talk to current students about the college and life on campus.
- Check out the freshman dorms, and stay overnight with a student, if possible.
- Visit the dining hall, fitness center, library, career center, bookstore, and other campus facilities.
- Talk to the coaches of sports that you may want to play.
- Walk or drive around the community surrounding the campus.

CHECK OUT CAMPUS MEDIA

Tune in to learn what's happening on campus and what's on students' minds:

- Listen to the college radio station.
- Read the student newspaper.
- Scan bulletin boards to see what daily student life is like.
- Go to the career center and learn what services it offers.
- Browse the school's website and any campus blogs.
- Read other student publications, such as department newsletters, alternative newspapers, and literary reviews.

Here are five thought-starters to help plan your campus visits!

1. When?

Look through your jam-packed calendar and mark off time for when you can travel.

MARCH	JUNE	OCTOBER
Spring Break	Summer <small>(May not have campus activities of the normal school year)</small>	Fall

2. Where?

Is there a geographic “hot spot” with colleges you’re interested in? Map together the schools you want to visit that are driving distance from each other:

College Group 1	College Group 2	College Group 3

Plan your route with the Campus Visit Planner at Cappex.com/campusvisits.

3. What?

The point of visiting schools is to experience the differences in each campus and the culture. Cappex’s Campus Visit Planner will help you get the most out of your visit by helping you set up appointments.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in an Info Session | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a Campus Tour | <input type="checkbox"/> Set Up an Interview |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meet With a Professor | <input type="checkbox"/> Sit in on a Class | <input type="checkbox"/> Stay in a Dorm |

4. How?

Make the final arrangements.

Who will you go with? Travel with people who will want you to get the most out of your college visits.

Where will you stay? Make arrangements ahead of time before hotels are full and rates go up.

5. Pack & Go!

Besides the necessary items, bring along extra things to make a long road trip better:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your Music | <input type="checkbox"/> Snacks | <input type="checkbox"/> Camera/Video Camera |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Map/GPS | <input type="checkbox"/> Pillow | <input type="checkbox"/> Sunglasses & Sunscreen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Aid Kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Cappex Worksheets (to journal your experiences and compare campuses) | |

Make your college trip simple with Cappex’s Campus Visit Planner. Start at Cappex.com/campusvisits.

College Visit Checklist

To help you find the right college, fill out one of these forms each time you visit a school.

College Name

City

State

Size

Tuition

Room/Board

Financial Aid Options

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

Admissions Contact

Name

Email

Phone

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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To-Do Checklist

Talk to professors

Visit the library

Tour campus

Sit in on a class

Eat at a cafeteria

Talk to an admissions counselor

Read the college newspaper

Check out computer labs

Talk to students

Visit student housing

Read bulletin boards

Check out recreational facilities

Check out student activities

Tour the city around campus

Eat at an off-campus student hang-out

Picture yourself living here

Rate It

On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the best, rate the following:

People _____

Social Life _____

Classrooms _____

Residence Halls _____

Town _____

Campus _____

Food _____

Ask a Student

What is the best part about this college?

What is the worst part?

What is a typical day like?

What do the students do on the weekends?

How are classes structured?

Why did you choose this college?

The Best Part About My Visit

The Worst Part About My Visit

Plan your college road trip with the Cappex Campus Visit Planner™. It's free and easy! Start at Cappex.com/campusvisits.

5½ Steps to Writing a College Admissions Essay

APPLY

1. Write in Your Own Voice

No matter what the essay question is, you can express who you are by answering in your voice. Avoid common tactics of trying to sound overly intellectual. Simply showing that you can use the English language, follow directions and articulate who you are will go far.

1½. Know What Your Voice Is

Your voice is distinctly yours. Recognize the qualities that distinguish you from others. **What are three qualities that make you stand out from others?**

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2. Don't Repeat Yourself: Don't Be Repetitive

Your essay should tell admission representatives something they haven't already read in your application. **What are three things the admission representatives won't know about you until they read your essay?**

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If any of these three things match any of the qualities in section 1½, that should tell you what you need to get across to the admission representative!

3. Give Yourself Enough Time to Write, Revise and Repeat

The writing process takes time, so give yourself enough of it. Before you even write, just brainstorm ideas. From there, craft an outline, and from there write a draft. Have someone like a parent, teacher or friend edit your essay. Take your editor's suggestions, make changes and rework the piece. Here's a checklist for writing your college admission essay:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorm | <input type="checkbox"/> Edit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outline | <input type="checkbox"/> Revise |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Draft | |

4. Are You Answering the Right Question?

With the stress of writing an essay, a lot of times the main point of the essay goes out the window. Remember, you need to answer the question the college asked. Even if you have the most beautifully written essay on your ability to talk to dogs, are you sure it answers the question? For every essay you write, re-read the question and double check that you have provided an appropriate response.

5. Get Some Mileage Out of It

Essay questions may be different for each school, but in many cases you can use what you already have toward another question. It's not as simple as copy and paste, but you can repurpose parts of your essay to make sense with a new question. Still, remember section 4! Make sure that your repurposed essay answers the question. Also, avoid at all costs accidentally leaving the wrong college's name in your essay.

All of these steps take time. Do yourself a favor and start your essays early!

What Sets You Apart?

PREPARE

Fill this out before you begin your college search to get an idea of your accomplishments and what you want out of college. Bring this to your counselor to start a discussion.

Name	GPA	SAT Score	ACT Score
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

My Academic Strengths Are

- Science Math English Foreign Language History Technology Fine Arts

How would your best friends describe you?

What adjectives would you say best describe you?

What in-school activities do you enjoy most?

What activities do you enjoy least?

What out-of-school activities do you participate in? Volunteer work?

Which talents make you stand out?

Prior to graduation I hope to accomplish ...

After high school I hope to accomplish ...

FEDERAL STUDENT AID AT A GLANCE

2017-18

WHAT is federal student aid?

Federal student aid comes from the federal government—specifically, the U.S. Department of Education. It's money that helps a student pay for higher education expenses (i.e., college, career school, or graduate school expenses).

Federal student aid covers such expenses as tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and transportation.

There are three main categories of federal student aid: grants, work-study, and loans. Check with your school's financial aid office to find out which programs the school participates in.

WHO gets federal student aid?

Every student who meets certain eligibility requirements can get some type of federal student aid, regardless of age or family income. Some of the most basic eligibility requirements are that you must

- demonstrate financial need (for most programs—to learn more, visit StudentAid.gov/how-calculated);
- be a U.S. citizen or an eligible noncitizen;
- have a valid Social Security number;
- register (if you haven't already) with Selective Service, if you're a male between the ages of 18 and 25;
- maintain satisfactory academic progress in college or career school; and
- show you're qualified to obtain a college or career school education by
 - having a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or a state-recognized equivalent; or
 - completing a high school education in a home-school setting approved under state law; or
 - enrolling in an eligible career pathways program.

Find more details about eligibility criteria at StudentAid.gov/eligibility.

Federal
Student
Aid

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HOW do you apply for federal student aid?

1. **Create an FSA ID.** Students, parents, and borrowers should create an FSA ID, made up of a username and password, to submit their *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) online and to access U.S. Department of Education websites. Your FSA ID is used to confirm your identity and electronically sign your federal student aid documents. To create an FSA ID, visit StudentAid.gov/fsaid.

2. **Complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) at fafsa.gov.** If you plan to attend college from July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018, you'll be able to submit a 2017–18 FAFSA beginning on Oct. 1, 2016. You'll be required to report income and tax information from 2015. Schools and states often use FAFSA information to award nonfederal aid, but their deadlines vary. Check with the schools that you're interested in for their deadlines, and find state deadlines at fafsa.gov.

NOTE: In the past, you couldn't submit the FAFSA until January 1 of the year you planned to attend college. The change to October 1 is a permanent change, and you'll be able to complete and submit your FAFSA as early as October 1 every year.

3. **Review your *Student Aid Report*.** After you apply, you'll receive a *Student Aid Report*, or SAR. Your SAR contains the information reported on your FAFSA and usually includes your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC is a number (not a dollar amount) used to determine your eligibility for federal student aid. Review your SAR information to make sure it's correct. The school(s) you list on your FAFSA will get your SAR data electronically.

4. **Contact the school(s) you might attend.** Make sure the financial aid office at each school you're interested in has all the information needed to determine your eligibility. If you're eligible, each school's financial aid office will send you an aid offer showing the amount and types of aid (from all sources) the school will offer you. You can compare the aid offers you received and see which school is the most affordable once financial aid is taken into account.

HAVE
QUESTIONS?

Contact or visit the following:

- StudentAid.gov
- a college financial aid office
- studentaid@ed.gov

- 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) toll-free
- 1-800-730-8913 (toll-free TTY for the hearing impaired)

Program and Type of Aid	Program Information	Annual Award Amount (Subject to change)
Federal Pell Grant Grant: does not have to be repaid	For undergraduates with exceptional financial need who have not earned bachelor's or professional degrees.	Amounts can change annually. For 2017-18 (July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018), the award amount is up to \$5,920. Visit StudentAid.gov/pell-grant for more information.
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) Grant: does not have to be repaid	For undergraduates with exceptional financial need.	Up to \$4,000. Visit StudentAid.gov/fseog for more information.
Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant Grant: does not have to be repaid unless student fails to carry out service obligation	For undergraduate, postbaccalaureate, and graduate students who are completing or plan to complete course work needed to begin a career in teaching. As a condition for receiving this grant, student must sign a TEACH Grant Agreement to Serve in which the student agrees to perform four years of qualifying teaching service and meet other requirements.	Up to \$4,000. Visit StudentAid.gov/teach for more information.
Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant Grant: does not have to be repaid	For students who are not Pell-eligible due only to having less financial need than is required to receive Pell funds; whose parent or guardian died as a result of military service in Iraq or Afghanistan after the events of 9/11.	The grant award can be equal to the maximum Federal Pell Grant amount (see above), but cannot exceed your cost of attending school. Visit StudentAid.gov/Iraq-Afghanistan for more information.
Federal Work-Study Work-Study: money is earned; does not have to be repaid	For undergraduate and graduate students; part-time jobs can be on campus or off campus. Money is earned while attending school.	No annual minimum or maximum amounts. Visit StudentAid.gov/workstudy for more information.
Direct Subsidized Loan Loan: must be repaid with interest	For undergraduate students who have financial need; U.S. Department of Education generally pays interest while the student is in school and during certain other periods; student must be at least half-time. Interest rate is 3.76% for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2016 and before July 1, 2017, and fixed for the life of the loan. Visit StudentAid.gov/interest for more information.	Up to \$5,500 depending on grade level and dependency status. Visit StudentAid.gov/sub-unsub for more information.
Direct Unsubsidized Loan Loan: must be repaid with interest	For undergraduate and graduate or professional students; borrower is responsible for all interest; student must be at least half-time; financial need is not required. Interest rate is 3.76% (undergraduate) and 5.31% (graduate or professional) for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2016 and before July 1, 2017, and fixed for the life of the loan. Visit StudentAid.gov/interest for more information.	Up to \$20,500 (less any subsidized amounts received for same period), depending on grade level and dependency status. Visit StudentAid.gov/sub-unsub for more information.
Direct PLUS Loan Loan: must be repaid with interest	For parents of dependent undergraduate students and for graduate or professional students; borrower is responsible for all interest; student must be enrolled at least half-time; financial need is not required; borrower must not have an adverse credit history. Interest rate is 6.31% for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2016 and before July 1, 2017, and fixed for the life of loan. Visit StudentAid.gov/interest for more information.	Maximum amount is cost of attendance minus any other financial aid received. Visit StudentAid.gov/plus for more information.
Federal Perkins Loan Loan: must be repaid with interest	For undergraduate and graduate students with exceptional financial need. Eligibility depends on the student's financial need and availability of funds at the school. For questions on Perkins Loan eligibility, students must contact the school's financial aid office. Interest rate is 5% and fixed for the life of the loan.	Undergraduate students: up to \$5,500; graduate and professional students: up to \$8,000. Visit StudentAid.gov/perkins for more information.

Note: The information in this document was compiled in spring 2016. For updates or additional information, visit StudentAid.gov.

LOOKING FOR MORE SOURCES FOR FREE MONEY?

Try StudentAid.gov/scholarships for tips on where to look and for a link to a free online scholarship search.

MAY 2015

Federal Student Aid

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College Students and Parents: What You Need to Know About the 2017–18 FAFSA®

What's changing for 2017–18?

Starting with the 2017–18 *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®), these changes will be in effect:

- **You'll be able to submit your FAFSA® earlier.** You can file your 2017–18 FAFSA as early as Oct. 1, 2016, rather than beginning on Jan. 1, 2017. The earlier submission date will be a permanent change, enabling you to complete and submit a FAFSA as early as October 1 every year.
- **You'll use earlier income and tax information.** Beginning with the 2017–18 FAFSA, students will be required to report income and tax information from an earlier tax year. For example, on the 2017–18 FAFSA, you—and your parent(s), as appropriate—will report your 2015 income and tax information, rather than your 2016 income and tax information.

The following table provides a summary of key dates as we transition to using the early FAFSA submission timeframe and earlier tax information.

When a Student Is Attending College (School Year)	When a Student Can Submit a FAFSA	Which Year's Income and Tax Information Is Required
July 1, 2015–June 30, 2016	January 1, 2015–June 30, 2016	2014
July 1, 2016–June 30, 2017	January 1, 2016–June 30, 2017	2015
July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018	October 1, 2016–June 30, 2018	2015
July 1, 2018–June 30, 2019	October 1, 2017–June 30, 2019	2016

How will the changes benefit me?

We expect that you'll benefit in these ways:

- Because the FAFSA will ask for older income and tax information, you will already have done your taxes by the time you fill out your FAFSA, and you won't need to estimate your tax information and then go back into the FAFSA later to update it.
- Because you'll already have done your taxes by the time you fill out your FAFSA, you may be able to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT) to automatically import your tax information into your FAFSA. (Learn about the IRS DRT at StudentAid.gov/irsdrt.)
- Because the FAFSA is available earlier, you may feel less pressure due to having more time to explore and understand your financial aid options and apply for aid before your state's and school's deadlines.

Will FAFSA deadlines be earlier since the application is launching earlier?

We expect that most state and school deadlines will remain approximately the same as in 2016–17. However, several states that offer first come, first served financial aid will change their deadlines from "as soon as

possible after January 1” to “as soon as possible after October 1.” So, as always, it’s important that you check your state and school deadlines so that you don’t miss out on any aid. State deadlines are on fafsa.gov; school deadlines are on schools’ websites.

Since the 2017–18 FAFSA asks for the same tax and income information as the 2016–17 FAFSA, will my 2016–17 FAFSA information automatically be carried over into my 2017–18 renewal FAFSA?

No; too much could have changed since you filed your last FAFSA, and there’s no way to predict what might be different, so you’ll need to enter the information again. However, keep in mind that many people are eligible to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to automatically import their tax information into the FAFSA, making the process of reporting tax information quick and easy.

Can I choose to report 2016 information if my family’s financial situation has changed since our 2015 taxes were filed?

You must report the information the FAFSA asks for. If your family’s income has changed substantially since the 2015 tax year, talk to the financial aid office at your school about the family’s situation.

Note: The FAFSA asks for marital status as of the day you fill it out. So if you’re married now but weren’t in 2015 (and therefore didn’t file taxes as married), you’ll need to add your spouse’s income to your FAFSA. Similarly, if you filed your 2015 taxes as married but you’re no longer married when you fill out the FAFSA, you’ll need to subtract your spouse’s income.

Will I receive aid offers earlier if I apply earlier?

Not necessarily; some schools will make offers earlier while others won’t. If you’re thinking of transferring to another school, you might want to look at the College Scorecard at collegescorecard.ed.gov to compare costs at different schools while you wait for your aid offers to arrive. Note: You should be aware that the maximum Federal Pell Grant for 2017–18 won’t be known until early 2017, so keep in mind that even if you do receive an aid offer early, it could change due to various factors.

How will I know what schools to list on the FAFSA if I haven’t decided which schools I’ll be applying to?

List any schools you’re considering applying to, and we’ll send your FAFSA information to them. Later, if you decide to apply to additional schools that you didn’t list on the FAFSA, you can log back in at fafsa.gov and add those schools.

Where can I get more information about—and help with—the FAFSA?

Visit StudentAid.gov/fafsa; and remember, as you fill out your FAFSA at fafsa.gov, you can refer to help text for every question and (during certain times of day) chat online with a customer service representative.

April 2016

Scholarship & Financial Aid Information

Montgomery Blair High School

Sources of Financial Aid

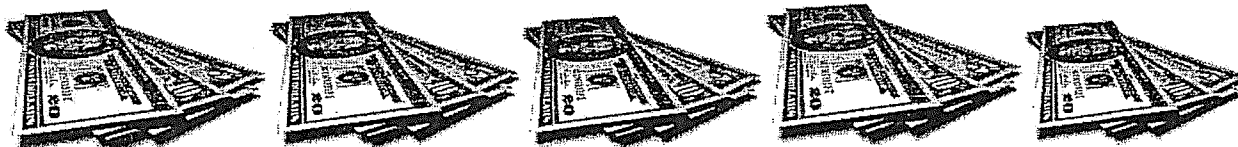
- Federal Financial Aid
- State Financial Aid
- Institutional Financial Aid (from the college)
- Private Sources of Financial Aid

Types of Financial Aid

- Scholarships
- Grants
- Employment
- Loans

Some Websites For Scholarship & Financial Aid Information

- Family Connections
- www.mhec.maryland.gov
- www.collegeboard.com
- www.fastweb.com
- www.fafsa.ed.gov
- www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov
- www.myscholly.com
- www.collegeanswer.com
- www.acinet.org
- www.collegetoolkit.com



College Applications: How Many is Too Many?

Have you ever heard the saying, "Nothing worth having comes easy?" If you consider a postsecondary degree "worth having," your college search should take significant time and effort. A hurried search can yield either a short list with few viable options or a much longer list that creates another set of problems. In an admission environment with easily accessible online applications and financial aid-hungry applicants, long lists have become more and more common.

When you consider all the various components of each college, a clear list of potential postsecondary options will reveal itself. College counselors typically stress one important piece of the application process to help students find a healthy list of target schools. "When a college is suggested to a student, they very often don't do the necessary research," said Jane Mathias, director of guidance at the Nardin Academy in Buffalo (NY). Research helps you narrow down your pool of potential colleges through visits to campuses, meetings with faculty and conversations with students. "Start with schools that are close to you," Mathias said. "See a class, be in a dorm for a night."

Survey data from the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA indicates a growth in the number of applications per student over the last 18 years. The percentage of students submitting seven or more applications has risen from nine percent to 22 percent since 1990. Scott Anderson is the director of outreach for the Common Application and chair of NACAC's Admission Practices Committee. Previously, he worked as a college counselor, where he recommended a list of six to eight schools for his students. "There were not many students who could justify a list longer than eight colleges," Anderson said.

While a long list of possible colleges might sound appealing during an application season filled with uncertainty, an application surplus carries a weight of its own. According to Anderson, a student with an excessive amount of applications will likely face one of two fates in the spring. Either the applicant will receive more rejection letters, adding unnecessary emotional strain on the admission process, or more acceptance letters, resulting in a tougher final decision.

In the fall, most students concentrate on obstacles in front of them, like maintaining a good grade point average, writing college essays and gathering recommendations. Anderson advises students to also conduct extensive research about each institution. "It would be much easier to narrow that decision now, rather than in April when you've got one month to evaluate financial aid packages, go back and revisit colleges, make all of these decisions at a very, very busy time of year," he said. More research translates into a quicker decision in the spring.

Counselors often recommend a range between six and eight colleges to keep a narrow, focused list. They did not pluck those numbers from thin air, so consider the benefits of staying in that range. Using this range, target schools should take up the majority, leaving room for any safety and reach schools you would like to include. Julie Beck, an independent counselor in Eugene (OR), usually recommends one reach, one "safety that you would actually go to," and three target schools. "That should be enough, if you've really done your research," Beck said.

Occasionally, circumstances permit more applications. At the Jewish Community High School at the Bay in San Francisco (CA), the number of applications per student spiked in 2009. "For the class of 2009, due to the recession and uncertainty about financial aid awards, I strongly recommended that students apply to somewhat more colleges," said Geoffrey Smith, dean of college advising at the academically competitive private school. Eight to 12 were my exact words, which may explain the upward blip in that year." Students hunting for the best financial aid offers sometimes find it difficult to adhere to the traditional application limits, but research always helps to keep the process under control.

Today, students can research prospective colleges in a variety of ways. "Ideally, it's great if you can be on campus, sit in class, spend an overnight," Beck said. The value of campus visits cannot be overestimated, but, as Beck admits, not every student has the resources for multiple trips, especially if they require extensive travel. Social media sites and student blogs allow prospective and enrolled students the opportunity to easily share information. Sometimes a series of conversations with enrolled students can give you more information than an official campus tour.

There are many ways to connect with colleges online, in addition to their official Web pages. Here is a list of widely used sites:

- [College Prowler](#)
- [Unigo](#)
- [Communiversi](#)
- [Campus Buddy](#)
- [Rate My Professors](#)
- [College Blender](#)
- [StuVu](#)
- [YouTube \(.edu\)](#)
- [The University Review](#)

There are over 4,000 degree-granting colleges in the US. Scott Anderson advises students to be wary of any college representative that tries to offer an easy path to admission. Most colleges are looking to find students that will fit their respective communities, just as you are looking to find your new home. "I would advise all students, regardless of what application tool they are using, to be thoughtful about where they're applying and make sure that every school on their list is there for a reason," Anderson said.

He also commented on the media frenzy surrounding highly-selective schools, which inspires some students to fill out more applications out of desperation. "The Chicken Little, sky-is-falling-scenario does not apply to most students, and they need to know that, and feel good about the many, many options that they have." To maintain sunny skies throughout the entire admission process, research as early and as often as you can.

*Written by Sean Nyhan <http://www.nacacnet.org/PublicationsResources/steps/Articles/Pages/Applications.aspx>
Published on August 10, 2010*

Tips for Parents: Dos and Don'ts for Helping Your Child Through College Admission

The college search and admission process is a life-changing event for your child, and often for the whole family. The beginning of the college search signals the beginning of a child's transition from teenager to young adult. As a result, it can be difficult for parents to strike the right balance of helping their child without taking over. Here are some dos and don'ts for parents entering the world of college admission.

DO Learn About the Process

Even if you have vivid memories of your own college decisions, realize that the college admission process has changed since you attended. Whether or not you attended college, invest some time in reading up about today's college admission. There are many good books on this topic in your public library or bookstore, and high schools often sponsor workshops for parents on college admission topics. Or ask your child's counselor to recommend helpful resources.

DO Discuss Restrictions Up Front

If there are financial or geographic restrictions that limit the range of colleges your child can consider, discuss them with your child at the beginning of the college search. Then your child won't waste time and energy researching colleges that she won't be able to attend.

DON'T Limit Choices Based on Fees

"Parents should certainly be willing to lay out economic realities to their children at the front end of the college search process, but should not shut out options based purely on sticker price," says Michael E. Dessimoz, associate vice president for enrollment services at Roosevelt University (IL). It's always a good idea to encourage your child to include several affordable colleges among his college choices. But remember that financial aid often helps families send their children to even the most expensive colleges. No matter your income level, find out all you can about financial aid. Your child's guidance counselor or colleges' financial aid offices can direct you to good resources and answer your questions about how financial aid works.

DO Remind Your Child of Deadlines

The life of a high school student is often very busy, and teenagers are still learning time management skills. So help your child begin keeping a calendar or day planner to keep track of all those college application deadlines (as well as her school work and activities).

DON'T Nag

"Say what you have to say and drop it," advises Scott White, a counselor at Montclair High School (NJ). "If the process delays or changes because students don't do what they are supposed to do, this is one time they may have to live with the consequences."

Remember, the goal is for your child to "own" the process, so that he can make college decisions that are right for him.

DO Listen and Offer Advice

For many students, their choice of college is their first adult decision—and it can be difficult. Likewise, it can be difficult for parents to find the right balance of guiding their child without making decisions for her. "Parents should be aware of what is going on, should make sure that deadlines are not missed and the proper tests are taken, and should be available when the student wants advice," says White. Try to act as a sounding board for your child: ask good questions and let your child supply the answers.

DON'T Make Decisions for Your Child

Your child needs to choose a college based on his individual abilities, interests and personality. To that end, beware of pressuring your child to apply to the college(s) you would like him to attend.

"This is the first time the student is making a decision that should be theirs alone," says White. "About things such as schooling, camp, etc., it was your decision with your child's input. [The college choice] is the opposite."

Of course, encourage your child to apply to a good range of schools, but your child must decide for himself which colleges to apply to and which college to attend. After all, your child will be the one who spends several years living and learning at college.

DO Be Your Child's Cheerleader

The college admission process can be stressful. Your child may feel uncertain about the decisions she must make, fearful of rejection from colleges, or anxious about meeting deadlines for both college applications and her school work. Over the course of the search process, your child may change her mind (more than once) about her career aspirations, academic goals, or what she wants in a college. All of this is normal. Parents can help their college-bound child by offering plenty of encouragement, a listening ear, and gentle guidance. And don't forget to celebrate each step along your child's journey from high school to college.

Written by Jennifer Gross.

Published November/December 2002.

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Surviving Your College Search: The Adventure Begins

You seem to have more and more mail from colleges every day. Your classmates keep talking about test scores and acceptance rates. Distant relatives and total strangers seem to take delight in asking you what college you plan to attend. Let's face it—it's time to start your college search.

If those words strike terror in your heart, you're not alone. Many students feel overwhelmed at the beginning of their college search. After all, you'll be making perhaps the biggest decision of your life so far. No pressure there!

To make your college search a little less intimidating, here are some strategies for getting started—and a preview of what to expect.

Soul Survivor

Most students assume that the college search begins with a guidebook, a Web site search, or a college fair. But the best place to begin is with yourself.

"The very first thing I encourage [students] to do is to 'soul search'—sit down and make a list of all the things they know about themselves," says Joyce Luy, director of admission at Westmont College (CA).

Start with the obvious: What do you like to do? What do you hate to do? What subjects (academic or not) make you sit up and take notice? What totally bores you? What are you good (or not-so-good) at? For example, you might love to write poetry and play soccer, but history bores you and you're not that great at baseball. Or there's nothing you like to do better than to discuss politics, but you zone out when the conversation turns to music or computers.

Once you have a list of your basic interests and abilities, start thinking about more complicated issues. How do you learn best—by listening, discussing, reading, doing? Do you enjoy being part of a large group, or do smaller groups suit you better? Do you seek out diversity among your friends, or would you rather hang out with people that are very similar to you? Are you more comfortable in the city or in a rural or suburban environment? Do you want to stick close to home or move far away? Is there a particular geographical area you're most interested in? You can probably think of other questions to consider, or ask your guidance counselor for more help.

Jot down short answers to these and other questions. Then "translate" your answers into things you'd like to see in a college. For example, that soccer-playing, poetry-writing, history-hating student above would probably want a college with a good English program and an opportunity to play varsity or intramural soccer. (Even if this student has a major other than English in mind, he or she might want to take a few poetry or writing classes as electives.) Similarly, if you love lively discussions, you should probably look for a college that encourages that kind of classroom discussion.

Winning the "I Don't Know" Challenge

OK, some people seem to know what they want before you even ask them. You probably have a friend or two who seemed destined from birth to major in engineering or political science. But the rest of us probably can't figure out whether we're more comfortable in a city or a small town. The city is so exciting, but a small town is so friendly. They both have their charms and drawbacks. If this sounds like you, forget all those questions for a moment and try something a little different.

Test your imagination. Close your eyes and envision your ideal college. Think about walking around campus. What do you see? Now you're sitting in your favorite class. What does the classroom look like? What are you and your classmates doing? What is the professor doing or saying? Pretend it's Saturday on campus. What are you and your friends doing? Where are you spending your weekend? What's coming up that evening?

While you have that picture in your mind, write down all of the details you can. Describe the college as accurately as possible. When you're finished, read through your description.

"Usually, the characteristics found in the ideal college serve as a good starting point for the college search," says Paul Marthers, director of admission at Oberlin College (OH). If the first picture that came to mind was strolling down the paths of a quiet campus, surrounded by trees, you should probably consider colleges that are in small towns or rural areas. On the other hand, if you envisioned walking down a city sidewalk on your way to your high-rise dorm, a more urban campus may be more for you.

Of course, there are plenty of colleges in between those two extremes, which is why the following strategy can also be helpful.

Sort through your options. "Corral all those college viewbooks [you've] gotten in the mail and acquire three cardboard cartons," says Nancy Scarci, post high school counselor at Roosevelt High School (HI). If you haven't received anything from a college that you're interested in, visit the Web site and request a brochure. "A little at a time, skim the viewbooks, look at the pictures, try to get a feel for each school, and make one of the following decisions: OH YES, NO WAY, and ?" Put the viewbook in the carton labeled with that decision.

When you're done, bring the "no's" to the guidance office so the material can be made available to your classmates. Go through the "?" box one more time, trying to sort into "yes" and "no." Then, on your own or with the help of your parents or counselor, go through the "yes" box. What do the "yes" colleges have in common?

"This is a way to start developing the concept of 'what are you looking for' that is so crucial to the search and selection process," says Scarci. In addition, the viewbooks can give students a better feel for what things like "urban" or "rural" might look like.

Going Fishing

Once you have some idea of what you're looking for, it's time to do some fishing for colleges that have the characteristics you seek. This is the time to whip out those guidebooks, visit those Web sites, and talk to your guidance counselor. That "yes" box can also be helpful now, especially if you keep it up to date as more college material arrives in the mail.

The goal at this point is to put together a list of 15 to 20 colleges that look promising. They should have most of the characteristics you want. They should also be colleges where you realistically have a shot at getting accepted. A number of "stretch" schools is fine, but if your list contains all of the Ivy League plus Stanford and MIT, you may want to add a few less selective colleges for balance (and to take a little pressure off the admission process). Your guidance counselor can help you assess your academic record in light of the requirements of various colleges.

Coming Up Next

As you might have guessed, the adventure doesn't end with that preliminary list of 20 or so colleges. In fact, a lot of the fun stuff is yet to come: exploring a variety of colleges, visiting college campuses, voting certain colleges off the island (oops, wrong adventure). In the coming weeks and months, you'll become an expert in finding out the real story about the colleges on your list. You'll refine your idea of the ideal college. And you'll learn more than you imagined about yourself. So stay tuned—your adventure is just beginning!

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<http://www.nacacnet.org/PublicationsResources/steps/Articles/Pages/collegesearch.aspx>

Local

5 wrong ideas about college admission

by Jay Mathews January 20, 2012

January is the beginning of the college admission season for high school juniors and their parents. It's just a formality, of course. In this region, the most college-focused in the nation, every season is college admission season.

Energetic and well-informed high school counselors are assembling their notes for upcoming parent meetings. These sessions are usually valuable and informative. Yet, despite all the good data and advice, some false assumptions about college admissions stubbornly survive. You encounter them while dining with friends, surfing the Internet or eavesdropping on the sidelines at youth soccer games.

Here are five of the most resilient and harmful of these wrong ideas about finding the best college for you:

Colleges are impressed by a lot of extracurricular activities. What a high school student does outside the classroom is important. Extracurriculars can make the difference when seeking admission to colleges that have three times as many straight-A student applicants as they have space. At one Ivy League college, I heard admissions officers describe applicants as, for instance, the violin-playing quarterback or the math-medalist poet. They never mentioned more than two activities. They wanted depth, not breadth. If the student was a baker, they wanted to see him enter his blueberry pies in county fairs. If the student was a writer, they hoped for copies of her op-eds that ran in the local newspaper. To them, five or six activities was a waste of time and space on the application.

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The more Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes and tests, the better. Selective colleges expect applicants to enroll in three to five AP, IB or similar college-level courses and take the final exams. If you take AP, taking 12 of them won't hurt you but confers no advantage over a classmate who took just four and did well on the exams.

3. Every high school grade counts. High grade-point averages are vital, but it is possible to get Bs in three or four courses and still have an average above 4.0. The extra weight given AP or IB courses makes the difference. Admissions officers often discount mediocre grades in freshman year, if the student's record improves after that. A single recommendation letter from a teacher saying an applicant was the best history student he had had in five years can make a C in physics meaningless.

4. A student has little chance to get into a top school without an SAT prep course. I spent a lot of money on the course my daughter took her junior year. These courses teach important things and give students confidence walking into the exam. But we have data showing such courses did little good for students who listened in their high school classes, did their homework and took a few practice SAT exams from the book in their counselor's office. My daughter raised her score 10 points after the course. That cost me \$100 a point.

5. The harder a college is to get into, the more it will ensure a bright future. It is difficult to persuade tribal primates like us that this isn't true. We are genetically wired to respect pecking orders. If we see a college listed No. 1, we want to go there. When its admissions rate falls below 10 percent, we are even more excited. Research indicates that the most selective schools look good because they attract so many of the students with character traits, such as persistence and humor, that ensure success. Those students acquire those traits long before they get to college and do just as well in life if they attend a school nobody heard of.

Jay Mathews is an education columnist and blogger for the Washington Post, his employer for 40 years.