

# **Planning for College:**

## ***What you need to know***

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## INTRODUCTION

The procedure of applying to college is both exciting and stressful. Most students have worked hard to present colleges with solid academic credentials. Now is the time to review what you've learned about yourself and choose a college that will enable you to grow and develop and to reach your goals. You should be ready to choose the "best" environment for you; size, location, competitiveness, social climate, and athletic programs are all to be considered. You will, in fact, find many schools that match your requirements and meet your personal needs. Once you find them, the complicated part of the process begins: Where do I get applications? How do I write all those essays? And the big question: Who will accept me?

### THE BEST COLLEGE FOR YOU

Despite all of the interest and publicity in the selective/prestigious colleges, the best college for you may be at a small liberal arts college with a strong creative writing department and a state-of-the-art television studio located in a small Ohio town with a diverse student body and opportunities for internship programs. Or, your best college may be a large state university with an outstanding marine biology department and lots of opportunities to pursue your interest in scuba diving. Your task now is to find the best colleges for you. Notice, the word "colleges" (plural). There is no **one** best school but **many** that will satisfy your academic pursuits, your career preparation, your social expectations, and for the other reasons that you choose to attend college. Which brings you to the first big question--"Why do I want to go to college?" If your answer is, "My parents expect me to continue at college" or "All my friends seem to be going" or "I can't think of anything else to do at this time in my life," you may encounter your first problem in beginning your college search. However, if you decide that there are indeed some good reasons for continuing your education after high school, you would do well to learn a systematic and logical approach to deciding on "the best colleges for you." With more than 3200 colleges among which to choose, how do you decide which colleges are best for you? More questions and more self-analysis!

### ACADEMICS

1. What are the most important reasons for wanting to go to college? Prepare for a career, broaden knowledge, prepare for graduate or professional school?
2. Do you want a specialized school that caters to your major academic interests or would you prefer a broader-based college where a wide variety of subject areas are available?
3. What if you are not sure of a major career goal? Don't worry about it--probably 80% of entering freshmen are in the same boat. In fact, that's one of the things college will do for you--help you to find out what really interests you enough to spend the rest of your life

doing. As a former Columbia University Dean of Admissions once said, "Don't be afraid to apply to college as a **pre-nothing!**"

### CAMPUS

1. What kinds of surroundings are important to you? In or near a big city or out in the country? Close to home or farther away? A small college or a large university? There are pros and cons to all campus situations, and you should decide based upon your likes and dislikes
2. What about coed college vs. single-sex institutions?
3. Would you prefer a campus where social life centers around fraternities and sororities, or one where they're unimportant?
4. Would you like to live at a college, at home, or in an apartment near the campus?

### CAMPUS CULTURE

1. Would you prefer a student body that is heterogeneous--representing many parts of the country, racial, ethnic, and religious groups--or would you prefer that most students were like yourself?
2. Do graduate students teach the freshmen? What is the relationship between teachers and students? Do students tend to go home on weekends or does the college bring social and cultural programs in for the students?
3. What is the intellectual level of the students?

### HAVE YOU CONSIDERED?

1. What are the admissions requirements? Can I meet them?
2. How important are organized sports? Intramural programs? Does the college offer athletic scholarships?
3. Does the college have internships, cooperative education, or other programs that will give you some career experience while in college?
4. Does the college have ROTC?

5. Are there junior year abroad programs? Does the college have cross registration with other colleges?

6. What is the cost of tuition, room and board, etc.? The average total cost of one year of college can range from \$14,000 to over \$40,000.

## **THE COLLEGE VISIT**

Once you have made some progress in your search for colleges by reading catalogues, discussing plans with parents, counselors, friends, students, meeting with college representatives, etc. you are now ready for some personal impressions. Your reaction to a college's facilities, physical setting, student attitudes, and general atmosphere cannot be measured in any way other than a visit. Is this the college in which you can function effectively as a student, as a member of the college community, and as a happy and productive person?

### **When to Visit**

Spring of your junior year, summer before your senior year, and early fall of your senior year seem to be the best time for visits. Try to visit when classes are in session so that you may sit in on them.

### **Before You Go**

Call the college to find out the schedule of tours and interviews. An integral part of the campus visit is the interview. There are two types of on-campus interviews--group and individual. The group interview is an informational session in which admissions staff members provide students and their parents with a short, descriptive talk on the college and give candidates an opportunity to ask questions. The personal interview may vary greatly from college to college. Most often, it involves a conversation between the student and an admissions representative who provides information to the prospective student and occasionally evaluates the student.

If an individual campus interview is "recommended," make an appointment about a month in advance. Plan on two to three hours for the campus visit, exclusive of the time for interviewing. To save time and money, plan your college visits to include colleges from the same geographical area.

### **Be Prepared--Some Tips**

1. Review the website and catalogue and know the essential facts.
2. Arrive on time. Take some time to look around.
3. Try to visit a class, especially in your area of interests.
4. Speak to students on campus (they were once in your shoes!).
5. Eat in the dining hall, if possible.
6. Pick up an application, scholarship form, campus map, college newspaper.
7. Allow enough time to get the feel of the campus.
8. Explore the town or neighborhood of the college.
9. Carry a small notebook and write your impressions. You may think of questions for the interviewer.

### **Who Should Go With You?**

Should parents accompany you? Parents are often very interested in seeing your colleges. Their child will be living at college for the next four years at a cost of up to \$100,000+. Reason enough to want to take a look! You should decide this based only on how comfortable you feel by yourself, with friends, with parents. Many students want and need the support and advice of parents when finally deciding on college choice. By all means, take them along.

### **What Should You Look For?**

1. **The college library**--many students study only in the library. How are the reference areas? Listening rooms? Study facilities?
2. **Academic facilities**--laboratories, language labs, classrooms, lecture halls, computer facilities, distance between buildings, etc.
3. **Living and dining options**--dormitories (visit the freshman dorm, if classes are separated), coed dorms, dining halls, fraternities, etc. Are there different meal plans? Can you eat in different dining rooms?
4. **Students**--the student guide may be a great source of information (questions you didn't want to ask the admissions officer). Where do students spend their leisure time?

5. **Athletic facilities**--even if you have no interest in playing a sport, the swimming pool, tennis courts, workout rooms may be interesting to you.

6. **Transportation**--off campus, into the nearest town, shuttle to the nearby colleges, home, etc. How convenient, how often, how costly?

### Special Considerations

1. An overnight visit may be arranged, but only if you contact the college in advance. If you know a student at the college, they may also arrange it.

2. Meeting professors in your area of interest may also be arranged through the admissions office.

3. Meeting coaches--if you are a high school athlete, your coach may arrange a meeting.

### After the Visit

Write down your impressions and keep a notebook so that you may compare colleges when hard decisions have to be made (i.e., getting into your third, fourth, and fifth-choice schools only). Write down questions you didn't get answered and see if your counselor can help. Don't forget to write a thank you note to the interviewer. Schedule a second visit later in the year, if necessary.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Choose your evaluators carefully.** Make a list of those people who know you best, those who can say the most about you from their own personal experience--teachers, coaches, advisors, youth leaders, employers. The purpose of the recommendation is to help you "come alive on paper" and have the reader begin to know you as a person, not a number.

2. **Narrow down your list.** What would you like the college to know about you that it won't be able to tell from the records? What makes you special, sets you apart from other candidates? And who can tell it best! Try to choose people you believe can write well, since the way a person puts something on paper is often just as important as the idea that person is trying to get across.

3. **Ask the right way.** Make sure the people you have chosen are willing to write your recommendation. It takes a good deal of thought and time to do a good job. Spend some time with your evaluator and let him/her know where you are applying and why.
4. **Give your evaluator help.** The best letters of recommendation include examples, anecdotes and illustrations of the qualities the writer is describing. Be proactive and give the evaluator samples of the work you completed as a student in their class. The evaluator may also ask you to submit additional information.

## THE COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY

You should look upon the application essay as a great opportunity to influence the reader on your behalf. In highly selective colleges, the essay is the most crucial of the subjective criteria for admissions. Essay questions used to be primarily used as an indication of the applicant's writing ability. That's still important, but the purpose today is much broader: it is an indicator of your personality, interests, intelligence, maturity, creativity, how much you think, what is special about you, and your general outlook on life. Correct spelling and grammar are vitally important, as is good organization. If you feel you're weak in these areas, have someone read over your first draft. Think of the essay as an invitation to talk face-to-face with the admissions committee. Read over the first draft to see if it catches the attention of the reader and is well written. If not, start again! **The best essays are not only well written, but present what are often ordinary events from an unusual perspective.**

### Types of Essay Questions

Types of questions generally fall into four categories: (1) tell us about yourself; (2) talk about some particular interest or idea; (3) why do you want to come to this college; finally, (4) questions that seek to examine your originality and imagination. When writing the application essay:

1. Pick a topic that interests you (not one you think will impress the reader).
2. Outline the topic. Define your purpose, give examples, arrive at a logical conclusion, and refine the process at least three times.
3. Brevity is a virtue. Make your point and don't use vocabulary that might not be appropriate.
4. Avoid travelogues and autobiographies (unless requested). Admissions officers read thousand of these and find it difficult to remain interested.

5. Humor is good if it is consistent with your content. Don't contrive or force humor or you may achieve just the opposite.
6. Allow the reader to experience your uniqueness, and if personal anecdotes explain unusual situations that had great influence on your development, by all means incorporate these anecdotes.

### Factors considered by Admissions Committees

- Grades
- Rigor of the curriculum
- Test Scores
- Teacher/Guidance Counselor Recommendations
- The Application Essay
- Extracurricular Activities
- Interviews, if required or recommended
- The Needs of the College

### COLLEGE ADMISSIONS VOCABULARY

<b>ACT</b>	American College Testing - an alternative to the SAT. Register at <a href="http://www.actstudent.org">www.actstudent.org</a> .
<b>Associate Degree</b>	A degree granted by a college or university after the satisfactory completion of the equivalent of a two-year, full-time program of study (or its part-time equivalent).
<b>AP Exam</b>	Advanced Placement exam - an opportunity to earn college credits through a placement exam.
<b>Bachelor Degree</b>	A degree granted by a college or university after the satisfactory completion of a four-or five-year, full-time program of study (or its part-time equivalent).
<b>CEEB Code</b>	College Entrance Examination Board Code (DMHS Code is 030396)

<b>COLLEGE BOARD</b>	The organization that offers many exams including the <b>PSAT</b> , SAT I, Subject Tests, and Advanced Placement tests. <a href="http://www.collegeboard.com">www.collegeboard.com</a>
<b>Common Application</b>	An application used by over 250 colleges and universities. The student completes one common application and then sends copies of it via the internet to the colleges chosen from the list of participating schools. This application is available in the guidance office and at <a href="http://www.commonapp.org">www.commonapp.org</a> .
<b>CSS</b>	College Scholarship Service - processes PROFILE financial aid application.
<b>Deferred Admissions</b>	The practice of permitting students to postpone enrollment, usually for one year, after acceptance to college.
<b>EA</b>	Early Action - Apply by an early deadline and receive an early notification. Generally, there is no commitment to enroll; however, this could vary by school.
<b>ED</b>	Early Decision - Apply by an early deadline and receive an early notification. The student <u>must</u> enroll if accepted.
<b>ETS</b>	Educational Testing Service - The operational phase of many College Board programs. It includes the development and administration of the major testing programs.
<b>FAFSA</b>	Free Application for Federal Student Aid - Required by <b>all</b> colleges and universities if you apply for financial aid. Available at <a href="http://www.fafsa.ed.gov">www.fafsa.ed.gov</a> .
<b>FEE WAIVER</b>	A form available to students who are eligible for a free/reduced meal plan at Sharon High. The Fee Waiver is submitted instead of money when registering for <b>SAT's</b> . See your counselor if you are eligible.
<b>GPA</b>	Grade Point Average
<b>Liberal Arts</b>	The study of the humanities (literature, the arts, and philosophy), history, foreign languages, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences.
<b>NCAA Clearinghouse</b>	Agency which processes academic qualification forms for all Division I and II athletes. Forms available at <a href="http://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net">www.ncaaclearinghouse.net</a>
<b>Open Admission</b>	The college admissions policy of accepting virtually all applicants with high school diplomas or their equivalent: generally offered by community colleges.
<b>PROFILE</b>	The financial aid form used by many private colleges. This is in addition to the FAFSA. Register at <a href="http://www.collegeboard.com">www.collegeboard.com</a>
<b>Reach School</b>	Colleges whose standards are slightly above your credentials but where you may have a chance to be accepted.
<b>Realistic School</b>	Colleges whose standards correspond with your credentials.

<b>Rolling Admission</b>	Decisions are usually mailed at the discretion of each school once the entire application packet has been received. No commitment on the part of the student is necessary. The student has until May 1st to commit.
<b>ROTC</b>	Reserve Office Training Corps is offered by the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force. Trains men and women to become officers in the military service upon graduation from college. Students take a full course load during college and military science courses. ROTC Scholarships can pay for college costs.
<b>Safety School</b>	Colleges whose standards are slightly below your credentials and your chance of acceptance is fairly high.
<b>SAT I</b>	Scholastic Assessment Test: A 3+ hour test including critical reading, math and writing components.
<b>Subject Test</b>	Scholastic Assessment Test: Subject Test is one hour test covering specific subject area. Not required by all colleges.
<b>SAR</b>	Student Aid Report - Verification of information submitted on FAFSA.
<b>TOEFL</b>	Test of English as a Foreign Language
<b>Transcript</b>	A copy of a student's official academic record listing all course taken and grades received.
<b>WAIT LIST</b>	Many colleges place students on a waiting list for admission. As accepted applicants decide to attend other colleges, the school will offer places to students on the wait list.

### **Websites to Help Get You Started....**

#### **Planning**

*College Board*

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

*College Access*

[www.teri.org](http://www.teri.org)

*College Planning*

<http://www.careersandcolleges.com/cnc/login.do>

*College Search*

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool/>

*College and Career Information*

<http://www.collegeview.com/>

*Princeton Review College Search*

<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/default.asp>

*College Resources*

<http://www.collegenet.com/>

*College and Career Planning Information*

<http://www.collegenet.com/>

*U.S. Universities by State*

<http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state/>

## **Disabilities & College Planning**

*U.S. Department of Education*

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

*Colleges/Universities Disability Services*

[http://www.dmoz.org/Society/Disabled/Education/Colleges\\_and\\_Universities](http://www.dmoz.org/Society/Disabled/Education/Colleges_and_Universities)

*Learning Disabilities Association of America*

<http://ldaamerica.us/>

## **Financial Aid**

*FAFSA*

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

*CSS Profile*

<https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/prf/index.jsp>

*The SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid*

<http://www.finaid.org/>

*NASFAA*

<http://www.studentaid.org/>

## **Testing**

*SAT*

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

*ACT*

[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)

## Differences between the SAT and the ACT

The ACT and the SAT are both standardized college admissions tests and most colleges and universities accept either one.

### SAT:

The SAT is designed to test your skill level in math, critical reading and writing. It tests critical thinking and problem solving. Typically, students take the test in May of their Junior year and again in the fall of their senior year.

### ACT:

The ACT is designed to test your skill levels in English, math, reading and science reasoning. It is a content/curriculum based test, meaning it tests a student's knowledge of subject matter.

ACT: Science reasoning      SAT: No science

ACT: Math includes trigonometry

SAT: Up to basic geometry and Algebra 11

SAT: Tests more vocabulary

Not entirely multiple choice      ACT: All multiple choice

Has a penalty for guessing      ACT: No guessing penalty

### Scoring:

ACT: Composite score    1-36

SAT: 200-800 per test    Highest total score 2400

### New Regulation 2009-2010

Both tests students can choose which schools receive their scores and which scores the schools will see.

### SAT II Tests: Individual Subject Tests

Check to see if the schools you are applying to require these tests.

**13**  
**TEST DATES**

*2008-09 SAT Test Dates*

<b><u>Test Dates</u></b>	<b><u>Test</u></b>	<b><u>Regular Registration Deadline</u></b>
October 4, 2008	SAT & Subject Tests	September 9, 2008
November 1, 2008	SAT & Subject Tests	September 26, 2008
December 6, 2008	SAT & Subject Tests	November 5, 2008
January 24, 2009	SAT & Subject Tests	December 26, 2008
March 14, 2009	SAT only	February 10, 2009
May 2, 2009	SAT & Subject Tests	March 31, 2009
June 6, 2009	SAT & Subject Tests	May 5, 2009

*2008 – 2009 ACT Test Dates*

In the United States, U.S. Territories, Puerto Rico, and Canada

<b><u>Test Date</u></b>	<b><u>Registration Deadline</u></b>	<b><u>(Late Fee Required)</u></b>
September 13, 2008*	August 12, 2008	August 13 – 22, 2008
October 25, 2008	September 22, 2008	September 23 – October 3,
December 13, 2008	November 7, 2008	November 8 – 20, 2008
February 7, 2009**	January 6, 2009	January 8 – 16, 2009
April 4, 2009	February 27, 2009	Feb 28 – March 13, 2009
June 13, 2009	May 8, 2009	May 9 – 22, 2009

**JUNIOR MONTH TO MONTH CALENDAR****August/September**

Think about future plans  
 Register for PSAT  
 Obtain dates/places of College Fairs  
 Purchase or borrow reference books  
 Plan next two years extracurricular  
 and community service activities

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**October**

Read PSAT/NMSQT Bulletin  
 Take PSAT at Sharon High  
 Develop list of interests  
 Study hard

**November**

Put forth best academic effort

**December**

Talk to graduates home from college  
 Meeting for juniors-PSAT results

**January**

Register on-line for SAT's

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

Consider registering for the ACT's

[www.ACT.org](http://www.ACT.org)

Prepare for mid year exams  
 Develop tentative college list

**February**

Check deadlines for AP Tests  
 Register for senior courses

Consider taking SATII tests on  
 courses you are finishing this year  
 Begin college search process

**March/April**

Begin college visits (possibly Spring Break)  
 Continue to learn about colleges  
 Write or call for college material to learn  
 more about prospective college  
 Watch deadlines for SAT/ACT tests and  
 sign up to take one or both tests

**May**

Identify and ask teachers for letters of  
 recommendation  
 Take the SAT's  
 Take the SAT II's-if required  
 Take ACT's -if appropriate  
 Think about Early Decision/Early Action  
 By the end of junior year students  
 should have taken the SAT at least  
 once and if required, SAT II's

**Summer**

Check websites and reference books  
 Think about what is important to you  
 Draft college essays  
 Visit colleges/universities

## SENIOR MONTH TO MONTH CALENDAR

### August/September

Make appointment to see counselor  
 Register early for Fall SAT/ACT  
 Finalize college list  
 Continue with essay draft  
 If applying Early Decision-  
   notify Counselor  
 Call or write for catalogs, viewbooks,  
   applications, financial aid information  
 Plan college visits and interviews  
 Develop spreadsheet of important information

### October

Take SAT-if needed  
 Take ACT-if needed  
 Work on college essays  
 Check for local college fairs  
 College reps in Guidance Office  
 Ask teachers for letters of  
   recommendations- remember  
   thank you notes  
 Begin filling out applications  
 If you apply Early Decision/Early Action  
   be aware of deadline dates

### November

Take SAT-if needed  
 Keep organized and keep copies of  
   everything  
 When sending applications:  
 Include self addressed, stamped  
   postcard  
 If applying on line, don't mail a hard copy  
 Sign and include check  
 If using common app, include supplements  
 Check on financial aid night

### December

Finish applications and essays  
 Check all deadlines

### January

File FAFSA or other forms  
 Mid year grades sent to colleges

### February/March

Check deadlines for AP tests

Make sure everything is sent and  
   received

### April

Review college responses  
 Decide where you wish to visit  
 Write withdrawal letters  
 Make final decision and send deposit  
   by May 1

### May

AP Tests  
 Graduate!

JUNIOR YEAR  
Exploring Colleges

Students should explore their college choices in earnest in their Junior Year. Students and parents/guardians can research colleges by:

1. Checking college Guide Books
2. Checking college websites. College Board has an excellent web site at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) where students can search for colleges according to several criteria and obtain information about them.
3. Contacting the admission offices by telephone, mail or e-mail to request information and viewbooks.
4. Visiting college campuses-March/summer vacations
5. Contacting coaches, faculty and staff
6. College representatives visit DMHS in the fall to meet prospective applicants.
7. Visit the DMHS College/Career Center.
8. Students and their parents/guardians can meet with their Guidance Counselor in person or contact with questions by phone or email.