

Delavan High School College Guide



Planning for Your Future

NEED TO KNOW INFORMATION

Considering College?

- Four-year public colleges require 4 years of English, 3 years of math (not counting pre-algebra and must pass at least advanced algebra), 3 years of science, and 3 years of social science. There may be exceptions to this, but they are rare.
- Private colleges may be more flexible with admissions requirements, but be sure to talk with them if you don't meet the above guidelines.

College Application Process

- Most colleges have an online application.
- Make sure to have appropriate info when sitting down to complete the application. (i.e. GPA, class rank, SAT scores)
- Be prepared to do an essay or two. (**DO NOT LET THIS PART SCARE YOU!**)
- May need letters of recommendation. (**DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE DAY BEFORE TO ASK FOR THEM: GIVE THEM A WEEK'S NOTICE.**)
- Let Ms. Putney know when the application is completed so she can send your transcript.



College Application Timeline

- Most college application deadlines are between January 1st and February 1st.
- Some colleges have rolling admissions, which means they will accept applications until May 1st.
- Apply early, especially if going into the healthcare field or another popular career field, depending on the college. Private colleges have tryouts or scholarship competitions in the fall, so getting your application in early will help you avoid missing those deadlines.
- Complete your FAFSA as close to October 1st as possible – increases the possibility of more money.
- February – March: Acceptance letters and financial award letters start to arrive.
- By April: Make sure tuition deposit is in and complete any other paperwork the college has requested.
- May: Let Mr. Knaggs know where you are attending so she can help you send your final transcript.

College Application Timeline

- Usually a deadline between Nov. 1st and Nov. 15th. Colleges will accept about 80% of their freshman enrollment from early decision deadlines.
- Make sure to read the rules for that college of what early decision means for them.
- At most schools, early decision means that you are agreeing to apply **nowhere**

else and that you will go there if they accept you. You are allowed to apply elsewhere if you do not get accepted, but not until they have sent you a letter stating that you are not accepted.

College Decision Process

- Choosing a college is difficult. See the following three attachments for help:
 - How Much Will College Cost? (pg. 8)
 - College Comparison Worksheet (pg. 26)
 - College Counseling Resume (pg. 36)

Placement Testing

- Colleges require a placement test to place a student in the appropriate math and English classes.
- Deemack offers the ICC placement test. Watch announcements for sign-up. Students must sign up ahead of time.

Scholarships

- Every year, multiple scholarships go unclaimed because students do not want to write an essay. **DO NOT LET THIS HAPPEN!** Essays are often only 500 words long.
- Free money: take advantage of it.
- Most scholarships are available after Christmas, but there are a few available before.
- Check out the school's website often to see what scholarships are available.



ACT/SAT

- A lot of four-year colleges have made the ACT or SAT optional for admission. However, it is best to check with your institution to make sure of their requirements. Most universities look at your ACT/SAT score in combination with your class rank. The better your class rank, the lower your ACT/SAT score may be. An 18 ACT composite is usually the lowest you can have to be admitted to a public university. Community colleges typically do not require the ACT/SAT unless you are going into a career field such as health care.
- Practicing for the ACT:
 - <http://www.kaptest.com/College/ACT/About-the-ACT/act-at-a-glance.html>
 - <http://www.mhpracticeplus.com/act.php>
 - <http://www.sparknotes.com/testprep/books/act/>

- Registering for the ACT:
 - www.actstudent.org
- Practicing for the SAT:
 - <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat>
- Registering for the SAT:
 - www.collegeboard.org

Getting Started on your student's FAFSA

- When you sit down to fill out the FAFSA you will need the following items for **both** the parents and student:
 - Social Security numbers
 - W-2s from previous year
 - Tax returns from last year
 - Current bank statements
 - Email addresses

Why is the FAFSA so important?

- Parents, depending on your income, your student may qualify for grants from the state and the federal government that do **not** have to be repaid.
- The types of loans that you and your student are eligible for are determined by your FAFSA.
- You should complete the FAFSA even if you don't think your student will qualify for aid.



Next Steps for FAFSA:

- Go to fafsa.gov and create a FSA ID
- An FSA ID is a username and password that you must use to log in to certain U.S. Department of Education (ED) websites. Your FSA ID identifies you as someone who has the right to access your own personal information on ED websites such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) at fafsa.gov.
- What happened to the Federal Student Aid PIN? The FSA ID replaced the Federal Student Aid PIN on May 10, 2015.
- If you already have a PIN, you can link your information to your new FSA ID by entering your PIN while registering for your FSA ID. (This will save you time when registering for your FSA ID.) If you've forgotten your PIN, don't worry; you can either enter the answer to your PIN "challenge question" during the FSA ID registration process to link your PIN, or you can just create your FSA ID from scratch.

- If you are a parent of a dependent student, you will need your own FSA ID if you want to sign your child's FAFSA electronically. If you have more than one child attending college, you can use the same FSA ID to sign all applications. Please note: Each FSA ID user must have a unique e-mail address.
- Your FSA ID is used to sign legally binding documents electronically. It has the same legal status as a written signature. Don't give your FSA ID to anyone—not even to someone helping you fill out the FAFSA. Sharing your FSA ID could put you at risk of identity theft!

Filling out the FAFSA

- Now that you have created your FSA ID, you should be ready to start a new application for the upcoming school year.
- Fill out all of the background information and then fill in the financial information for yourself and your student. After completion, you will be able to sign and submit the FAFSA.
- The sooner you complete the FAFSA, the better! The MAP grants from the State of Illinois are awarded on a first come, first served basis and they cut off completely after March 1st.
- You will receive a Student Aid Report by email that explains what aid that your student might be eligible for, and what your expected family contribution would be.
- Watch for letters or information from your college or university regarding financial aid.
- If you have questions, you can contact the college's financial aid office directly for help.

Student Loan Types

- Most are based on FAFSA information.
- Make sure to check the specific loan to know the repayment options and interest rates.
- Try to get as many scholarships and grants as possible that you do not have to repay.
- **Pell Grant** – federally funded and never has to be repaid
 - Based on financial need.
 - Fill out FAFSA early while more money is available.
- **Stafford Loans** – based on student dependency on parents and his/her year in school
 - Guaranteed one low interest rate over the life of the loan.
 - Allowed to defer until 6 months after graduation.
 - Subsidized – Government pays interest while the student is still in school.
 - Unsubsidized – Interest is accrued while the student is in school.
- **Perkins Loan** – help students with extreme financial need



- Interest is paid by the government until the student graduates.
- Payments are deferred until 9 months after graduation.
- Maximum 10 year repayment plan with payments of at least \$40 a month.
- After 10 years can be eligible for “forgiveness” if working a certain type of job.
- **PLUS Loan** – allows a student to finish covering out-of-pocket costs that financial aid did not cover
 - No borrowing limit.
 - Usually have higher interest rates.
 - **Repayment begins while the student is still in school.**
 - Interest rate can fluctuate throughout the life of the loan.

How Much Will College Cost?

The costs of college can be broken down into two areas: billable costs and indirect costs.

Billable Costs

Tuition and Fees
Room and Board
(if the student lives on campus)

Indirect Costs

Books and Supplies
Room and Board
(if the student lives off campus)
Transportation
Other Expenses

1. **Tuition and Fees** – this is the cost of the student’s instruction; tuition and fees vary widely depending on the type of college or university. Averages range from \$2,963 at public two-year colleges; to \$8,244 in-state and \$20,770 out-of-state at public four-year colleges; and \$28,500 at private nonprofit four-year institutions.
2. **Room and Board** – these costs will be billed by the college if a student lives on campus, and include housing and meal costs.
3. **Books and Supplies** – these are the costs for course materials, and materials can cost up to \$1,000 per year or more.
4. **Transportation** – if the student lives more than a few hundred miles away, this will add to the cost of attending college.
5. **Other Expenses** – this includes the cost of laundry, entertainment and clothing, and can add up quickly.

Methods

Have each participant estimate how much each year of college will cost. Illustrate the difference in cost and Expected Family Contribution (EFC) (Resource 5.2). Also discuss the costs for different types of institutions.

Billable Costs

These are fixed costs that show up on the college bill. They include the items that are paid directly to the college or university, including tuition, student activities fees, laboratory fees, and other charges. For students who live on campus, the costs of room and board will also be fixed, especially if optional plans are not available at reduced rates.

Indirect Costs

These are costs that do not show up on the college bill. They include books and supplies, travel to and from campus and personal expenses (laundry, entertainment and clothing, to name a few). The amount spent on these items will vary according to need and preference. If the student lives and eats off campus, room and board costs will also be indirect costs. Families have some control over indirect costs by making smart spending choices.

Types of Financial Aid

Grants

Grants are also known as gift aid; they are based on need and do not have to be repaid. They come from the federal or state governments or from the college itself. Grants are based on a student's financial need, and when the need is high, the grant aid tends to be high as well. Grants may be made up from various sources. There are five types of federal student aid grants, all of which require filing the FAFSA to be eligible:

- Federal Pell Grants are the largest source of free money for college from the federal government. To be considered, the student must file the FAFSA. Pell Grants can be used for tuition, fees and living expenses, and in 2009–10 they ranged from \$555 to \$5,550.
- Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants (FSEOG) are awarded to students with exceptional financial need. Filing the FAFSA is all that is needed, and students who qualify for a Pell Grant will be given priority consideration. The grants range from \$100 to \$4,000 per year.
- Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACGs) are for Pell-eligible students who completed a rigorous high school course of study and are enrolled in an eligible program of study. For a list of recognized rigorous programs of secondary school study in your state visit www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/about/ac-smart/state-programs.html. Awards in 2009-10 were \$750 for first-year and \$1,300 for second-year students.
- National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent Grants (SMART Grants) are for Pell-eligible students in their third or fourth year of specific majors (listing at www.ifap.ed.gov/dpcletters/attachments/GEN1012Attach.pdf). Students must have a minimum 3.0 GPA. The award for full-time students in 2009–10 was \$4,000.
- Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants are for students pursuing a degree in education. The award amounts up to \$4,000 and the student agrees to teach in a participating school or teach in a high-need field for four complete years. This grant is converted to an Unsubsidized Direct Stafford Loan and must be repaid if the teaching agreement is not fulfilled.
- In addition to federal grant money, many institutions have their own grant aid available for high-need students.

Scholarships

Scholarships are a form of financial aid that is usually based on merit, sometimes in combination with need. The competition for many scholarships is intense. Some are given to the student who exhibits a particular ability or skill such as athletics or music; others are awarded for academic achievement. Scholarships are often renewable for each college year, usually contingent on the student continuing to participate in the activity that prompted the award; or, in the case of academic scholarships, maintaining a certain achievement level or grade point average. In some instances, the college controls the scholarship process, inviting only certain students to become candidates.

Web sites such as FastWeb (www.fastweb.com/) and The College Board (http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch_ss/welcome.jsp) provide free scholarship search services that allow students to identify scholarships based on their interests, talents, need, ethnicity, and other factors. Students should be aware of scholarship scams, however. One way to spot a scam company is if it asks students to pay a fee in order to provide a scholarship search or guarantees a successful search. Visit www.finaid.org/scholarships/scams.phtml for more information on scholarship scams.

Don't overlook the possibility of local scholarships. Students should seek out and apply for as many local scholarships as possible. High schools, churches, local businesses, civic organizations, and special programs may have local scholarships. Some companies and businesses offer assistance to children of their employees. The school counselor or the school's Web site can provide information about local scholarships, also.

Work-Study

In this case, the student earns the money awarded, often working on campus in the book store, library or dining commons. Students may be able to find employment related to college studies or community service. The typical number of hours worked is 10-15 hours per week, and the salary is often higher than minimum wage.

Loans

Loans are a part of most financial aid packages, and they must be repaid, usually with interest. Fortunately, most government loans do not have to be paid until after graduation. Loans can be either need-based or awarded without regard to the family's financial circumstances, and they may be awarded to the student or to the parent(s). Loans based on need usually come from the federal government, the college or university, or private lenders.

Some of the most common types of the loans include:

1. Stafford Loan – the most common government loan for undergraduates at all types of colleges. The government pays the interest on a Stafford subsidized loan while the student is in college.
2. Perkins Loan – is a low interest loan for students with exceptional need. These loans are awarded by colleges using mostly federal funds, and no interest is accrued while a student is enrolled at least half-time. Repayment begins nine months after graduation. Students can borrow up to \$5,500 per year or a total of \$27,500.
3. PLUS (Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students) Loan – is a federal loan that allows parents to borrow up to the total cost of attendance, less any other aid the student receives. These loans are unsubsidized, so the parent is responsible for paying the interest.
4. Private Loans – after exhausting all other sources of financial aid. Private loans usually carry a higher interest rate than federal loans, and they may not have as favorable repayment terms.

Students and parents should get all of the facts about the loan before signing a loan agreement. Loans must be repaid according to the terms of the loan, even if the student does not finish college or is dissatisfied with the educational program.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE IS A FAMILY AFFAIR AND HERE'S HOW IT WORKS



THE SAD FACT is that many students who earn admission to college never go because they do not complete the financial aid process.

THE GOOD NEWS is that there are lots of ways to pay for college and lots of information and help are available to students who honestly need financial aid assistance!!

FACTS WORTH NOTING:

- THE EARLIER YOU BEGIN TO THINK ABOUT PAYING FOR COLLEGE THE BETTER.
- MONEY IS AVAILABLE TO ALMOST EVERY STUDENT WHO ATTENDS COLLEGE.
- NO ONE GETS FINANCIAL AID BY WISHING! YOU NEED TO APPLY AND FOLLOW THROUGH.
- EVEN THE MOST AMBITIOUS STUDENT WILL NEED ASSISTANCE FROM THE ADULTS IN THE HOUSEHOLD IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE FINANCIAL AID APPLICATION PROCESS.
- YOU DO NOT NEED TO PAY ANYONE TO HELP YOU APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID! BEWARE OF ANYONE WHO OFFERS A SERVICE FOR A FEE.
- OFTEN THE MOST EXPENSIVE COLLEGES HAVE THE "DEEPEST POCKETS" AND CAN HELP THE VERY NEEDIEST STUDENTS MAKE COLLEGE AFFORDABLE.

In a perfect world, families begin thinking about college finances when their children are still in grade school. But we all know this is NOT a perfect world. So—the time for you to start thinking about paying for college is TODAY!

There is a lot of money available to students with need:

While it is true that college costs increase almost yearly, it is also true that there is more financial aid available than ever before—according to the federal government, more than \$199 billion. This money comes from the following sources:

- The US Department of Education's Federal Student Aid (FSA) program which provide \$146.5 billion a year in grants, loans and work-study assistance.
- State grant and loan programs.
- College and university grant, loan and scholarship programs.
- Scholarships given by foundations, corporations, and community organizations.

These are the sources of financial aid:

- **Grants and scholarships:** Also called "gift aid," grants are based on financial need and do not need to be repaid. Scholarships are most-often awarded on the basis of strong academic achievement, a special talent or ability, or ethnicity.

- **Work-study:** This option gives students the opportunity for part-time employment ON CAMPUS to help them meet their financial need.
- **Loans:** These are offered to students or parents and must be repaid. Loans that are awarded based on financial need are low-interest loans, usually sponsored by the federal government. Interest on these loans is paid by the government for students with the greatest need. Repayment does not begin until 6 months after completion of the college program and may be deferred until a later date under some special circumstances.

APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID IS TIME-CONSUMING, BUT NOT HARD!

Here is how the need-based application process generally works:

1. Every student must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This is the only application required by many colleges, and should be completed as soon possible after January 1st of the senior year. **As the name says, this is free!** The preferred method for completing this form is online, although a paper copy is available. The Web site is: **www.fafsa.ed.gov** (NOT .com which is a fee-based, unnecessary service)
2. A few colleges and universities also require that students complete a financial aid form specific to the institution, or the College Scholarship Service Profile application, which is offered through the College Board. There is a fee for this form, but fee waivers are available through school counselors and college financial aid offices.
3. Financial aid offices use the information provided through these forms to determine a family's ability to pay for college. This is called the "estimated family contribution" (EFC), and it is always the same, regardless of the cost of the college. That means that financial aid can help you afford even the most expensive college, if you qualify for admission.
4. In the spring of the senior year, colleges notify students of the amount and type of aid offered.
5. Students have until May 1st to compare offers of admission and financial aid in order to make one final college enrollment decision.

There are many people and resources who can help you find your way through the financial aid process. Your school counselor, your teachers, adults in your community or place of worship may all be available to advise you. **At every college you consider, financial aid officers will be eager to help students and families understand and complete the financial aid process. Don't be afraid to ask for lots and lots of help.**

If you are a good student and an active participant in school and community, you may qualify for scholarships offered by corporations, foundations, religious organizations, or community groups. Ask at your school about possibilities. Do some research online at **www.fastWeb.com** and **The College Board** (http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch_ss/welcome.jsp).

In the end, all of the work required to apply for financial aid is well worth the effort! In 2008:

- **College graduates earned an average of \$55,700**
- **High School graduates earned an average of \$33,800**

Over the course of your life and career that difference will make up for the cost of even the most expensive college—many times over!

For more information on financial aid visit: **www.finaid.org** and **www.studentaid.ed.gov**

HERE IS HOW ONE STUDENT FINANCED A FIRST YEAR IN COLLEGE:

Susan Smart

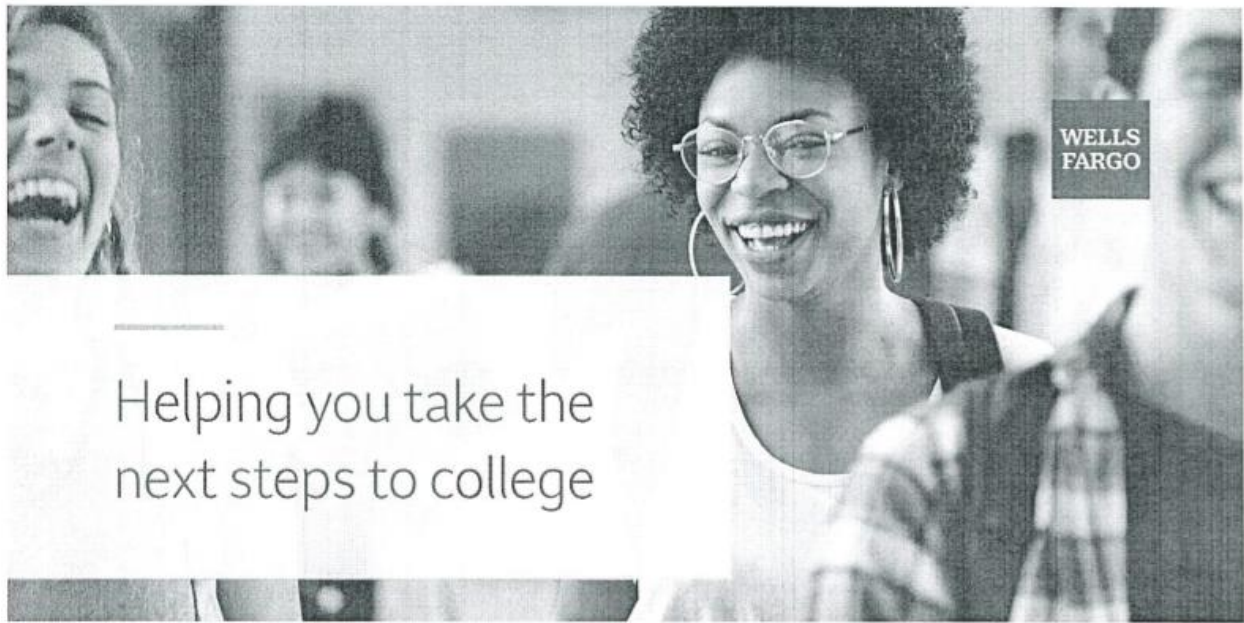
Total Cost: **\$21,120**
(Tuition, Room and Board, Books, Fees, Travel)

EFC **\$3,241**
(Estimated Family Contributions determined by FAFSA)

Financial need: **\$17,879**

How she pays:

Scholarship from college	\$4,000
Federally subsidized student loan	\$3,500
State scholarship	\$2,500
Federal Pell Grant	\$1,060
Federal Perkins Loan	\$2,400
Federal SEOG Grant	\$300
Federal Work Study	\$1,600
Scholarship from church	\$1,500
Summer earnings	\$1,019



Helping you take the next steps to college

Check out the *CollegeSTEPS*® site at wellsfargo.com/collegesteps for these resources and tools to help you plan, prepare, and pay for college:



Get College ReadySM Tracker

Get financially ready for college with an interactive guide and "to-do" list.



5 Step Guide to Paying for College

Learn the basics of paying for college so you'll know what to expect.



College Planning webinar series

Join free, on-demand webinars on a wide variety of college planning and funding topics.



TFS Scholarships

Access to over seven million scholarships and more than \$41 billion in funding for higher education.



Go College! Now

Connect with this online community to access resources for students who are first in their families to attend college.

PREPARING FOR COLLEGE: JUNIOR/SENIOR CHECK LIST

JUNIORS

Fall:

- Start your year off right by **talking with your guidance counselor about the year ahead.** Confirm that your courses will put you on the right track for college admission. Be sure to ask about test dates for the PSAT, ACT, and SAT. You'll need to register up to six weeks ahead of time.
- Starting developing a résumé**—a record of your accomplishments, activities, and work experiences. This will be an important part of your college application.
- If you haven't participated in many activities outside of class, now is the time to sign up.** Consider clubs at schools, team sports, leadership roles, or involvement in your religious or civic community group.
- Take the PSAT.** Taking the test as a junior will qualify you for some scholarship consideration and identify you to colleges as a potential applicant. When you receive the results (usually in December), review them to learn more about your strengths and weaknesses. Discuss the results with your family and school counselor.
- Begin to prepare for the ACT or SAT.** Free test preparation may be available at your school, your local community colleges, and community based programs; in addition, there are many free resources on the Internet. If you can't find the best Web sites, ask your counselor. You should plan to take at least one of these tests in the spring and again next fall during your senior year. **Ask your counselor if you qualify for a fee waiver.**

January/February:

- Meet with your guidance counselor again to develop your senior schedule.** Make sure that you will be enrolled in the most challenging courses for which you are qualified.
- Register for a spring offering of the SAT and/or ACT.** Ask your counselor if you should take an SAT Subject Test this spring.
- Ask your counselor about summer opportunities on college campuses.** These can be a great way to find out what college life is all about and make you a more attractive candidate for admission to colleges.

March/April:

- Begin taking a more serious look at colleges and universities.** Make a file for each college in which you are interested and gather information about academics, financial aid, and campus life. Go to college fairs and open houses and learn as much as you can about colleges online.
- Begin planning college visits.** Spring break is a good time to visit. Try to visit colleges near you. and include a large, medium size, and small campus
- Develop a preliminary list of colleges that interest you.** Write or email to request a viewbook and additional information.
- Think about lining up a summer job, internship or co-op.**

May:

- Take a look at some college applications** and consider all of the different pieces of information you will need to compile.
- Make a list of teachers, counselors, employers, and other adults whom you might ask to write letters of recommendation** for your college applications.

Summer:

- Continue investigating colleges**
- Begin thinking about your applications. Generally, colleges will have their applications online by the beginning of August. Work on the essay before you return to school!**

SENIOR YEAR TIMELINE

August/September

- Register for the SAT and/or ACT** if you didn't take it as a junior, or if you aren't satisfied with your score and want to take it again. (remember that your counselor can help you with fee waivers)
- Take a look at some college applications** and consider all of the different pieces of information you will need to compile.
- The SAT test date most popular with high school seniors is this month.**
- Visit with your school counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate** and fulfill college admission requirements. If you're ahead of schedule, consider taking courses at a local university or community college to get a jumpstart on college credit.
- Take every opportunity to get to know colleges:** meeting with college representatives who visit your high schools during the fall, attending local college fairs, visiting campuses (if possible). Ask your counselor if they know of special campus visitation programs.
- Narrow down your list of colleges** and begin to consider "safe," "reach," and "realistic" schools. Make sure you have the application and financial aid information for each school. Find out if you qualify for any scholarships at these schools.
- Create a checklist and calendar** to chart:
 - Standardized test dates, registration deadlines, and fees
 - College application due dates
 - Financial aid application forms and deadlines
 - Other materials you'll need for college applications (recommendations, transcripts, essays, etc.)
 - Your high school's application processing deadlines
- Some schools require the CSS/Financial Aid Profile.** Ask the colleges to which you are applying for their deadlines. You can register as early as September. See your guidance counselor about fee waivers.



October

- Some colleges will have deadlines as early as this month.** These would include rolling admission, priority, early decision, and early action deadlines.
- If you cannot afford the application fees that many colleges charge, **ask your counselor to help you request a fee waiver.**
- Finalize your college essay.** Many schools will require that you submit at least one essay with your application.
- Request personal recommendations from teachers, school counselors, or employers.** Follow the process required by your high school or provide a stamped, addressed envelope, the appropriate college forms, and an outline of your academic record and extracurricular activities to each person writing you a recommendation.
- Research possibilities of scholarships.** Ask your counselor, your colleges, and your religious and civic groups about scholarship opportunities. There are also some good scholarship Web sites, including FastWeb (www.fastweb.com/) and The College Board (http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch_ss/welcome.jsp). You should NEVER pay for scholarship information.

November

- Finalize and send any early decision or early action applications due this month.** Have a parent, teacher, counselor, or other adult review the application before it is submitted.
- Every college will require a copy of your transcript from your high school.** Follow your school's procedure for sending transcripts.
- Make sure testing companies have sent your scores directly to the colleges to which you are applying.**
- The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) will be available this month,** but cannot be completed before January 1. This is the form you will complete to find out what financial aid you are eligible to receive from the government. Ask your guidance office for a copy or visit www.fafsa.ed.gov. This form should be filed online if at all possible.

December

- Begin to organize regular decision applications** and financial aid forms, which will be due in January and/or February.
- Register for the January SAT (If needed). It is the last one colleges will be able to consider for a senior.**

January

- Many popular and selective colleges will have application deadlines as early as January 1.** Others have deadlines later in January and February. Keep track of and observe deadlines for sending in all required fees and paperwork.
- If necessary, register for the February ACT (some colleges will be able consider it).**
- Ask your guidance office in January to send first semester transcripts to schools where you applied.** At the end of the school year, they will need to send final transcripts to the college you will attend.
- It is time to file the FAFSA (no later than Feb 1).** The sooner you complete it, the sooner you will have an idea of your financial aid options. Watch the mail for your Student Aid Report (SAR)—it should arrive four weeks after the FAFSA is filed.

Feb/March/April

- While most of your applications will be complete and you are waiting to receive admission decisions, **don't slack in the classroom.** The college that you do attend will want to see your second semester transcript. No Senioritis!
- Acceptance letters and financial aid offers will start to arrive.** Review your acceptances, compare financial aid packages, and visit your final choices, especially if you haven't already.

May

- May 1 is the date when the college you plan to attend requires a commitment and deposit.** When you've made your college decision, notify your counselor and the colleges. Send in your deposit by the postmark date of May 1. If you've been offered financial aid, accept the offer and follow the instructions given. Also notify schools you will not attend of your decision.
- Make sure that you have requested that your final transcript be sent to the school you will be attending.**
- If you are "wait listed" by a college you really want to attend, visit, call and write** the admission office to make your interest clear. Ask how you can strengthen your application.

Summer

- It's been a long journey through high school and to college. **Take time to enjoy your summer!**
- **Getting a summer job** can help pay some of your college expenses and give you great career preparation.
- **Make a list of what you will need to take with you for your dorm room.** The suggested list of items, room and furniture dimensions and many other questions can usually be answered by visiting your college's Web site and searching under 'Housing' or 'Residence Life' for further information.
- **You will most likely get a roommate assignment** from your college. Call, write or email to get acquainted in advance. In your conversations and communication, you should be able to figure out who will bring what for your room.
- **Some colleges will offer a summer orientation/registration.** Make sure to attend in order to meet fellow students and other important people on campus and to familiarize yourself with your new school. This is often the time you sign up for your fall courses.

Your College Search: A To-Do List

by Ned Johnson

Prepare for a great high school experience. You'll have opportunities to grow inside and outside the classroom, while making sure that you're well prepared to apply to college in three short years. Use this calendar to guide your experience. Careful planning and good choices over time make for strong options later. Ready, set, go!

Freshman Year

Listen and observe. Faced with more challenging high school classwork, you'll want to pay attention to what your new teachers expect from you and look for ways to work harder and smarter. Grades are important in ninth grade, but seek balance so that you are challenged but not overwhelmed. Ask for help if you run into trouble and treat a low grade as constructive feedback to help you become a better learner.

Get involved. High school is not simply a four-year audition for college but a critical period to develop yourself. Grades are important, but so, too, are your social connections and extracurriculars. Use part-time jobs, clubs, community service, arts and music, photography, cheer squad, robotics club, and so on to pursue your passions. It

will also give you an energy boost to push you through the less exciting parts of school life.

Read voraciously. Dive into books, newspapers, magazines and blogs. Explore subjects that engage you. Additionally, check out TED Talks, YouTube videos and other free learning opportunities such as the massive open online courses known as MOOCs.

Find mentors. Look for knowledgeable people who can offer helpful advice over time: teachers, coaches, counselors and friends. These relationships can pay off in other ways, too: People like to help students they know!

Schedule downtime. That means turning off electronic devices. No phones. No screens. We all need time to daydream and think about ourselves and our place in the world.

Sophomore Year

Focus on evolving as a learner while developing your understanding of your strengths and passions.

Challenge yourself (wisely). Strive for strong grades and take on new challenges, but ask for help when needed and avoid overtaxing yourself. Balance is your goal.

Speak up in class. Share and discuss your ideas with others. Colleges look for students who contribute and elevate class discussions. Additionally, down the road, you'll request letters of recommendation, and teachers won't know you without hearing your thoughts.

Sleep. The typical 15-year-old brain needs eight to 10 hours of sleep to function at 100 percent, so that should be your goal.

Refine your route. Look ahead to the 11th- and 12th-grade courses you might be interested in taking and plan to work into



your schedule any prerequisites. Take advantage of special courses, particularly rigorous ones that are in line with your academic interests.

Learn from the masters. As you take inventory of your own interests, find people who work in related areas. Listen to their stories and consider opportunities for gaining firsthand experience of your own. A 20-minute conversation with a professional could even turn into a fruitful internship opportunity.

Put together an activities list. Start jotting down your hobbies, jobs and extracurricular activities to keep track of what you have accomplished. This document will form the basis of your résumé and will be essential in preparing for college interviews and applications, in addition to possible jobs, internships and summer programs.

Make your summer matter. Work, volunteer, play sports, travel or take a class. Research summer programs and internships to give yourself the chance to move beyond the scope of your regular high school courses. Plunge into an activity that excites you or one that builds on a special interest.

Settle on a testing strategy. Use your PSAT scores and other practice tests to help you identify the right test for you (i.e., SAT vs. ACT). Set up a test-prep plan.

Junior Year

Essays and testing and APs. Oh my! *Your grades, test scores and activities this year form a large part of what colleges consider for admission, so prepare for your exams and do your best in class.*

Plot out your calendar. Talk with your parents and guidance counselor about which exams to take and when. If your 10th-grade PSAT scores put you in reach of a National Merit Scholarship, concentrated prep time might be worth it. Then, take the SAT or ACT in winter or early spring. In May or June, the SAT Subject Tests (required by some colleges) are also an option in areas where you shine or in subjects you covered this year. If you're enrolled in an AP or honors course now, consider taking one of the College Board's practice AP tests.

Immerse yourself in activities. Look for extracurriculars, both in and out of school, that you enjoy and that show you are dedicated, play well with others and can assume leadership



roles. High school is not simply a four-year audition for college. Rather, it's a time to discover what you like, to develop, and to sharpen skills you'll use after high school.

Build your college list in the spring. Once you get your test scores, talk to a counselor and put together a list of target, reach and likely schools. Use apps to aid your research. Explore college websites and resources such as ed.gov/finaid and usnews.com/bestcolleges. And clean up your social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) since college admissions folks may see them.

Visit schools. Spring break and summer vacation are ideal times to check out a few campuses. Attend college fairs and talk with the people behind the tables who can provide information and may serve as future contacts.

Get recommendations. Right after spring break, ask two teachers with different perspectives on your performance if they will write letters for you. Choose teachers with whom you have a good relationship and who will effectively communicate your academic and personal qualities.

Write. Reflect on your experiences and highlight your strengths. Procrastination causes stress, so aim to have first drafts done by Labor Day of senior year. Share them with an English teacher, parent or counselor.

Senior Year

Don't slack off. Colleges look at senior-year transcripts, so keep working hard in your classes.

Finish testing. If necessary, you can retake the SAT, ACT or SAT Subject Tests. The early fall test dates give you time to apply early. Check deadlines and the admissions testing

policies of your schools. Are they test optional or do they require the SAT or ACT? If so, do you also need the optional written essays for either test? What about the SAT Subject Tests?

Know your deadlines. Many colleges have multiple deadline options. Consider the implications of early decision, early action, rolling, regular and other deadlines and plan accordingly (related story, Page 128).

Apply. Craft your essays with a well-thought-out narrative. Fill out applications carefully. Review a copy of your transcript. Have you displayed an upward trend that should be discussed? Does an anomaly need context? Discuss with your counselor. Leave yourself time to reread essays to clean up any errors.

Follow up. Check that your colleges have received records and recs from your high school and your SAT or ACT scores from the testing organization. A month after you submit your application, call the college and confirm that your file is complete.

Confirm aid rules. Check with each college for specific financial aid application requirements: Dates and forms may vary.



Make a choice. Try to visit or even revisit the colleges where you've been accepted before committing. Talk with alumni; attend an accepted-student reception. Then, make your college choice official by sending in your deposit. Congrats! ♦

Ned Johnson is founder of and tutor-geek at PrepMatters (prepmatters.com) where, along with colleagues, he torments teens with test prep, educational counseling and general attempts to help them thrive. He is also co-author of the 2018 book "The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives."

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

Choosing a college is a huge task. You have so many options and colleges have so many offerings. The good news is that more than one college can be the "right choice" for you. Forget the idea that there's "one perfect school" because there are a number of very good schools for you. Just find ones that are a good match and look at them closely.

Here are some tips for your college search:

Start early; it's never too early to look at colleges and their environments. Use Internet college searches such as ACT's at <http://www.act.org/> and www.fastweb.com, visit college websites, read their brochures. Start thinking about what you would like and wouldn't like in a college.

Think about how colleges differ: four-year, two-year, number of students, location, tuition, majors, type of school, student activities and student support services. What's important to you?

Visit different types of schools so you understand what it's like to be on a campus with 5,000 other students or 25,000 other students, or what it's like to be in a large city or in a small town.

Make your college visits when school is in session. Visit a classroom, talk to professors and students, eat in the cafeteria, stay in a dorm room; experience the college.

Take part in any outreach programs offered at colleges and universities. Summer camps and enrichment programs give you a feel for living on campus, even though enrollment during summer sessions is smaller than during fall and spring sessions.

Take charge of the search. Work with your parents as a team, but lead the effort, take responsibility and determine what you would be happy doing.

Be realistic. Use your time wisely and only look at colleges you think you would really attend. And instead of selecting a top choice, choose a group of schools as your top preferences, along with others that would be acceptable.

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING A CAMPUS VISIT

1. What activities and services are available to help students get settled (academically and socially)?
2. How big are the classes?
3. (Ask students) How easy is it to meet with faculty?
4. (Ask students) Are you able to register for the classes you want?
5. What is the total cost of attending that college?
6. What types of financial aid does the college offer and how do I apply?
7. Are all freshmen assigned to an academic advisor?
8. Where do most freshmen live?
9. Can I take a tour?
10. What activities are available for students?
11. Who teaches the courses for first-year students; professors or graduate students?
12. How successful are the college's graduates in finding jobs?
13. What services (such as transportation and shopping) are available locally?
14. What is there to do on weekends? Do most students stay or leave campus on weekends?

COLLEGE SEARCH CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist to track your progress as you gather information.

LOCATION/SIZE

Distance from home
Enrollment
Physical size of campus

ADMISSIONS

Tests required/accepted
High school credits required
Essays
Resumes
Interviews
Letters of recommendation
Deadline
Early action/early decision
College credit for exam scores or high school courses
Orientation program

ACADEMICS

Degrees/programs offered/majors
Academic clubs/associations
Academic advising services
Academic tutoring services
Career placement services
Internship opportunities
Opportunities to study abroad and other special programs

FINANCIAL AID

Costs of attending college
Grants/scholarships/loans
Employment
Deadlines

CAMPUS LIFE

Who attends the college?
Sports
Music
Theater
Art
Publications
Extracurricular activities
Housing
Health services
Counseling services
Safety information
Community information

College Names	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
Location – contact information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> distance from home admission staff contact email/phone number 			
Size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> student enrollment physical size of campus 			
Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> type of school (2 yr., 4 yr.) school setting (urban, rural) location & size of nearest city co-ed, male, female religious affiliation 			
Admission Requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deadline tests required average test scores, GPA, rank would it be “reach”, “likely” or “target”? 			
Academics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> your major offered special requirements accreditation student-faculty ratio typical class size 			
College Expenses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tuition, room & board estimated total budget application fee, deposits 			
Financial Aid <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deadline required forms % receiving aid scholarships 			
Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> residence hall requirement food plan 			
Facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic recreational other 			
Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clubs, organizations Greek life athletics, intramurals other 			

Campus Visit Checklist

When you visit a campus, it is important that you ask the right types of questions:

Look at Equipment and School Facilities

- Are the facilities and equipment up-to-date and operating?
- Is the equipment similar to what you will be using on the job?
- Is the library good for studying and research?
- Are the dorms quiet enough for studying?
- What is the cafeteria like?
- How large or small are the dorm rooms?
- What types of furniture are provided/allowed?
- Are there plenty of computer labs?
- Do students get free e-mail and Internet access?

Sit In on a Class or Two

- Do the instructors seem knowledgeable?
- Are the students participating in classroom activities?
- What kinds of work are the students doing?
- How large/small are the classes?

Talk with Current Students in the Program

- How long have they been in school?
- Do they like the program?
- Are they learning what they need to know to get a job?
- What is their opinion of the instructors?
- Do the instructors spend time with the students to be sure they understand the material?
- How much time is needed for studying and other work outside class?
- Are instructors available outside of class?
- Have they had any problems with the school, the instructors or the classes?
- What do they like most/least about the school/program?
- How do they spend their free time?

Talk with Instructors in the Program

- What are the academic requirements in the program?
- What kinds of courses are offered?
- How many students are in the program?
- How long does it take most students to complete the program?
- How long have they been teaching at the school?
- Do they teach full time or part time?
- What types of activities are they involved in that relate to the field of study?
- What types of background do they have in the field?

Talk with an Admissions Counselor

- What are the admissions requirements at this college?
- How do I apply and which forms do I fill out?
- When are the important deadlines for admissions?
- What are the housing requirements and parking rules?
- What types of extracurricular activities are available?
- What is the job placement rate of recent graduates?

Talk with a Financial Aid Counselor

- How much does it cost to attend the college (including tuition, room and board, fees, etc.)?
- What financial aid options are available?
- Are there any special financial aid services offered by the college?
- Which forms do I need to fill out and what are the deadlines?
- How is financial aid paid out? When will I receive it?
- Are there school-specific scholarships available? How do I apply?

Essay Writing Tips

Write an Effective Application Essay

A great application essay will present a vivid, personal, and compelling view of you to the admission staff. It will round out the rest of your application and help you stand out from the other applicants. The essay is one of the only parts of your application over which you have complete control, so take the time to do a good job on it. Check out these tips before you begin.

Keep Your Focus Narrow and Personal

Your essay must prove a single point or thesis. The reader must be able to find your main idea and follow it from beginning to end. Try having someone read just your introduction to see what he or she thinks your essay is about.

Essays that try to be too comprehensive end up sounding watered-down. Remember, it's not about telling the committee what you've done -- they can pick that up from your list of activities -- instead, it's about showing them who you are.

Prove It

Develop your main idea with vivid and specific facts, events, quotations, examples, and reasons. There's a big difference between simply stating a point of view and letting an idea unfold in the details:

- **Okay:** "I like to be surrounded by people with a variety of backgrounds and interests"
- **Better:** "During that night, I sang the theme song from Casablanca with a baseball coach who thinks he's Bogie, discussed Marxism with a little old lady, and heard more than I ever wanted to know about some woman's gall bladder operation."

Be Specific

Avoid clichéd, generic, and predictable writing by using vivid and specific details.

- **Okay:** "I want to help people. I have gotten so much out of life through the love and guidance of my family, I feel that many individuals have not been as fortunate; therefore, I would like to expand the lives of others."
- **Better:** "My Mom and Dad stood on plenty of sidelines 'til their shoes filled with water or their fingers turned white or somebody's golden retriever signed his name on their coats in mud. I think that kind of commitment is what I'd like to bring to working with fourth-graders."

Don't Tell Them What You Think They Want to Hear

Most admission officers read plenty of essays about the charms of their university, the evils of terrorism, and the personal commitment involved in being a doctor. Bring something new to the table, not just what you think they want to hear.

Don't Write a Resumé

Don't include information that is found elsewhere in the application. Your essay will end up sounding like an autobiography, travelogue, or laundry list. Yawn.

"During my junior year, I played first singles on the tennis team, served on the student council, maintained a B+ average, traveled to France, and worked at a cheese factory."

Don't Use 50 Words When Five Will Do

Eliminate unnecessary words.

- **Okay:** "Over the years it has been pointed out to me by my parents, friends, and teachers -- and I have even noticed this about myself, as well -- that I am not the neatest person in the world."
- **Better:** "I'm a slob."

Don't Forget to Proofread

Typos and spelling or grammatical errors can be interpreted as carelessness or just bad writing. Don't rely on your computer's spell check. It can miss spelling errors like the ones below.

- "After I graduate **form** high school, I plan to work for a nonprofit organization during the summer."
- "From that day on, Daniel was my best **fried**."

This article is based on information found in [The College Application Essay](#), by Sarah Myers McGinty.

Tips for Writing the College Admission Essay from e-CampusTours

The college admissions essay should be personal, intriguing, and well-written. It should have a focus and be specific. It should make you stand out from other applicants. Here are some tips to help you achieve these tasks.

- **Be yourself.** Choose a topic that has meaning to you. If you choose a topic that you could care less about, it will show through your writing. Be sure to make the essay your own. If you are funny, don't be afraid to make the essay humorous. If you are passionate, write about that quality and describe what motivates you.
- **Provide a clear thesis and prove it.** The reader should be able to identify the main point of your essay. The thesis should indicate where you are going and what you are trying to communicate from the very beginning. It should be stated

in the introduction of the essay and should be supported with specific facts and examples in the sentences that follow.

- **Be creative.** Draw the reader in with an original introduction so they will want to finish your essay. Don't forget that admissions officers read thousands of essays so you have to make yours stand out from the crowd.
- **Stay on task.** Be sure to do what the college asks you to do. Most colleges want you to write about specific topics or answer certain questions. Make sure you stay on topic throughout your essay. If the admissions officers set a limit for the amount of words in the essay, follow their requirements. Don't ramble on for ten pages when all they want is 500 words.
- **Don't write over your head.** If you use too many big words, a college admissions officer will think you are trying too hard to show off your vocabulary and may even toss the essay out, especially if those big words are misused. Stick to words that flow easily throughout the paper and only use big words occasionally.
- **Proofread.** Your college admissions essay should have zero grammatical and stylistic mistakes. Proofread the essay several times before you submit it. Make sure there are no misspelled words, punctuation errors, or incomplete sentences. Essays with grammatical or stylistic errors are easily dismissed by admission officers.
- **Ask others for input.** Grab parents, teachers, tutors, or older siblings and ask them to read the essay and give you feedback. They may also find grammatical mistakes that you have over-looked.

Students and admissions pros share their tips for standing out from the pack

by Margaret Loftus



Ever since Jack Maloney played the Artful Dodger in a local children's theater production of the musical "Oliver!" when he was 6, he knew he wanted to be a professional actor. The theater program at his school, Oxbridge Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida, was still finding its footing during his early years there, so Maloney took it upon himself to create and stage productions, including a concert of songs from the musical "Rent" and a full production of "Urinetown" that he developed out of an honors performance class. He also helped get the course into the curriculum by writing a proposal in collaboration with his theater teacher and lobbying administrators.

Now a freshman at Pennsylvania State University studying musical theater, Maloney believes that his resourcefulness – and highlighting that in his college essays – was a big factor in getting into his three top choices. (The others were Northwestern in Illinois and the University of Michigan.) He also elaborated on his experiences in interviews whenever he got the chance. "I wrote my own story," he says, "and it was much more compelling in the end."

College counselors have long urged high school students to find and focus on their passion. But developing it to create new opportunities for yourself and others can really grab the attention of admissions officers. For many of them, there's a certain sameness to the applications they read, so when prospective students carve out their own opportunities, colleges notice, says Maria Laskaris, former dean of admissions and financial aid at Dartmouth College and now a senior private counselor at Top Tier Admissions, a company focused on helping applicants navigate the admissions process. "We tell students to push beyond what the school offers," Laskaris says.

These days, with the sheer volume of applications growing, aspiring college students need to use every edge they can muster. According to the latest State of College Admission report from the National Association for College Admission Counseling, the overall number of applications from first-time freshmen inched up 7 percent between fall 2015 and fall 2016. Distinguishing yourself from the crowd has become more important than ever. But remember, even though many coveted schools are growing more and more selective, overall colleges accept an average of two-thirds of first-time freshman applicants, according to NACAC. U.S. News talked to experts to find out how to make your application stand out.

Build on your academic strengths. While the weight that admissions officers give each component of your application varies from school to school, academics is always the heaviest. After all, schools are looking for students who have not only done well but who have also challenged themselves, as they are more likely to succeed in college-level courses. Of course, reviewers also take into account the level of rigor available at a particular school. The key is to plan ahead and start in eighth or ninth

**JACK MALONEY (RIGHT)
IN REHEARSAL AT
OXBRIDGE ACADEMY**

grade to build a foundation that will open doors to advanced coursework later on. For instance, being ready to get advanced algebra out of the way sophomore year puts you on track to take calculus before earning that high school diploma, which might set you up better should you apply to a program that requires it, such as engineering. The bottom line: "Position yourself to keep your options open," Laskaris says.

Tackling honors, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes (if they're available) shows that you're up for the rigors of college, even if you don't ace them. "We'd prefer to see students challenge themselves to get a B in AP or honors

courses rather than an A in a standard-level course," says David Kaiser, the director of undergraduate enrollment management at Temple University's Fox School of Business in Philadelphia. This shows someone who "isn't afraid of hard work," Kaiser says, and "it's a better indicator of the student's ability to perform." That

Two Essays That Worked

What makes a college admissions essay successful? Below are two submissions that helped students get into **Johns Hopkins University** in Baltimore, plus commentary from **Ellen Kim**, dean of undergraduate admissions, about what these applicants did right. Remember, Kim advises, that "what works in these essays works because of who the student is" and how it fits into the rest of the application. In other words, you'll want to apply these principles to a topic that reveals something intriguing about you.

The author takes a straightforward approach to starting, Kim says. "But you can tell you are going to get to know her."

Many personal statements include short scenes, Kim notes. But the strongest essays are the ones that put those anecdotes toward a larger purpose, as the author does here. "She is helping us understand where she is in her journey with Italian," Kim says. "It's not just being descriptive for the sake of being descriptive."

The author chose to write about something very accessible and approachable, Kim notes. "Everyone can relate to family heritage," she says. "It would have been very easy to talk about the members of the family, but she does a good job of making it say something about herself," which is the goal.

In this paragraph, Kim says, "We learn not just about her intellectual appetite for something, but also about what she does when she is passionate."

More Than Thick Eyebrows

By Caroline

Rarely have I studied a topic that flows from my ears to my brain to my tongue as easily as the Italian language. The Italian blood that runs through me is more than the genetics that gave me my dark hair and thick eyebrows. It is the work of the generation that traveled from Istria in the north and Sicilia in the south, meeting through friends in Chicago, and encouraging their children to study hard and make a living for their future families. In time, that influence would be passed on to me; finding my grandfather's meticulously-written electricity notes circa 1935 - filled with drawings and words I did not yet understand - inspired me to take Italian at my own high school.

The moment I realized that my Italian heritage was wholly a part of me was a rather insignificant one, yet to me is one of the most remarkable realizations of my life. The summer after my second year of Italian study, I was driving in my car, listening to a young trio of Italian teenagers, *Il Volo*, meaning "The Flight." As one of the tenors sang a solo, *Ti voglio tanto bene*, I realized that I could understand every word he was singing. Though it was a simple declaration of love and devotion in a beautiful tune, what mattered was that I was not just listening to three cute teenagers sing a song. I was fully engaged with the words and could finally sing along.

After that moment, I sought out all the Italian I could get my hands on: watching *Cinema Paradiso* and *La Dolce Vita*, absorbing phrases of the language I felt I could now call my own. Even better, was that I felt confident enough in my skill that I could use it with my closest living Italian relative, my father's mother, *la mia nonna*. More than speaking the language, I discovered my family's past. In conversing with her and my father, I discovered that I will be only the third person in my paternal grandparents' family to attend college, that my grandmother had only a sixth-grade education, that my grandfather, despite never holding a degree in mathematics or physics, worked for three decades on CTA train cars as an electrician. The marriage of my grandparents in 1922 represented a synthesis of the culture of northern and southern Italy and America.

Having now studied three full years of this language, I only want to consume more of it. I want to read Dante's *Divina Commedia* in its original vernacular, to watch my favorite Italian films without the subtitles, to sing every Italian refrain with fluid understanding of what the melody means, and to finally - finally! - visit my grandparents' childhood homes: the town of Trapani in Sicilia and the Istrian peninsula on the Adriatic coast. To me, the Italian language holds an essential connection to my past, but also a constant goal for the future. It is likely that I will never fully master the vernacular and colloquialisms, yet learning this language will stimulate me intellectually and culturally for life. I believe I can claim Italian as mine now, but there is still so much more to learn. Italian is a gift that I will hold dear forever, and I am glad that I received it so early in life.

"This title is interesting," Kim says. "But it's up to students to decide whether they want to title an essay." If nothing brilliant comes to mind, then you can skip.

"This is a good way to close the essay, by describing why this matters to who she is as a person," Kim says.

said, it's also important to consider carefully which advanced courses will build on your strengths – and don't overdo it. Taking every AP option available may backfire for those who don't excel in a particular subject, for instance, and they could see their overall GPA drop as a result.

Remember: Once you've been accepted, don't slack on your studies. "Grades throughout the senior year are critical to demonstrate continued growth," says Laskaris. "The worst students can do is take their foot off the gas."

Get a handle on the tests. Of course, colleges have long relied on standardized tests to help them differentiate between students in a way that grades alone cannot. Increasingly, applicants are choosing to take both the SAT and the ACT. Christoph Guttentag, dean of undergraduate admissions at Duke University in North Carolina, suggests doing just that to

String Theory

By Joanna

If string theory is really true, then the entire world is made up of strings, and I cannot tie a single one. This past summer, I applied for my very first job at a small, busy bakery and café in my neighborhood. I knew that if I were hired there, I would learn how to use a cash register, prepare sandwiches, and take cake orders. I imagined that my biggest struggle would be catering to demanding New Yorkers, but I never thought that it would be the benign act of tying a box that would become both my biggest obstacle and greatest teacher.

On my first day of work in late August, one of the bakery's employees hastily explained the procedure. It seemed simple: wrap the string around your hand, then wrap it three times around the box both ways, and knot it. I recited the anthem in my head, "three times, turn it, three times, knot" until it became my mantra. After observing multiple employees, it was clear that anyone tying the box could complete it in a matter of seconds. For weeks, I labored endlessly, only to watch the strong and small pieces of my pride unravel each time I tried.

As I rushed to discreetly shove half-tied cake boxes into plastic bags, I could not help but wonder what was wrong with me. I have learned Mozart arias, memorized the functional groups in organic chemistry, and calculated the anti-derivatives of functions that I will probably never use in real life – all with a modest amount of energy. For some reason though, after a month's effort, tying string around a cake box still left me in a quandary.

As the weeks progressed, my skills slowly began to improve. Of course there were days when I just wanted to throw all of the string in the trash and use Scotch tape; this sense of defeat was neither welcome nor wanted, but remarks like "Oh, you must be new" from snarky customers catapulted my determination to greater heights.

It should be more difficult to develop an internal pulse and sense of legato in a piece of music than it is to find the necessary rhythm required to tie a box, but this seemingly trivial task has clearly proven not to be trivial at all. The difficulties that I encountered trying to keep a single knot intact are proof of this. The lack of cooperation between my coordination and my understanding left me frazzled, but the satisfaction I felt when I successfully tied my first box was almost as great as any I had felt before.

Scientists developing string theory say that string can exist in a straight line, but it can also bend, oscillate, or break apart. I am thankful that the string I work with is not quite as temperamental, but still cringe when someone asks for a chocolate mandel bread. Supposedly, the string suggested in string theory is responsible for unifying general relativity with quantum physics. The only thing I am possible for when I use string is delivering someone's pie to them without the box falling apart. Tying a cake box may not be quantum physics, but it is just as crucial to holding together what matters.

beginning to realize that I should not be ashamed if it takes me longer to learn. I persist, continue to tie boxes every weekend at work. Even though I occasionally backslide into feelings of desperation, I always rewrap the string around my hand and start over because I have learned the most gratifying victories come from tenacity. If the universe really is comprised of strings, I am confident that I will be able to tie them together, even if I do have to keep my fingers crossed that they hold up.

Personal statements are called "personal" for a reason, Kim observes. They should tell the admissions committee something about the student. This essay does a good job of wrapping up the piece on a personal note.

Students should try to grab the reader's attention at the first sentence. "Her opening paragraph is interesting," says Kim. "You read it, and you aren't sure what the essay is going to be about. It makes you curious about what she is going to tell you."

"A lot of times students feel like they need to write an essay about a life accomplishment or a life-changing event or something really extraordinary," Kim says. "But it's also possible to write a very effective personal statement about an ordinary thing. It's not the topic that has to be unique. It's what you say that has to be unique."

The author does a good job of providing a window into her thought process, Kim notes. "You also see how she responds to a challenge in a very approachable way."

In this instance, dropping in some academic references works with the theme of the essay, but students shouldn't think they have to follow suit, Kim cautions. It only works if it reinforces your central point.

This essay, like all strong essays, was well-written, clear and error-free, Kim notes. The writing felt natural – not as though the author was reaching for a thesaurus. "This should sound like you," she says.

determine which test better suits your test-taking style. You might opt to sit for your preferred test again, but twice should be the limit, he says. Duke, for example, accepts scores for both tests, but check with your prospective schools on their policies and whether you should submit scores for both tests. At Duke, admissions officers consider scores of individual sections from both tests, but they'll use the highest composite score in their admissions rubric. And what about the optional SAT essay section? While many places don't require it, some do, and that may change year to year. Again, it's best to consult a school's individual policies.

More and more schools - including Bennington College in Vermont, Ohio Wesleyan University, Arizona State University and, as of this summer, the University of Chicago - are going test-optional, meaning certain applicants can choose not to submit standardized-test scores for review in admissions decisions. You can find a comprehensive list of test-optional schools at fairtest.org, operated by the National Center for Fair and Open Testing. When in doubt, check with the school's admissions office.

Laskaris cautions students and parents to take "test-optional" with a grain of salt. "Just because those colleges are not requiring [scores] from everyone doesn't mean 80 percent of them don't take them," she says. "It still does matter for many top institutions."

Think outside your school's extracurriculars. While Santa Monica, California, native Brendan Terry's interest in environmental and social justice issues was first sparked in middle school, he found most of the opportunities to nurture his activist spirit off campus. Terry interned at an educational nonprofit as a summer camp counselor for local children from low-income families and Chinese exchange students, volunteered at a community health clinic, and served as the "educational ambassador" for the 5 Gyres Institute, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that focuses on reducing global plastic pollution, among other activities.

Now a junior majoring in chemistry at Pomona College in California, Terry is well aware of the impact of his community work on his college apps. "It was huge," he says. "Schools always brought it



up." Terry wrote about his activism in the majority of his essays, as well as the "activities" and "additional information" sections of the Common Application. "I used part of it to provide background on each organization that I worked with, and to provide links for clippings about activist work I had done," he says. "His recommendations - one from a teacher and the other from one of the directors at 5 Gyres - reinforced his work as an activist.

No matter what your interests are, find ways to use them to make a contribution to your school or local community. If math is your thing, for example, think about how you can tap your skills to get other kids interested in the subject. Arianna Hilliard, a classmate of Maloney's at Oxbridge Academy who is now in her first year at Vassar College in New York, was vice president of a club at her school called Race Alliance in which members met weekly to discuss the topic of race in popular culture.

Whatever you do, use your time outside of schoolwork wisely. For instance, three-season athletes who know they're not going to be recruited for sports might consider skipping one or two seasons to focus on other interests. Think depth instead of

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breadth, says Seth Allen, vice president and dean of admissions and financial aid at Pomona. "We're looking for students who have decided to go down a particular path with as much enthusiasm as they can muster," he says.

To be sure, some students are too busy with a part-time job or, say, babysitting younger siblings to devote themselves to even one season of sports, much less an activity or a cause. But employment and child care are responsibilities that you can learn from, too. "Colleges look at extracurriculars in the context of a student's environment," says Craig Meister, director of college counseling at Oxbridge Academy and founder of college consulting firm Admissions Intel. He urges his students to list those experiences on their apps. "It's a combination of what you can afford and what you're passionate about," he says.

Consider recommendations carefully. "Always give great consideration to the people you ask to write a recommendation," says Susan Schaurer, associate vice president for strategic enrollment management and marketing at Miami University in Ohio. Colleges vary on their preferences and typically spell that out in their application instructions. For instance, Miami asks for letters from a high school counselor or academic teacher, Schaurer says. "Preferably someone who's had close academic encounters with you," she says. "Ask someone who can really provide insight."

The ideal scenario is when you can ask an instructor who taught you more than once – such as during freshman year and again later on – because then they can speak to your growth and how you might have overcome any particular challenges. Duke, meanwhile, prefers letters from two teachers and a guidance counselor. "We find counselor recommendations so valuable in understanding the student as a member of a community," says Guttentag.

Do a social media check. Meister implores his ninth and 10th graders to not put anything on social media or online that could be questionable. Nonetheless, he says, when looking at their info, "nine times out of 10 I find something they should take down." And while it's true admissions officers don't have time to scroll through your entire Instagram feed, they may stumble upon social media info if

searching online to verify a part of your app. What's more, it's not unusual for schools to be alerted by alumni, community members or others to social media that paints a student in an unflattering light. "We can't ignore what may be brought to our attention," says Schaurer, even after acceptance. "Most institutions put a disclaimer in acceptance letters that stipulates good behavior," she says, or they reserve the right to withdraw the offer of admission.

Meister advises students to always use appropriate language online and to scrub their social media to the extent they can of anything that doesn't reflect the image projected in their applications. "Admission officers are savvier than ever in comparing your application persona versus your recommender's impression of your persona versus your online persona to see if they all match up," he says. A good rule of thumb: "I tell them that if they wouldn't want an admissions officer to see it, nobody else should see it online either," Meister adds.

Show up (to the extent you're able). Time was, if you had your heart set on a particular school, counselors advised you to visit the campus to show the admissions office that you'd be likely to attend if accepted (which is music to their ears). Showing up is still a great way to reveal what schools refer to as "demonstrated interest," a factor that some 70 percent of colleges say plays at least some role in their admissions decisions, according to NACAC. At the same time, "most schools are attuned to resources," Schaurer says, and "they don't want to put students at risk who can't afford to come for a visit."

Indeed, making a trip to campus isn't the only way to let your interest be known, especially in the digital age. "We count any way students engage with us," she notes, which includes opening a college's emails or clicking on a link in a particular message, participating in a webinar or Facebook Live event, and more. Schaurer encourages applicants to ask colleges if they consider demonstrated interest – and how. And be sure to introduce yourself to recruiters during visits to your high school or at local college fairs, Schaurer advises. "You can show interest without leaving home." ♦

COLLEGE COUNSELING RÉSUMÉ

Section I—Family:

	Father	Mother	Guardian	Siblings
Name(s)				
Educational Background (high school, post-high school, etc.)				
Occupation				

Section II—Academics/School:

1. Check the following:

	English	History	Language	Math	Science	Computer	Art	Other
Which subjects do you like the best?								
In which subjects have you done the best?								
Which subjects are more difficult for you?								

2. Your academic record: How would you describe your academic record? Are your grades above, below or consistent with your ability? Why?
3. Your finest academic moment: Describe that achievement or experience.

Section III—School Activities:

Activity

Grade Level

9	10	11	12	Beyond
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Athletics (sport and level [JV, varsity, etc.] and any awards)

Extracurricular Activities (clubs, organizations)

Employment and Summer Activities

Church/Community Service

Section IV—College/Career Interests:

- List the college majors that interest you.
 a. _____ b. _____
- Identify the profession(s) in which you see yourself working. _____



Section V: FACTORS AFFECTING YOUR COLLEGE CHOICES:

1. Besides getting an education and preparing for a career, what are other reasons why you are going to college?
2. What type of college environment will challenge you to grow the most academically and personally?
3. What are your top 4-6 criteria in selecting a college?
4. In college, what extracurricular activities do you want to continue or begin?
5. What professions interest you the most?
6. List college majors that interest you
7. What pressures, if any, are you feeling from yourself or others about going to college?
8. What are your major concerns about attending college?
9. College Type: Single Sex_____ Coed_____ Either_____

10. College Locations—Check regions and circle states of particular interest:

- Midwest (IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, MO, OH, WI)
- Southeast (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV)
- Mid-Atlantic (DE, D.C., MD, PA, NJ, NY)
- New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, VT, RI)
- West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, ID, HI, KS, MT, NE, NV, NM, OK, OR, ND, SD, TX, UT, WA, WY)
- Canada, England, Scotland

If you are interested in specific cities, list them here and explain why.

11. Community (check all that apply):

- small town
- large town
- near a city
- near the mountains
- near the coast
- undecided

12. College size (check all that apply):

- under 500-1000
- 1000-2000
- 2000-5000
- 5000-10,000
- over 10,000
- no preference

Section VI—Final Thoughts:

Is there anything else you'd like to share about yourself?

IMPORTANT LINKS THAT MIGHT HELP IN YOUR SEARCH

College searches

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

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

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

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

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

<http://www.ecampustours.com/> - virtual tours of many colleges

Other Web Sites

<https://www.commonapp.org/CommonApp/default.aspx> - a general college application

<http://www.icc.edu/futureStudents/campusVisitDays.asp> - ICC campus visit days

<http://www.admissions.com/> a general site

<http://eligibilitycenter.org/> site for division I & II potential athletes

<http://www.collegeillinois.org> - great college resources

<http://www.knowhow2goillinois.org> - great college resources

<http://www.whatsnextillinois.org> - great college resources

<http://www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov> - financial aid help

<http://www.fafsa.gov> - where to file FAFSA

<http://www.pin.ed.gov> - where to get PIN for signing FAFSA electronically

<http://www.collegenavigator.ed.gov> - college search tool

INTERNET SITES FOCUSED ON COLLEGE EXPLORATION:

COLLEGE INFORMATION

CSO College Center: www.CSOCollegeCenter.org

The College Board: www.collegeboard.com

KnowHow2Go: www.knowhow2go.org

Hobson's CollegeView: www.collegeview.com

Peterson's: www.petersons.com

The Common Application Online: www.commonapp.org

Colleges That Change Lives: www.ctcl.org

FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION

Federal Student Aid: <http://studentaid.ed.gov>

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): www.fafsa.gov

FAFSA4caster: www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov

CSS/PROFILE: <https://profileonline.collegeboard.com>

The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid: www.finaid.org

FastWeb: www.fastweb.com

FindTuition: www.findtuition.com

Sallie Mae: www.salliemae.com

TESTING

ACT: www.act.org

ACT Fee Waiver Instructions: www.actstudent.org/faq/answers/feewaiver.html

SAT: The College Board: www.collegeboard.com

SAT Fee Waiver Instructions: www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees/feewaivers.html

Preliminary SAT (PSAT): www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/about.html

Free Test Prep from Number2.com: www.number2.com

The Princeton Review: www.princetonreview.com

Kaplan's Test Prep: www.kaptest.com

ASSOCIATIONS/ORGANIZATIONS AND RESEARCH/POLICY

National Association for College Admission Counseling: www.nacacnet.org

MemberPortal/United Negro College Fund (UNCF): www.uncf.org

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities: www.hacu.net/hacu/Default_EN.asp

National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education: www.nafeo.org

First In The Family: www.firstinthefamily.org

ATHLETICS

The Official NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse Web site: <http://eligibilitycenter.org>

Campus Champs: www.campuschamps.org

Athletic Aid: www.athleticaid.com

CAREERS

The Occupational Outlook Handbook: www.bls.gov/oco