



COLLEGE PLANNING MINUTES

Volume 3, Issue 2

October 18, 2010

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Special College Application Issue

Seniors—Time to Apply!

One day you're watching your five year old trudge toward his first day of kindergarten and the next thing you know he's a senior, making plans to leave home for good. Once again you're worrying about whether he'll like his new school and his teachers, whether he'll get good grades and make nice friends. You're wondering, "Is he ready?" - and are you?

Stay Involved

As your senior sets off to navigate the bewildering college application and financial aid mazes, don't send her off alone. A 2006 poll that asked high school seniors how satisfied they were with their "parents' level of involvement in the college search" found that 57% of students were satisfied and 28% wished their parents had been *more* involved. Only 6% wished their parents had been less involved (1). So while it's a safe bet that your opinion of your daughter's hairstyle isn't welcome, your assistance with researching colleges and arranging campus visits will be.



Communicate

Don't make the mistake of waiting until your son is accepted to Stanford to mention that you aren't willing to pay the tuition and don't want him in California anyway. A good way to begin the conversation about college is for a student and his parents to go through the (cont'd p.2)

Inside this issue:

5 Steps to Organize the Application Process	3
Test Optional Colleges	4
Finding Merit Aid on the Web	4
Timely Tips for All Grades	5

Time to Apply Cont'd

college search engine on the College Board website together (www.collegeboard.com). The questions posed cover lots of important issues, ranging from geographic location to whether on-campus housing is available all four years. Comparing parent and student responses is an excellent way to uncover differences and begin resolving them.

A second important step to take now is to have a candid discussion with your child about what you are willing and able to contribute toward college costs. If you expect your daughter to work and/or take out loans to help pay college expenses, tell her now so that she can factor it into her college selection. Help educate her about loans with the FinAid loan calculator (<http://www.finaid.org/calculators/loanpayments.phtml>). You can input the amount of a loan, interest rate (which is provided for standard college loans), and repayment period and find out not only how much you would pay each month, but the income you would need to make those payments comfortably. That said, remind her that many families pay far less than the sticker price for college, so encourage her to apply wherever she wants, but include a financial safety school that everyone is comfortable with.

Remember Who's Going

While your involvement in the college search is extremely important for your senior, try to keep your own likes, dislikes, and ego out of the process. This is easier said than done. If you've dreamed of tailgating at Virginia Tech or vicariously reliving the best four years of your life strolling the "gothic wonderland" of Duke, it can be genuinely disappointing to accept that your son's dream school is a small engineering college in the heart of Pittsburgh. You're entitled to your feelings, but try to keep them to yourself. For years your teenager has been forced to adapt to your world, but college signals the beginning of a new era. As the parent of a young adult instead of a child, your role is increasingly to embrace the world your son or daughter creates for him or herself.

Be Supportive

Provide lots of emotional support this year. Your teenager faces the complex and laborious process of applying to multiple colleges as well as being judged in a very public manner. If you were applying for several highly competitive jobs, you probably wouldn't broadcast the news until you'd gotten an offer. Imagine how much more stressful the whole ordeal would be if everywhere you went for an entire year people were asking where you'd applied and whether you'd been accepted.

You can reduce your son's senior year angst by making sure that applying to college does not become the topic of every conversation, by letting him know that he does not have to worry about disappointing you, no matter the outcome, and by reassuring him that if he selects colleges carefully, he will have a great experience wherever he goes.

Finally, give him the same pep talk you did all those years ago when he was facing kindergarten. Borrow the words of Dr. Seuss: "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go."

1. Parent Involvement in College Planning. (2007). *Student Poll*, Vol. 6,(1). College Board and Arts & Sciences Group. LLC.



5 Steps to Organize the Application Process



For seniors, it's time to get serious about applying to college. Share these five steps with your teen to help her take charge of the process.

1. Finalize Your List of Colleges.

Before you start filling out applications, take the time to thoughtfully compose your complete list of colleges. The College Board recommends applying to 1-2 reach schools, 2-4 likely schools and 1-2 safeties. However, I'd suggest adding to the reach and likely groups, especially if you're applying to highly selective colleges, where the acceptance rates are very low. Above all, make sure that all schools, including your safeties, are schools you would be happy to attend.

2. Get an Overview of the Process.

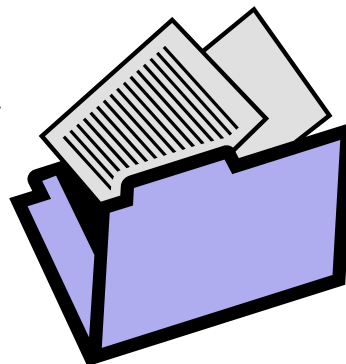
I recommend two key organizing tools. The first is a **spreadsheet** on which you list your college choices and make columns for deadlines and requirements (like testing, teacher recommendations, etc.). Carefully read the instructions for all applications and complete the spreadsheet, making note of any unusual requests. The second critical tool is a **calendar** just for college-related deadlines. If you're like me, however, and suffer from the tendency to dutifully write important dates on your calendar and then forget to look at it, consider creating an online Google Docs calendar. You can access it from anywhere and send yourself e-mail reminders of dates. Sign up at <http://docs.google.com>.

3. Check standardized testing.

Review the testing requirements of the schools on your list. Have you taken all required tests? Are you satisfied with your scores? If not, register for any tests you still need to take—and be sure to have *official* reports from the College Board and the ACT sent to colleges. The scores that are reported on your high school transcript are not sufficient for many colleges.

4. Make a separate folder for each college.

Keep a copy of your application and any correspondence with the college inside. On the outside, tape a cover sheet on which is printed a checklist for recording when each part of the application was sent. And to help you quickly pick the folder you're looking for out of the pile, use cover sheets of different colors—say blue for Virginia Tech and red for UVA.



5. Complete any early application first—then start on the rest.

Once you've finished your first application, give yourself a few days break and then get started on the rest. There's a natural temptation to hope for the best and postpone working on other applications until you've heard from your early school, but do yourself a favor and resist it. If you get disappointing news in mid-December, the last thing you'll want to face will be a stack of unfinished applications to work on over the winter break.

Good luck and take comfort in knowing that college is well worth the effort it takes to get there.

Test Optional Colleges

Standardized tests are a bane of every college bound student, but for some they are particularly troublesome. These are the students who did everything right—took difficult courses and applied themselves diligently, prepared for the tests systematically, went to bed early the night before the test and put their pencil down the moment the proctor told them to. Yet despite their best efforts, their SAT and/or ACT scores do not reflect their academic achievement.

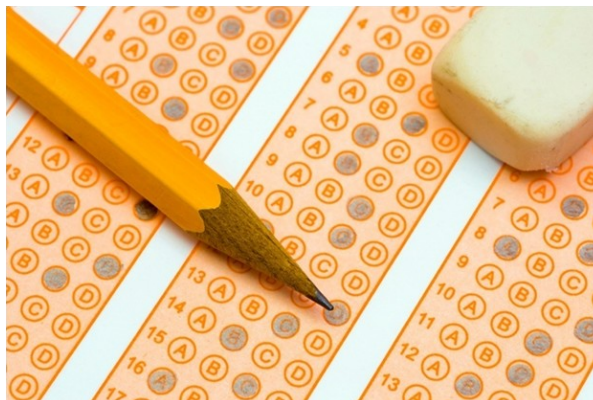
What can such students do? Fortunately, an increasing number of colleges are permitting applicants to choose not to submit their test scores. A list of these colleges is available on the website of the organization FairTest:

<http://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>.

Virginia Test Optional Schools

Here in Virginia, Christopher Newport University and George Mason University have test optional policies for students who meet the following academic standards:

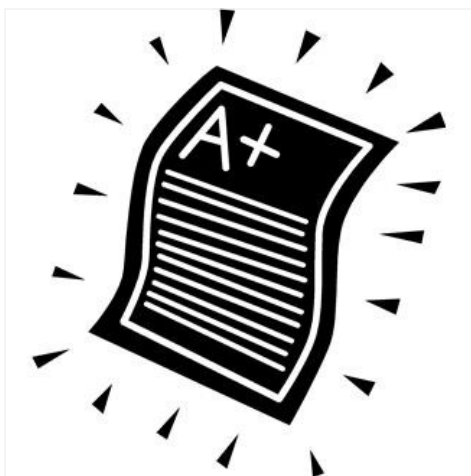
CNU: A cumulative GPA of at least 3.5 or class rank in the top 10% of their class. Score optional students are “strongly encouraged to submit at least one recommendation



from a teacher in a core subject area.”

George Mason: There are no requirements, but the college notes that successful score optional candidates generally have a GPA of 3.5, class rank in the top 20%, “strong academic performance” in college preparatory courses, and extra-curricular demonstration of leadership and motivation. Also, they “must submit at least one recommendation from a teacher in an academic subject.” *Note also that they are excluded from certain programs, majors, and scholarships, and from NCAA intercollegiate teams, so students should research and weigh this option carefully.*

Finding Merit Aid on the Web



If you're hoping your senior will be able to spin good grades into gold, check out these websites featuring colleges that offer merit aid.

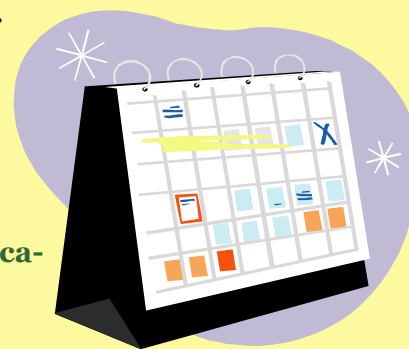
MeritAid.com: This website allows you to search by college name or by state. Available merit scholarships are listed for each college. Click on a scholarship to see the details; who's eligible, selection criteria, amount, etc.

U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges 2011: This web page has a list of the colleges with the highest percentages of students who “had no financial need and who were awarded institutional non-need-based scholarship or grant aid”: <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/most-merit-aid>.

Timely Tips for All Grades

Grades 9-12: Focusing on the Future: January 22, 2010. Sign up

by Dec. 3rd. This is a one-day academic and career planning conference hosted by the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary. Separate workshops are provided for parents and students. Check it out at www.cfge.wm.edu.



Grades 10 and 11: In October, the application process begins for:

Virginia Summer Residential Governor's School Programs. Rising 10th and 11th graders in Virginia can apply to participate in specialized residential programs that are sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education and housed at Virginia colleges. Program choices include Humanities; Math, Science, & Technology; Visual and Performing Arts; Agriculture; and Life Sciences and Medicine. Mentorship programs are available in Engineering and Marine Science. The selection process is competitive; students who are interested in applying should speak to their school counselors. For more information, visit http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/governors_school_programs/summer_residential/index.shtml.

Virginia Summer Foreign Language Academies. In addition to the Summer Governor's Schools, the Virginia DOE offers three week residential programs to selected 10th and 11th graders who excel in the study of foreign language. The options include programs for students who are currently studying French, Spanish, German, or Latin, and programs in Russian, Japanese, and Chinese for students with or without a previous background. Interested students should contact their counselor and click here for more information: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/foreign_language/language_academies/index.shtml.

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