



# *COLLEGE ADMISSIONS HANDBOOK*

## WELCOME

Welcome to your College Admissions “Boot Camp” Handbook! Plan the Way Foundation has created this handbook to help you be prepared and learn the more important information for a well educated, sound decision, to find your dream college or university.

This handbook can be a lifesaver when it comes to the college application process, and we know this from experience. Frankly, there is a LOT of information that students need to learn in order to maximize their chances at the best schools for their college education. It isn’t a particularly difficult process to master with the right help and guidance, but the problem is that so many graduating high school students simply don’t know what to do, or where to start!

With the information available in this book, Plan the Way Foundation will enable you to get a head start on the college admissions process. For example, you will learn what to look for as you go through the process of selecting a school, along with how to maximize your chances of an acceptance when you actually complete your applications. You will discover the secrets to an effective essay, and the skills you will need to ace any admissions interviews... and much more, as well!

We hope that you are reading this handbook early, giving yourself plenty of time to implement these strategies to your benefit. Regardless, however, this information will be applicable for any college-bound high school student. With that in mind, we urge you to take the opportunity to absorb this material, and talk it over with parents, advisors, and other involved adults. It can really make a difference in how smoothly things go during your college application process!

# FINDING THE RIGHT COLLEGE

Feel like you need to go to a big-name college to get the best education and impress all of your friends? Take a moment to consider that college is not just about getting a great education — it's also a huge leap into a whole new world of social experiences, personal growth, and independence. (Not to mention a new level of hard work, studying, and academic achievement!) The overall culture of your college may play as big a role in your future success as your degree. Figuring out what's important to you will help you narrow the field, and you may discover some alternative options that hadn't even been on your radar!

Starting your search with the basics can help you identify colleges that will best suit you academically and personally. Each of us has unique needs and values, and what is important to you may not matter to someone else. Take location, for instance. If you don't want to be more than 100 miles from home, then schools on the other side of the globe are out! The same goes for school size, cost, and other basic criteria. By identifying your needs early on, you can eliminate hundreds of schools and focus on the things that will make your school a perfect fit.

## TEN CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING A COLLEGE

Most college-bound students already realize that the best schools tend to enroll students with the best grades and the highest test scores. You probably also are aware that there are some college names that are a lot more impressive on a sweatshirt than they are in real life. The real question that must be asked by all college-bound students, however, involves figuring out whether a school is right *for you*? There are some important details to consider when deciding which colleges and universities to apply for – and even more importantly, where to enroll! Sadly, many students don't spend very much time thinking about this life-changing decision, though, and they may end up extremely unhappy as a result. This can happen even at schools that are very well respected – if the university is a poor match for a student, it really doesn't matter how highly it is ranked! By taking the time to think about these things now, you'll be able to hone in on the details that really matter to you... and with that information, you are far more likely to find the college or university that's right for you.

### 1. Size of School

The fact is, colleges come in all sizes. They range from a tiny school in California that enrolls only 26 students to enormous institutions like Ohio State University, which has more than 60,000 students! So, which size is better? The answer to that question, of course, depends on you and your individual comfort zone. Consider the following questions: Did you go to a small or a large high school? Did you like the size of your high school? Did you grow up in a city or a rural area? Do you like being places where everybody knows you, or do you like the anonymity of a crowd? How much individual attention do you prefer from your teachers? All of these considerations may help you determine which size of school is best for you.

## **2. Type of Institution**

There are many different types of colleges and universities. Some schools devote significant time and resources to research, and focus on large graduate programs. This can be great, if that is what you are looking for... but it doesn't suit every incoming college freshman. Other schools limit (or completely forego) graduate programs. There are many colleges that enroll only undergraduate students, and focus their attention on teaching and learning. In addition to these differences, remember that some schools offer a specialty in one specific area, such as engineering or writing. Others are best known for offering their students a broad, liberal arts education. Other differences could include whether the schools are coed, or only open to students of one sex. It is often also worth noting whether the schools have a particular religious affiliation, and whether they are public or private. There are also historically black colleges, schools with co-op programs where you earn money while going to school, and schools with large evening, distance-learning, and part-time programs. The options really are almost limitless! Determine where your interests lie, and you will be able to find the types of schools that will be your best match.

## **3. Location, Location, Location!**

There are colleges in every living environment you can imagine, from tiny college towns in Minnesota, to pastoral hills in Ohio, to the middle of New York City, Chicago or Los Angeles! If you have always lived in the suburbs or a smaller town, choosing an urban campus could seem like an adventure at first glance. However, after a week of the noise, dirt, and crowds, will you find yourself longing for a grassy campus with open spaces? On the other hand, if you are used to the city and mall life but choose a scenic college in a rural area, will you find yourself rushing into the Student Center after a few nights, looking for any sign of noise, lights, and people? Think very carefully about where you grew up, what kinds of areas are the most comfortable for you, and how much of a change you want when you head off to college.

## **4. Distance from Home**

Closely tied to location is the issue of how far from home you want to be. For some people, going to college is a chance to explore a totally different part of the country. Other college students want to make sure they can have dinner with their family once a week, or go home to do their laundry. However, this is far more than a decision about the comforts of home! When deciding how far you want to be from home during college, think very seriously about how much money you can afford to spend in travel, not to mention how frequently you feel homesick. The fact is that for most students, the farther you are from home, the less often you'll be able to afford to visit. On the other hand, with email, mobile phones, and a good internet provider, you can still feel close to home even if you're in California and your sister is in New Jersey.

## **5. Cost/Scholarships & Financial Aid**

Naturally, not all colleges cost the same amount, and the costs can get rather confusing. In fact, there are even different types of financial aid available at different schools. People often hear about students who received a scholarship for their athletic ability, but those same kinds of offers may be available to other students who show their talents and hard work with their grades, musical talent, or other special abilities.

Public universities often offer much lower tuition rates to in-state students, but their fees to out-of-state residents are usually pretty similar to private schools. On the other hand, private institutions charge everyone the same (usually higher) tuition, but they often have privately-funded scholarship monies available. Because of this, it's worth applying to some private schools even if the cost seems high initially.

## **6. Student Population**

Representing the population of the country (and the world!), college students are not all the same. Some institutions, particularly larger schools and those in big cities, tend to have a student body that hails from a wide range of ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds. Other schools, especially smaller colleges and those in very rural locations may lean toward having a fairly homogeneous student body. Other important elements of the student population include whether most students live at the school or commute, the age of the average student, and how many students are involved with the Greek system of sororities and fraternities, if there is one.

## **7. Majors and Requirements**

If you already have a good idea what field you want to enter after college, it's important to make sure you select a college that will best prepare you for your chosen profession. Some schools are particularly well known for excellence in specific majors, like pre-med or architecture. Attending these schools – and performing well there – will put you in an enviable position to pursue your desired career after you graduate. Of course, many entering freshmen are not so sure what they want to do with their lives just yet... in that case, a student may want to consider a school that will offer a variety of options.

Universities and colleges will almost always require students to take classes in a wide range of areas during their first year or two. These schools are great for students who either want a well-rounded education or are trying to figure out what area to focus on. However, even more specialized schools will require a set of general education courses before they let students just dive in to their chosen majors. Compare these requirements between schools, as they may vary from place to place.

## **8. Athletics and Events**

This can be a larger element of the college scene than many students think, before attending their school. Are you an avid sports fan, or does the sound of a marching band and the sight of a football uniform make you cringe? At some schools, sports are a huge element of the social calendar in many students' lives. Other schools may not have intercollegiate athletics at all, and others may not pay much attention to it even if the school supports teams. Bear in mind that the culture of intercollegiate athletics can vary substantially from one college to the next. Maybe you're really into going to live concerts, or you might love nothing better than to go hiking in the woods. If you like to spend your free time going to shows at clubs, you probably won't be happy at a small school in the countryside where relatively few popular musical acts stop on tour, and you might be happier in an urban environment. However, if you love to be outdoors, a campus in a natural setting can give you just the kind of balance you need to feel – and perform – your best.

## **9. Special Activities and Programs**

Many students have always wanted to try living and studying in another country, and experiencing another culture? A surprising number of colleges offer special programs to help you study overseas for a semester, or even a whole school year. You'll usually receive full credit for your academic work overseas, as well as enjoying the perfect chance to learn a new language, make some new friends, and experience exotic scenery and cuisine.

If you're a singer/musician, a visual artist, or an aspiring journalist, then you want to consider school that will not only fulfill your academic goals, but your personal interests and aspirations, too. Some colleges and universities have great arts and theater programs, or excellent newspapers, giving students a chance to be involved in extracurricular activities outside their majors. Others – especially commuter schools without a large, on-campus contingent of students – focus more of their attention on great classes, but there may not be as much else to offer. There are also institutions created specifically for a type of study, such as conservatories of music, art schools, and other programs that can be a perfect fit for the right student.

## **10. Your Gut Feeling**

This is truly a situation where you must trust your instincts. If a place “feels right,” that's an important thing to notice. Similarly, if it just “feels wrong,” no matter who wants you to go there or how good it looks on paper, that school may not be the ideal place for you. Selecting a college or university is an extremely personal choice, and after considering all the other objective factors, the fact of the matter is that it comes down to you. Visit colleges you're interested in, and see how you feel walking around their campuses. Could you imagine yourself going to school there? Once you get a true feel for the types of campuses – and the kinds of schools – that are the best fit for your personality, lifestyle and goals, you'll be well on your way to finding the college that's right for you. Good luck, and happy hunting!

# VISITING AND RESEARCHING YOUR COLLEGE LIST

College visits are an essential aspect of building your college list. You don't need to see every college before you apply, but you should see some representative models and then pursue more of those that are like the ones you prefer. Before you hit the road, you'll need to know what a good fit is potentially, and you should do enough browsing and research to make the visits worthwhile. Keep your options open. Visit all types of campuses even if you know you are decided against them. You might be pleasantly surprised.

## **A matter of timing**

You're probably insanely busy as a sophomore or junior, and breaking out the time to visit campuses is not easy. That's especially true when you factor in the availability, or lack thereof, of on-campus tours and information sessions, let alone one-on-one interviews. You're probably free on most Sundays, but most college admission offices are closed. You're probably free during major school vacations, but college campuses are like ghost towns because that's when the colleges are on break as well. You'll need to make some compromises, perhaps missing a practice or performance here or there, or working with your teachers and guidance counselor to be excused from classes on a few days. This lack of time makes it all the more important that you make visits count by preparing for them.

## **Why visit?**

First of all, you need to know what seems to be a fit for you, and there's no substitute for actually visiting a campus in person. An online tour or DVD can give you an initial flavor, but walking around, seeing the students, experiencing the information session, going in and out of buildings, and seeing what's in the surrounding area are essential to helping you establish your comfort level with the institution as a whole. Second, colleges are starting to pay more attention to how much attention you pay them. How do you demonstrate interest, so that a college will be more likely to admit you? Visit, of course. Interview, if they'll let you. Write great essays that establish the logical fit between you and the college, and continue to stay in touch with the college and its representatives through letters, e-mails, and calls during your senior year.

## **The power of research**

So how do you discover, and then establish, that logical fit between you and some large institution that you don't know much about? Research. Research should begin very early. Get to know your prospective colleges' Web sites, because that's where they make available almost any information you could possibly want. You can delve deeply into prospective majors, course listings, faculty research areas, special programs, internships, scholarships, graduation requirements, academic opportunities, and extracurricular offerings. What's great about the Internet is that you can not only see the general course listings in departments that might be of interest to you. You can also find out which courses will be offered next semester, and the semester after that.

Prior to a college visit, spend some time exploring each college's site. What majors are offered? Minors? What are the requirements to fulfill the major? Can you find out the percentage of students majoring in these areas? As you read through the courses listed in the department, do you find yourself getting more interested or tuning out? How do these offerings begin to compare to the other colleges you are researching? Spend some time in the academic section of the colleges' Web sites, and then spend time in the admission section. Here is where you'll find the incoming class profile that lists the scores, grades, geographical background, and other aspects of the first-year class. Can you place yourself in this profile? Does this school seem like a huge stretch? A realistic reach? A target? A likely admit? Look for special admission and academic programs, scholarship opportunities, information on need-based financial aid, and extracurricular offerings that fit your interests. Begin to try to find your place in this college. If you can't, it's probably not a great fit. If you find yourself becoming increasingly interested, then a visit is likely to be worthwhile.

### **Keep track of what you see**

As you continue your visits, be mindful of the model you're exploring. Size, location, institutional type (from college to research university), campus environment, and other factors will play out differently for you. Keep notes and review them as you continue your research by going back to the college Web sites and other third-party sites and guide books that will offer you additional perspectives. Is there a theme that is starting to develop? Are you drawn to one or more types of college or university? If so, that's the starting point for your next visits. Which other institutions might compare well to the ones you like?

As you can see, research is a continuing process, and visiting doesn't stop until you finally select the one college you will attend. Even in late spring of senior year, you'll likely find yourself reviewing college materials carefully and planning a couple of final follow-up visits to schools that have admitted you. This ongoing evaluation and open-minded, critical analysis is a key component of a smart, well-informed approach to college admission — one that will help you to find and gain admission to a college where you are most likely to be successful and happy.

### **The Campus Visit: First Impressions Count**

Would you ever think of buying a car without driving it first? Of course not — how else will you know how it runs unless you get behind the wheel and take it for a spin? The same goes for choosing a college. While a school may look good on paper, you might be in for a shock when you actually step on campus for the first time. You can't tell what a college will really be like just from pictures on its Web site and catalog. Perhaps the freshman dormitories look like they should be condemned or the campus is situated in a high-crime area. You wouldn't be able to see these potential deal-breakers from the pages of a glossy catalog featuring happy-go-lucky coeds studying under the flowing branches of a wispy willow tree

While these visuals may seem like an exaggeration, they are a possibility. That is why you need to visit every college that you plan to apply to. Here's what you need to look for when you take your campus tours.

## **Academics**

The best time to visit college campuses is during the school year, when classes are in session. That way, you can see the actual size of a class, the format in which the class is run, and who is teaching (a professor versus a teaching assistant). But, no worries, there are still classes that go on throughout the summer. You just need to make sure you ask lots of questions of your tour guide to get the real deal.

Take a look at the size of the classrooms. Are they large lecture halls that hold more than 100 students? Are they smaller rooms? If you're a self-starter, then large lectures might be OK for you; but if you need some one-on-one attention, the school you choose to attend should provide small-class learning opportunities. Ask your tour guide about the average student-teacher ratio in freshman classes versus upperclassman classes.

## **Location**

Campuses are located in one of three types of locations: urban, suburban, or rural. If you're looking to attend college in a bustling city, that's great; but just because a school is situated in a city doesn't mean that it's the right place for you. Perhaps the campus is located in a remote part of a city, from which it is difficult to get to the city's center. Or maybe it's in one of the busiest, noisiest sections of town — if you like peace and quiet when you study, this might not be the best location for you.

The same goes for suburban and rural schools. Just because the location sounds ideal from a catalog, it might not be ideal when it comes time to actually live on campus. Perhaps that university located in the rolling green hills of Kentucky didn't mention that there were dozens of horse farms surrounding it. While horses and green hills sound lovely, you might not think the same of the smell of horse manure waking you up every morning! The key here is to take a really good look around you when you visit a campus.

## **Housing**

Where are you going to be living on campus? While the academics and location are very important, don't forget that you will be spending many of your waking (and sleeping) hours in your dorm room. Find out the following information:

- Are there freshman and upperclassmen dorms?
- Are the dorms co-ed or single-sex?
- Is there a quiet time enforced every night for studying?
- Are laundry facilities available?
- Is there a student lounge?
- Are there computer and phone hookups in all the rooms?
- Does the dormitory have a sprinkler system?

## **Student Life**

Let's face it: you're probably not going to spend all of your time studying and sleeping, so you need to find out what the social situation is. Is the school a party school? Are sororities and fraternities big on campus? What kind of extracurricular activities and competitive sports are available? Knowing what to expect from the social scene before you sign the dotted line will help you determine if the school will be right for you.

**Security**

Your personal safety is of utmost importance when you leave for college. You'll be walking a lot of places on your own, both during the day and at night, and you need to know what kind of security is available. If the campus is large, find out if there is transportation available. Many large campuses offer intercampus bus service — just make sure to ask when the last bus runs. You should also find out if the school offers an escort service. If you are studying late at night at the library and don't want to walk back to your room by yourself, it is reassuring to know that a security guard will be available to accompany you.

# ADMISSIONS ESSAY SECRETS

Each year, the most selective Ivy League colleges reject four out of five high school valedictorians – not to mention hundreds of students with perfect SAT scores! This can leave these excellent applicants and their parents wondering where they went wrong. The fact is, of course, that there may not have been anything “wrong” with their credentials – but they may simply have presented themselves poorly! While there is no secret formula for gaining admission to a top school, there are (unfortunately) a good many ways for students to ensure rejection! One of the most common problems is taking the admissions essay too lightly.

Over one-third of the time an admissions officer spends on your application is spent evaluating your essay. Admissions officers use the essay to compare hundreds or even thousands of applicants with similar grades, activities, and SAT scores. To stand out, your essay must not only demonstrate your grasp of grammar and ability to write clearly and engagingly, but you must also paint a vivid picture of your personality and character. This is the thing that needs to impress an over-worked and busy admissions officer to accept you... instead of the next applicant on his or her desk.

Fortunately, unlike the other aspects of the application, you maintain *current* control your essay. This means that you can make sure that you offer the most positive glimpse of your character, background, and writing ability to the members of the admissions committee.

Our advice when it comes to essays? Be interesting... and be concise. Here are some tips to help in that regard.

## ESSAY WRITING TIPS

### **1. Don't Get Too Fancy. Do Use Your Own Voice.**

Admissions officers can easily tell words poached from a thesaurus from the words of a high school senior. Big words, especially when misused, detract from the essay. Instead of impressing the reader, they wind up inappropriately drawing attention away from the message. They also tend to make the essay sound contrived and disingenuous.

*Before: Although I did a plethora of activities in high school, my assiduous efforts enabled me to succeed.*

*After: Although I juggled many activities in high school, I succeeded through persistent work.*

### **2. Don't Bore the Reader. Do Be Interesting.**

Admissions officers have to read hundreds of essays, and they must often skim. Abstract rumination has no place in an application essay. Admissions officers aren't looking for a new way to view the world; they're looking for a new way to view you the applicant. The best way to grip your reader's attention is to begin the essay with a captivating snapshot. Notice how the slightly off-kilter scene depicted in the "after" example creates intrigue and keeps the reader's interest.

*Before: The college admissions and selection process is a very important one, perhaps one that will have the greatest impact on one's future. The college that a person will go to often influences his personality, views, and career.*

*After: An outside observer would have called the scene ridiculous: a respectable physician holding the bell of his stethoscope to the chest of a small stuffed bear.*

### **3. Do Use Personal Details. Don't Tell Them... Show Them!**

Good essays are concrete and grounded in personal detail. They do not merely assert "I learned my lesson" or that "these lessons are useful both on and off the field." They show it through personal detail. "Don't tell them, show them," simply means that in order to describe a personal trait, do it by describing your personal experiences. This is infinitely better than merely stating it as fact.

*Before: I developed a new compassion for the disabled.*

*After: The next time Mrs. Cooper asked me to help her across the street, I smiled and immediately took her arm.*

The first example is vague and could have been written by anybody. But the second sentence evokes a vivid image of something that actually happened, placing the reader in the experience of the applicant.

### **4. Do Be Concise. Don't Be Wordy.**

Wordiness not only takes up valuable space – it can also confuse the important ideas you're trying to convey. Short sentences are more forceful because they are direct and to the point. Certain phrases such as "the fact that" are usually unnecessary. Notice how the revised version focuses on active verbs rather than forms of "to be" and adverbs and adjectives.

*Before: My recognition of the fact that the project was finally over was a deeply satisfying moment that will forever linger in my memory.*

*After: Completing the project at last gave me an enduring sense of fulfillment.*

### **5. Don't Use Slang- Do Use Proper Grammar.**

You are writing an essay, here, and not e-mail or a text message. Remember your audience, and what they are looking for in an applicant! Slang terms, clichés, contractions, and an excessively casual tone should be eliminated. Here's one example of inappropriately colloquial language.

*Well here I am thinking about what makes me tick. You would be surprised. What really gets my goat is when kids disrespect the flag. My father was in 'Nam and I know how important the military is to this great nation.*

### **7. Do Use Active Voice Verbs**

Passive-voice expressions are verb phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb. Passive voice employs a form of the word to be, such as “was” or “were.” Overuse of the passive voice makes prose seem flat and uninteresting.

*Before: The lessons that prepared me for college were taught to me by my mother.*

*After: My mother taught me lessons that prepared me for college.*

### **8. Do Seek Multiple Opinions.**

Ask your friends and family to read the essay and provide critical feedback, keeping these questions in mind:

- Have I answered the question?
- Does my introduction engage the reader? Does my conclusion provide closure?
- Do my introduction and conclusion avoid summary?
- Do I use concrete experiences as supporting details?
- Have I used active-voice verbs wherever possible?
- Is my sentence structure varied, or do I use all long or short sentences?
- Are there any clichés such as "cutting edge" or "learned my lesson?"
- Do I use transitions appropriately?
- What about the essay is memorable?
- What's the worst part of the essay?
- What parts of the essay need elaboration or are unclear?
- What parts of the essay do not support my main argument?
- Is every single sentence crucial to the essay? (This must be the case.) What does the essay reveal about my personality?

### **9. Do Answer the Question.**

Many students try to turn a 500-word essay into a complete autobiography. Not surprisingly, they fail to answer the question and risk their chances of attending that college. Make sure that every sentence in your essay exists specifically to answer the question.

### **10. Do Revise, Revise, Revise.**

The first step in an improving any essay is to cut, cut, and cut some more! Rewriting elements of the essay makes a big difference, as well.

## SAMPLE ESSAY

*The sun sleeps as the desolate city streets wait for the morning rush hour. Driven by an inexplicable compulsion, I enter the building along with ten other swimmers, inching my way toward the cold, dark locker room of the Esplanada Park Pool. One by one, we slip into our still-damp drag suits and make a mad dash through the chill of the morning air, stopping only to grab pull-buoys and kickboards on our way to the pool. Nighttime temperatures in coastal California dip into the high forties, but our pool is artificially warmed to seventy-nine degrees; the temperature differential propels an eerie column of steam up from the water's surface, producing the spooky ambience of a werewolf movie. Next comes the shock. Headfirst immersion into the tepid water sends our hearts racing, and we respond with a quick set of warm-up laps. As we finish, our coach emerges from the fog. He offers no friendly accolades, just a rigid regimen of sets, intervals, and exhortations.*

*Thus starts another workout. 4,500 yards in the water, followed by a quick shower and a five-minute drive to school. Then it's back to the pool; the afternoon training schedule features an additional 5,500 yards. Tomorrow, we start over again. The objective is to cut our times by another tenth of a second. The end goal is to achieve that tiny, unexplainable difference at the end of a race that separates success from failure, greatness from mediocrity. Somehow we accept the pitch--otherwise, we'd still be deep in our mattresses, slumbering beneath our blankets. In this sport, the antagonist is time. Coaches spend hours in specialized clinics, analyze the latest research on training technique, and experiment with workout schedules in an attempt to defeat time. Yet there are no shortcuts to winning, and workouts are agonizing.*

*I took part in my first swimming race when I was ten years old. My parents, fearing injury, directed my athletic interests away from ice hockey and into the pool. Three weeks into my new swimming endeavor, I somehow persuaded my coach to let me enter the annual age group meet. To his surprise (and mine), I pulled out an "A" time. I furthered my achievements by winning "Top 16" awards for various age groups, setting club records, and being named National First Team All-American in the 100Butterfly and Second Team All-American in the 200-Medley. I have since been elevated to the Senior Championship level, which means the competition now includes world-class swimmers. I am aware that making finals will not be easy from here--at this level, success is measured by mere tenths of a second. In addition, each new level brings extra requirements such as elevated weight training, longer weekend training sessions, and more travel from home. Time with friends is increasingly spent in the pursuit of the next swimming objective.*

*Sometimes, in the solitude of the laps, my thoughts transition to events in my personal life. This year, my grandmother suffered a reoccurrence of cancer, which has spread to her lungs. She has always been known for her good spirits and sense of independence, but suddenly my family had to accept the fact that she now faces limited time. A few weeks later, on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, my grandfather – who lives in Japan – learned he had stomach cancer. He has since undergone successful surgery, but we are aware that a full recovery is not guaranteed. When I first learned that they were both struck with cancer, I felt as if my own objective, to cut my times by fractions of a second, seemed irrelevant, even ironic, given the urgency of their mutual goals: to prolong life itself. Yet we have learned to draw on each other's strengths for support – their fortitude helps me overcome my struggles while my swimming achievements provide them with a vicarious sense of victory. When I share my latest award or triumph story, they smile with pride, as if they themselves had stood on the award stand. I have the impression that I would have to be a*

*grandparent to understand what my medals mean to them.*

*My grandparents' strength has also shored up my determination to succeed. I have learned that, as in swimming, life's successes often come in small increments. Sometimes even the act of showing up at a workout when your body and psyche are worn out separates a great result from a failure. The difference between success and failure is defined by the ability to overcome strong internal resistance. I know that, by consistently working towards my goals--however small they may seem--I can accomplish what I set for myself, both in and beyond the swimming pool.*

# WHAT IS YOUR “HOOK”?

Many students operate under the assumption that in order to be accepted to a good college, they need to somehow transform themselves magically into a sort of "model applicant." We disagree... to a point! Now, we will be the first to tell you that achieving excellent grades and test scores are definitely a part of the important factors considered by college admissions committees... however, bear in mind that colleges also tend to look for a diverse student body of people with real interests and personalities. Encourage all college-bound students to focus on one important objective: as you get your application materials together, focus on being the best version of *you* that you can be!

You know the facts – This is what colleges are looking for:

- **Grades:** being on the honor roll, taking Advanced Placement or other challenging classes, being selected for honor societies, etc.
- **Standardized Test Scores:** doing well on the SAT or ACT
- **Recommendations:** strong letters of reference from teachers, counselors, bosses, or coaches
- **Application Essay:** appearing interesting, witty, but humble to the admissions committee
- **College Interview:** interviewing with intelligence, a good sense of humor, and maturity

These are all important elements for college application – there is no doubt about that. However, there's one more thing that should be on your list. It's a major factor that colleges take into account when they evaluate candidates for admission, and we call it “The Hook.”

What exactly is "The Hook"? Well, it's a unique characteristic that sets you apart from the other applicants. Your hook is the thing that makes your application jump off the pile. It could be a personal attribute or trait, it could be your ethnic heritage, or it might even be an unusual hobby or job. The key to the hook is that it needs to be something just a little different from most of the applications that are submitted.

It is the little something special that makes the admissions committee remember your application. Some examples of possible hooks include:

- **Personal Achievements:** Did you start a radio station at your school, or do some sort of scientific research?
- **Special Talents:** Are you a chef? An equestrian? A performing artist?
- **Geographical Diversity:** Did you grow up overseas, or live in Alaska? Do you travel?
- **Extra-Curricular Activities:** Do you play the bassoon? Are you an Eagle Scout? A debater? A community organizer?
- **Ethnic Heritage & Socio-Economic Background:** Are you an ethnic minority, or the first person in your family to go to college?
- **Leadership Qualities:** Did you help to run any kind of club, serve as a team captain, or lead the local chapter of Amnesty International?
- **Athletic Talent:** Are you a champion speed skater, a diver, or involved in a team sport?
- **Legacy:** Did your parents or grandparents attend the school to which you are applying?

For a good hook, you want something unusual, to which you devoted a lot of energy. “Unusual” means that, unless you were a captain of the team or won some individual awards, playing football usually won't set you apart. It is a very good activity, certainly, but not a hook. Competitive kayaking or could be, though, because it is a little bit different.

Remember, focus is the key to life and to success in the college admissions process. Instead of signing up for yet *another* club or sport, or throwing up your hands because you don't think you've done enough activities, think about the things you do that excite you the most... the things of which you're most proud. Think about what makes you different from everyone else you know. Focus in on this, work on it, and then make sure to tell the admissions committee about it in your application.

# PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Although it is relatively rare that a personal interview is required for undergraduate education – except at Ivy League schools and other extremely competitive institutions – many colleges will highly recommend that you take this opportunity for a face-to-face discussion with a member of the admissions staff. Read through the application materials to determine whether or not each college places significant emphasis on the interview. If they strongly recommend that you have one, it may work against you to skip it, and a strong interview could help your application immeasurably.

In contrast to a group interview and some alumni interviews, the personal interview is viewed both as an information session and as further evaluation of your skills and strengths. You will meet with a member of the admissions staff, who will be assessing your personal qualities, high school preparation, and capacity to contribute to undergraduate life at the institution. On average, these meetings last about 45 minutes – a relatively short amount of time in which to gather information and leave the desired impression! With that in mind, here are some suggestions on how to make the most of your interview experience.

## **1. Schedule Your Visit**

Students usually choose to visit campuses in the summer or fall of their senior year. Both times have their advantages. A summer visit generally allows for a less hectic visit and interview. Visiting in the fall, on the other hand, provides the opportunity to see what campus life is like in full swing. Always make an appointment in advance, and avoid scheduling more than two college interviews on any given day. Completing multiple interviews in a single day may hinder your chances of making a good impression, and your memories of each colleges can tend to blur into each other as you make your way from campus to campus.

## **2. Prepare In Advance**

Know the basics about the college before going for your interview. Read the college catalog. You will be better prepared to ask questions that are not answered in the literature and that will give you a better understanding of what the college has to offer. You should also spend some time thinking about your strengths and weaknesses and, in particular, what you are looking for in a college education. You will find that as you get a few interviews under your belt, they will become easier. For this reason, you might wait to interview at your “favorite” schools until you are feeling comfortable with the process.

## **3. Ask The Right Questions**

Inevitably, your interviewer will ask you, "Do you have any questions?" Not having one may suggest that you're unprepared or, even worse, not interested. For this reason, it is wise to enter every interview with a couple of intelligent questions in mind. When you do ask questions, make sure that they relate to things that matter to you. The questions that you ask will give the interviewer some insight into your personality and priorities. Avoid asking questions that can be answered in the college literature – again, this is a sign of being unprepared. Although the interviewer will undoubtedly pose questions to you, the interview should not be viewed merely as a question-and-answer session. The best interviews become conversations that evolve naturally out of a particular question!

#### **4. Be Yourself**

In the end, remember to relax and be yourself. Don't guzzle caffeinated beverages prior to the interview, and control any nervous fidgets like leg-wagging, finger-drumming, or bracelet-jangling. This is easiest to manage if you have some practice interviews before the real thing. Naturally, your interviewer will expect you to be somewhat nervous, which should relieve some of the pressure. Consider this an opportunity to put your best self on display, and enhance everything good that the college knows about you. Simply remember to be yourself! Admissions counselors can sense phoniness from miles away, and it does not help your cause to pretend to be someone else.

#### **INTERVIEW CHECKLIST**

Here are some questions you may be asked in your interview:

- What courses have been most difficult for you?
- How would you describe your high school?
- If you could change one thing about your high school, what would it be?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What do you want to know about our college activities?
- Have you worked up to your potential?
- What other colleges are you considering?
- What do you expect to be doing seven years from now?
- Have you ever thought of not going to college? What would you do?

Here are some questions you may want to ask during your interview.

- How do you treat AP scores?
- Is there a limit on the number of AP credits you will allow?
- How do you match roommates?
- When are students allowed to live off-campus?
- What new offerings are there in my major?
- Is there an opportunity for me to design my own major?
- Are any new campus buildings being planned?
- How does student advisement work?
- Are there opportunities for student research?
- What is your system for course selection?

## ABOUT THE SAT (AND THE “NEWER” SAT)

One explicitly stated purpose of the SAT is to predict how students will perform academically as college freshmen. However, the more practical purpose of the SAT is to help college admissions officers make acceptance decisions. When you think about it, admissions officers have a difficult job. It's not easy to figure out how one student's GPA in New Mexico compares with that of another student in Florida, or even a student from overseas! Even though admissions officers can do detective work to fairly evaluate candidates, they benefit a great deal from the SAT. The SAT provides a single, standardized means of comparison. After all, virtually every student takes the SAT, and the actual SAT is the same for everyone.

Obviously, the SAT is an important test. Nevertheless, it is decidedly **not** the end-all, be-all factor for college admission. We always urge college-bound students to keep the SAT in perspective. This test is only one of several important pieces of the college admissions puzzle. Other factors that weigh heavily into the admission process include GPA, difficulty of high school course load, level of extracurricular involvement, and the overall strength of the college application itself.

### When Should You Take The SAT?

Many students prefer to complete the SAT in March of their junior year of high school. By planning their schedule in this way, they complete the SAT several months before final exams, proms, and all of the ancillary end-of-the-year distractions. Taking the test in March also offers students some early feedback as to how they performed. If they are dissatisfied with their SAT performance, there is still ample time for them to take the test again later in the spring, or even the fall of their senior year.

Once you have decided to which schools you're going to apply, determine whether or not these colleges and universities require the SAT. Be aware that most schools will! Your next step is to determine the deadlines for when each school wants your SAT scores. Write each of these dates down, and highlight them! (That's one deadline that you *really* don't want to miss.)

You do have some leeway in choosing your test date. The SAT I (that's the basic SAT test) is traditionally offered on one Saturday morning in October, November, December, January, March, May, and June. Check the exact dates to see which dates will meet your specific deadlines. To determine whether or not your scores will be ready in time with a specific test date, simply count back six weeks from each school's application deadline. It takes about six weeks to score your test and send out the results to the colleges you have selected.

You do not need to panic if you don't yet know to which schools you wish to apply! Even if you don't take the exam until December or January of your senior year, there is generally plenty of time to send your scores to most schools before the deadline. However, for financial aid purposes, as well as consideration for borderline candidates, a solid score reported earlier can be a definite help.

However, when planning to take the SAT there is one thing that is even more important than the application deadlines of particular schools. Every student should be sure to select a test date that works best with his or her schedule! Be ready for this test because it can assist in shaping your educational future. Ideally, we recommend that students allow at least two to three months to prepare.

### **How Many Times Should You Take the SAT?**

Colleges will evaluate the SAT I results in different ways. Some schools will consider your highest math and verbal scores, even if they were earned on different test days. This means that if you crushed the math portion in March, and then nailed the verbal portion in October, they will combine those two numbers to maximize your overall score. Not a bad deal, right? Bear in mind, though, that many other schools don't do that. Some institutions only pay attention to your highest combined score on any particular examination day. Many others will calculate an average for all of your scores, or lend equal weight to all of them.

What does this mean? First and foremost, it means that you should only take the SAT I when you are truly prepared. No matter what each school's individual policy tends to be regarding the SAT results, each and every SAT I score you earn will become part of your permanent transcript. The colleges will see them all, and you want to make the best impression possible. Be ready!

### **Critical Reading – “The Verbal Section”**

The current SAT includes a section called Critical Reading, which *does not* focus on analogy questions (no matter what mom and dad saw on their SATs!). The Critical Reading section consists of questions that will test reading skills at the sentence, paragraph, and passage level. There are also paragraph-length critical reasoning questions, to supplement sentence completions and reading comprehension passages. The topics of the given texts will represent a wide range of subjects, including science, literature, humanities, and history.

### **The Math Section**

The Math Section of the SAT includes Algebra II material so that it is aligned with the math curriculum currently being taught in high school classrooms. The current Math Section does not include quantitative comparisons, even if your older siblings saw them in the past. There are two other types of math questions: five-choice multiple-choice, and student-produced responses.

### **The Writing Section - Essay**

The SAT now includes a Writing Section, which was not the case a few years ago. The Writing Section consists of two parts: an essay and a multiple-choice section. Students will be given 25 minutes to respond to a prompt and construct a well-organized essay that effectively addresses the question posed. The essay question may require students to complete a statement, to react to a quote or an excerpt, or to agree or disagree with a point of view. In any case, a good essay will support the chosen position with specific reasons and examples from literature, history, art, science, current affairs, or even a student's own experiences.

These essays are scored based on the procedures for the current SAT II: Writing Test. This means that the essays are graded by two independent readers on a scale of 1 - 6, and these two scores are combined to form an essay subscore that ranges from 2 to 12. Should the readers' scores vary by more than 2 points, a third reader also scores the essay. The essay readers are high school teachers and college professors who teach writing composition. To ensure that essays will be scored in a timely manner, they are scanned and made available to readers on the internet for grading.

### **The Writing Section - Multiple-Choice**

The Writing Section also includes multiple-choice grammar and usage questions. Some of these questions require students to improve given sentences and paragraphs. Others present students with sentences and require them to identify any mistakes in diction, grammar, sentence construction, subject-verb agreement, proper word usage, and wordiness.

The highest possible score on the Writing Section is 800. Scores on the essay and multiple-choice section are combined to calculate a single score for the Writing Section. A writing sub-score is also assigned. The highest possible scores on the Critical Reading and Math Sections are also 800 each, which means that 2400 is the magical number for a perfect score on the current form of the SAT.

# ALL ABOUT THE ACT

## **What Exactly IS The ACT – Should I Take It?**

Much like the SAT, the ACT Assessment is a battery of multiple-choice tests used by colleges and universities to help decide which applicants to choose. Even though there are other types of standardized tests available, almost all colleges will accept scores from the ACT Assessment, and a good number of colleges require it. The ACT Assessment is given five times each year at locations throughout the United States and Canada, as well as overseas.

There are several elements to the ACT Assessment. One part is a personal interest inventory. The results of this section are considered useful in career planning, and suggest several occupations related to those subjects or areas that may appeal to you or that are suited to your personality.

In addition, the ACT Assessment includes a course and grade information questionnaire, as well as a student profile. These sections create a picture of you for the college admissions boards to review. Each admissions board knows from years of experience what type of student will fit in the best with its particular programs and student body. Of course, there are always exceptions, and many other elements go into the acceptance process besides this student profile, but the ACT questionnaire and profile can provide the board with a quick "snapshot" of you as an applicant.

Of course, the ACT Assessment also includes the part that concerns every student most – the actual test itself! The ACT is comprised of a series of smaller tests, which are specifically based on the standard high school curriculum. In other words, the ACT Assessment tests exactly what most high school students are expected to be learning every day.

## **ACT Assessment Contents and Format**

The ACT Assessment is a 3-hour exam broken into four sections, each of which is separately timed. With scheduled breaks, and including the time spent listening to instructions and disseminating paperwork, the actual time spent taking the exam is roughly four hours.

The four sections test Standard English skills, math skills, reading comprehension skills, and science reasoning skills. No student is expected to know every answer to every section. Because the ACT Assessment assesses the full range of students, from below average to brilliant, there will be questions that most students will not be able to answer. That reality is taken into account in scoring.

## **The Test Booklet and Answer Sheet**

The format of the ACT Assessment exam should be familiar to you from standardized tests in school. All of the questions are printed in a booklet you will receive the day of the test. Although you may mark inside this test booklet, for scoring purposes the answers must be put on the answer sheet, which is a separate piece of paper. If you write the correct answer in your test booklet, but not on the answer sheet, you receive no credit for it!

Questions for all four of the subject tests go on the separate answer sheet. You should be familiar with this type of answer sheet from other standardized tests – it is simply a fill-in-the-circle grid. All of the ACT questions are multiple choice. The English, Reading, and Science Reasoning Tests have four choices for each question, while the Math Test has five options for each question.

Like any other test of this nature, you must completely fill in the circle of your choice with your pencil. As almost any high school student knows by heart, be sure to USE A NUMBER 2 PENCIL, or the computer may not be able to read your marks! In addition, these answer sheets are graded with a computer, so it's important that your mark is clear and complete. Be sure to mark **only one** circle per question, and do not skip lines by mistake! This is a big deal because one misplaced mark can make every answer after it wrong.

### **Marking the Answer Sheet**

To help prevent test takers from accidentally skipping a line, the ACT Assessment answer sheet is formatted a bit differently from other sheets with which you might be familiar. Instead of each set of choices being A, B, C, and D (or A, B, C, D, and E for Math questions), the ACT Assessment answer sheet alternates between sets of answers. The odd-numbered questions, starting with Question 1, use A, B, C, and D (or A, B, C, D, and E for Math questions). However, the even-numbered questions, starting with Question 2, use F, G, H, and J (or F, G, H, J, and K for Math questions). This format is designed to help you by catching your attention if you miss a line, and begin to fill in an answer in the wrong space on the sheet.

### **How the ACT Assessment Is Scored**

For each of the four tests, the number of correct answers is determined, providing a raw score. The raw score for each subject is then "scaled," or calculated in such a way as to make the varying ACT Assessment exams given on that day equal to each other. The scaled scores range from a low score of 1 to the highest possible score of 36. In recent years, the average score for each subject has been about 21.

In addition, within each subject there are sub-scores for the different areas within that subject. These sub-scores range from a low score of 1 to the highest possible score of 18. There is also a composite score, which is the average for all four of the subject scores.

Because every student taking the ACT Assessment is a potential competitor for the same college seat that you want, the ACT Assessment results also include a percentile score. The percentile score – which is based on the more familiar 100 percent maximum – measures your composite score against the composite score of all of the other students taking the ACT. The percentile number indicates the percentage of students who have scored lower than you.

## CHECKLIST -DETAILS ABOUT THE ACT

- The ACT Assessment is a 3-hour exam of 215 questions. Remember that it is divided into four sections that test skills in Standard English, math, reading comprehension, and science reasoning. Remember that the questions are designed to cover these areas at the standard level taught in most high schools across the country, not random facts.
- For each of the four ACT Assessment tests, your result is based on a "scaled score." Because the specific content of each ACT Assessment might be different, scaling is necessary to standardize your results with those of everyone who completes the exam. The raw score is determined by the number of correct answers marked on your exam answer sheet. This raw score is then scaled to make an accurate comparison with the performance of other students.
- Your ACT Assessment score is only one of the factors considered by college admissions offices. The schools will also assess your high school performance, your personal profile and circumstances, and other information you submit with your application.
- Take the ACT Assessment as early as you can, so that you will have time to retake it if necessary. For your scores to be available for your college applications, you should take the ACT Assessment **no less than eight weeks before** the earliest college application deadline that you have.

## WHEN SHOULD I TAKE (OR “RE-TAKE”) THE TEST

Once you're actively thinking about taking the SAT, ACT, or another standardized test, an important part of the process is deciding precisely when to take it. Here's how to decide.

### **Take the test only when you are ready**

Standardized tests measure the same skills in the same way every time. The exact questions will be different, but the content you need to know will be the same. So, there's really no point in taking a standardized test if you aren't ready. If you're unprepared, you won't do your best, and you'll want to take the test again anyway. So why bother? If you're thinking about taking the test just "to see what it's like," take a practice test instead and save yourself the registration fee – not to mention the heartache of performing well below your actual ability!

### **Make sure that you have time to prepare**

People who know how the test is put together – as well as some effective strategies for tackling the questions – have a major advantage over those who don't. Make sure that you budget some time to prepare for these kinds of tests. Of course, some people have an easier time studying during the school year, but others prefer to study over the summer and take the test in the fall. Frankly, either way is fine, as long as you're prepared to do your best. Be honest about the time you're willing to spend preparing, and make the commitment! It will pay off with a better score on test day.

### **Take the test early enough to report your scores**

Getting your college applications in early is always advisable, but most admissions offices won't look seriously at an application until that application is "complete." This means that the application must include all required test scores. For this reason alone, getting your tests taken and your scores in early is a very good idea. (Just make sure you're prepared!) Taking your test/s during the spring before you apply will have your scores ready in plenty of time.

### **Leave yourself a margin for error**

On test day, you might get sick. Your car might break down. You might just have a bad day. Lots of things that have nothing to do with your ability could affect your test score, and most of those things could lower your score. If you happen to have a bad day on the last possible test date, you're out of luck. You will have to live with a bad score! However, if there is another test date available in the future, you have another chance to prove your true abilities. That's why it's best to take the test earlier, rather than later. It's just good planning to have a backup in case something goes awry.

### **Getting a bad score is not always a reason to take it again**

Now, what should you do if you have taken a standardized test and aren't happy with your score? Almost everyone wishes they scored at least a little higher. Unless you score perfectly, it's always possible to do better. Still, wanting a better score isn't enough. To be worth the preparation time, aggravation, and the new testing fee, you need a strong reason to believe that you'll score significantly better the next time around. Be honest with yourself about your preparation level.

**Ask "What will be different next time?"**

If you totally bombed the first test because you were sick, or something unexpected happened that affected your concentration, then it could be advisable to take it again. However, if you were completely prepared the first time, taking it again may not make a tremendous difference. Standardized tests are usually very consistent, so if you don't do anything differently, then you're likely to wind up with about the same score. However, if you were not well prepared – for whatever reason – then you could have much to gain by diligently improving your skills to take the test again.

# COLLEGE TIMELINE OVERVIEW

This practical timeline calendar is designed to help you stay on top of the process of applying to college. For most students, the process begins in September of the junior year of high school and ends in June of the senior year. You may actually want to begin considering financial aid options, reviewing your academic schedule, and attending college fairs before your junior year. In fact, if you are a student reading this now, you are probably ready to start thinking about college!

## FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Get to know your high school guidance counselor.
- Plan a family discussion about college.
- Learn your Social Security Number.
- Explore occupations, salaries, and requirements.
- Understand basic college curriculum requirements.
- Participate in school and community activities.

## JUNIOR YEAR - SEPTEMBER THROUGH DECEMBER

- Check with your guidance counselor to make sure your course credits will meet college requirements at the type of school you want to go to. (Your local community college, state university, liberal arts college, and a prestigious private university could all have different admissions requirements.)
- Be sure you are involved in one or two extracurricular activities. Taking a leadership position in those activities is definitely a plus.
- Register for and take the PSAT. You can pick up the registration form in your guidance counselor's office. If you do well on the PSAT it could lead to National Merit Scholarship money, so find a practice book and do some studying in advance!
- Strive to earn the best grades you can. A serious effort will boost your GPA, which definitely provides you with more options during the college application process.

## DECEMBER THROUGH FEBRUARY

- Talk with your college friends that are home for break.
- Take both the SAT and ACT at least once.
- Estimate how much various colleges will cost.
- Utilize student planning resources to begin building your personal list of colleges and universities that interest you.
- Find out the dates of college fairs and ATTEND
- Prepare a list of questions to ask college reps. Review descriptions of the different types of schools.

## **FEBRUARY THROUGH MAY**

- Talk with your college friend's home for break.
- Begin to understand the basics about federal and private loans.
- Learn what components make up the cost to attend college.
- Identify characteristics you want in a college.
- Narrow your college list to a reasonable number.
- Meet with your school counselor to discuss college choices. Review your transcript and test scores with your counselor to determine how competitive your application will be from an academic standpoint.
- Develop a preliminary list of 15 to 20 colleges and universities that interest you, and search for information on them. The internet is a fantastic tool for this task!
- Start scheduling campus visits and interviews. When school is in session (but never during final exams) is the best time. Summers are OK, but a visit during vacation will not be able to show you what the college is really like. If possible, save your top college choices for the fall. Be aware, however, that fall is the busiest season for campus visits, so you will need to plan visits in advance. Don't forget to write thank-you letters to your interviewers.
- Locate the College Visit Checklist. This is a great resource to point you in the right direction while you are on a college campus.
- Plan a challenging schedule of classes for your senior year.
- Begin to keep an accurate record of your personal and academic information. Having this in one place will make it easier to transfer everything to your college applications.
- Build a resume.
- Think about which teachers, coaches, and counselors you will ask to write recommendations.
- Structure your summer plans to include advanced academic or research work, travel, interesting volunteer work, or a job.

## **JUNIOR YEAR - SUMMER**

- Find out which of the colleges on your list will accept the Common Application. Contact any schools on your list that do **not** accept the Common Application to request application forms. Also check out the school websites to see if there are online application options.
- Begin working on your application essays. Have at least two or three separate people (parents, teachers, mentors) read through your essays before you submit them.
- Schedule campus visits and interviews for any interesting school that you did not visit in the spring. Again, remember that fall is a great time to visit campuses, but you need to plan in advance because it is also the busiest time.
- Re-visit the colleges you really liked to get a second impression.

## **SENIOR YEAR - SEPTEMBER**

- Obtain admission application information from schools on your list.
- Request transcripts from your guidance office.
- Mark school key dates and deadlines on your calendar.
- If you are going to re-take the ACT, SAT I, SAT II, and/or TOEFL tests – or if you did not take them in the spring – register now. Again, sign up for an in-person or online course, or utilize a comprehensive study guide. Check out our practice questions for the SAT and ACT.
- Check with your school counselor to see if any college representatives will be visiting your high school (or other schools/college fairs) in your community this fall.
- Ask selected individuals if they would be willing to write a letter of recommendation for you. Make sure you give them all the proper forms, with your portion of the forms filled out. Also, provide addressed, stamped envelopes for them to mail the letters. Finally, don't forget to write thank-you letters to everyone who writes you a letter of recommendation!
- Meet with your counselor to compile your final list of colleges.

## **OCTOBER**

- Begin reviewing application forms for your final list of colleges. Many colleges have online applications that you can access right from their website. Take your time filling out the applications, and be accurate. This is the main snapshot the school will receive of you as an applicant, so take the time to make the quality of your application as high as possible.
- Write your college admissions essays. Remember that these essays can be a tool to set you apart you from the other applicants.
- Photocopy or print extra copies of your applications to keep on file as a backup.

## **NOVEMBER – DECEMBER**

- Apply to schools prior to Thanksgiving break!
- Be sure that you have requested your ACT Assessment and SAT scores be sent to your colleges of choice
- Don't be late! Invest in a large calendar to keep track of all deadlines for transcripts, recommendations, financial aid, applications, etc.
- Attend college fairs.
- “Early decision” candidates should complete college applications.
- Submit Part 1 of the Common Application, if applicable.
- Make copies of documents you send for your files.
- Meet with your counselor to verify that all transcripts have been sent out to the colleges.
- Make sure everything is in order for the filing of your FAFSA and PROFILE. The FAFSA can be submitted as soon as January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year you will attend college.
- If applicable, keep all of the colleges updated with any new honors or accomplishments that were not included with your original application.
- Apply for housing when you submit the application, if required by the school.

## **JANUARY – MARCH**

- Ask your guidance counselor to send transcripts with first semester grades to your intended schools. If you haven't received confirmation from your school, contact the admissions office to verify that your documents have been received.
- Be sure you have received a FAFSA acknowledgment. (If not, contact them immediately!
- Pay a return visit to a couple of the top-choice colleges that have accepted you.
- You can appeal to your top colleges if you require more financial aid, if your circumstances have changed, or if another school has made a more competitive offer.

## **APRIL–MAY**

- Celebrate every one of your acceptance letters!
- Review your admissions information to ensure you've completed the application process. (For example, have you chosen your housing and a meal plan?)
- Register for the Advanced Placement (AP) tests, if needed.
- Request that your final transcript be sent to your school.
- Notify your college of choice that you have accepted their offer, and send in a deposit by May 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Be sure to notify the colleges you have chosen not to attend. Not only is it the proper and classy thing to do, but your decision will open a seat for another deserving student at that school.

# **CONGRATULATIONS!**

**PLAN THE WAY FOUNDATION WISHES YOU SUCCESS IN THE PURSUIT OF YOUR EDUCATIONAL GOALS!**