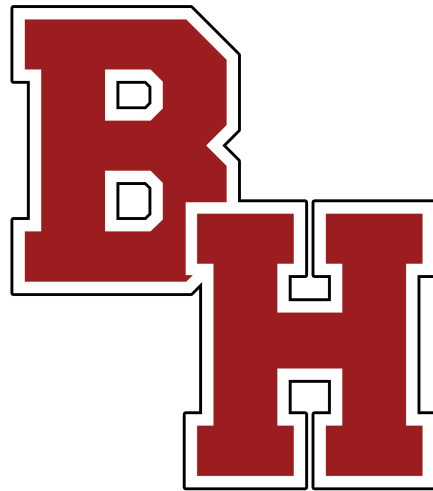


# **BYRAM HILLS HIGH SCHOOL**

## **COLLEGE PLANNING GUIDE**



**2024 - 2025**

**School Counseling Department**

**BYRAM HILLS HIGH SCHOOL  
School Counseling Department  
12 Tripp Lane  
Armonk, NY 10504**

**Christopher Walsh  
Lauren Albert  
Jennifer Spirelli**

**Principal  
Assistant Principal  
Assistant Principal**

**Kristina Wilson  
Julie Berman  
Keara Hunt  
Gary McCarthy  
Greg Quirolo  
Meaghan Williams**

**Guidance Chairperson  
School Counselor  
School Counselor  
School Counselor  
School Counselor  
School Counselor**

**Stacey Ferrante  
Margherita Nordstrom**

**School Counseling Support Staff  
School Counseling Support Staff**

---

**Important Numbers**

**School Counseling Department Phone: 914-273-9200, Ext. 4930**

**School Counseling Department FAX: 914-730-0015**

**College Board Information:  
Customer Service: 1-866-630-9305  
Website: [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)**

**ACT Information:  
Website: [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)**

**Byram Hills High School CEEB Code: 330-225**

**REVISED NOVEMBER 2023**

# Table of Contents

<b>Important Numbers</b>	2
<b>Introduction</b>	4
Before You Begin	6
Getting Started – Debunking the Myths	7
<b>College Planning Timeline</b>	9
<b>STEP ONE – Taking Standardized Tests</b>	13
PSAT	14
SAT	14
ACT	16
Test Optional	17
<b>STEP TWO – Completing the Pre-Application Paperwork for Counselor Recommendations</b>	19
<b>STEP THREE – Learning About and Visiting Colleges</b>	21
Finding a College That Fits	22
Visiting Colleges	27
The Admissions Interview	30
The Student with Special Talents	31
How Colleges Choose Among Applicants	32
Resources	33
College Information Online	35
<b>STEP FOUR – The Application Process</b>	39
Writing the College Essay	40
Teacher Recommendations	43
Resume or List of Activities	44
Understanding Early Decision and Early Action	46
Completing the Application	48
Application Methods	49
The Common Application	49
The Coalition Application	49
Learning Disabilities and Special Needs	50
Glossary of Terms Used in College Admissions	54

**Byram Hills High School  
School Counseling Department**

## **College Planning Guide**

### **Introduction: Keeping the College Selection Process in Perspective: A Message to Parents**

The college application process can seem complex, but if you follow the approach recommended in this *Guide* and work closely with your counselor, you will easily navigate through the process one step at a time.

Basically, the college application process is comprised of 4 major steps with several “sub-steps.” Each step is explained in detail throughout this book. Please keep in mind that **meeting all deadlines** is critical to your success throughout the process. We encourage you to approach the college selection process with a positive frame of mind. Too often, families seem to approach the process with a sense of dread. Though there are sure to be high and low points during the coming months, it is possible to make this a very positive growth experience for the entire family.

Parents sometimes mistakenly believe that they can’t be of much help in the process, especially when they are doing this for the first time. On the contrary, you don’t need a team of experts coaching, or providing support or advice at each step along the way. All you really need is knowledge of your child, commitment in terms of time and energy, and a willingness to learn. These ingredients, combined with the experience and knowledge of the school counselor, will allow you to find a good college fit for your child.

Here are some points for you and your family to keep in mind:

- Having a teenager leave for college means change for everyone in the family, even younger siblings. Emotions will run high, so try to have your discussions about college at positive times.
  
- Talk openly and honestly to your son/daughter about your concerns, fears, hopes, and other feelings. Don’t tell them they can’t go to California because the airfare is too expensive, when the real reason is you just don’t want them so far away from you. Honesty on your part will be appreciated and will encourage your teenager to act in the same manner.
  
- Really listen to your son/daughter and don’t be too quick to cut them off with your opinions. You have much to contribute, but how and when you choose to do it will determine how much of an impact you have.

- ❑ The college selection process has become very public. Everyone will have an opinion of where your son/daughter should be looking, but you have a right to privacy. Your teenager's SAT scores, GPA, and future plans do not have to be discussed with everyone who asks. There is already too much pressure from the peer group in the cafeteria.
  
- ❑ The more you communicate with us at school, the better we will be able to help you. Honesty and openness on the part of all of us greatly enhances this process, and you can be sure that we are careful and professional about what information we share with admissions personnel.

There is no one, perfect college for any student. It is important to find schools that will be a good match for your son/daughter, a place where they will feel good about themselves and have a chance to grow. Choosing schools merely on the basis of names is a mistake. It's our hope that when the process is over, every student will be able to say, "I controlled what I could, I had some choices, and the college I'm going to will work for me because..."

On a final note, it's important to keep in mind that people don't have to attend a highly selective college to be successful in life, for success is measured in many ways. In a few short years, college will be over and your son or daughter will begin to navigate through all of the other phases of life, as we all do. Their measure as persons will not be determined by where they went to college.

With hard work and good intentions, this can be a wonderful family experience. You will know one another in ways you never did before, and the impending separation may bring out a new intimacy that will make freshman year a little easier for both parents and students.

We encourage you to read this book in its entirety prior to beginning the process. It will then be helpful to consult each section as you approach and complete each step. Of course, your counselor is readily available to assist you at any time. We look forward to working with you as you begin this new and exciting venture!

The Byram Hills High School Counselors,

Kristina Wilson  
Julie Berman  
Keara Hunt  
Gary McCarthy  
Greg Quirolo  
Meaghan Williams

# **Before You Begin...**

## **A Message for Students**

### **The Most Important Step**

“Picking a college is an important decision. The experience can greatly affect the quality of one’s future. It can be the most exciting four years of your life. On the other hand, you can plod through this process largely untouched and unaffected; many teenagers give more thought to learning to drive than to picking a college.

Confront yourself honestly. Why, really, are you going...for fun or for some other reason? What are your abilities and strengths? What are your weaknesses? What do you want out of life, or in life, something tangible or intangible? Are you supremely confident or hesitantly unsure of yourself? Do you want to give or to get? Are you a self-starter or in need of nurturing and structure? Are you socially self-sufficient, marching to your own drummer, or do you need warm, familiar support? Do you live in the fast track? And so on. If the student doesn’t look to him/herself, she is vulnerable to herd thinking -- one of the principal causes of bad decisions.

It takes both clarity and courage to look at oneself probingly and then to make decisions based on what one sees there and not be influenced by friends or classmates. After you have questioned yourself you can effectively choose a college; but only after you have examined it, too.”

**Loren Pope**  
**(Author of *Looking Beyond the Ivy League and Colleges That Change Lives*)**

“Most people think of college as preparation -- for a profession, a job, or graduate school. But it is also a chunk of life -- six percent of our days and years. Here we make lifelong friends. We discover intellectual strengths. We begin to forge a philosophy. It can be a peak experience, exciting and enjoyable. Finding the right college is a project in itself, and is not one to be taken lightly. Since it is you who will attend, and not some statistical average, you must spend time determining your needs. What, for example, do you want out of college? What kind of person are you? What are your likes and dislikes, hopes and ambitions? Are you gregarious or solitary? Have you decided on a career, or are you still searching?

Often students pick a college more or less at random, on the chance recommendation of a friend or because of a well-known name. They commit themselves to spending four crucial years in an environment chosen by accident. It’s four years of your life. With planning and forethought, you can make them the best.”

**Dr. John Brooks Slaughter (former President, Occidental College)**

## Getting Started

Whatever your reasons for going to college, deciding where to go is one of the most important choices you will have to make in the coming years. Which college you choose relates to more than deciding on a campus with certain buildings -- libraries, tennis courts, labs, dining halls. We believe that in choosing a college, a student is choosing a perceived image, a group of peers, a curriculum, an environment, a particular philosophy of life and learning and an intellectual orientation. The choice of a college is a major step toward the future. Learning about colleges is an arduous task, one to which many students simply do not allocate sufficient time and thought. The beginning of the college selection process is also fraught with many myths and misconceptions. The most common myths are:

### **Myth I**

#### **There is a Perfect College for Me**

Understanding that there is no perfect college for you but several choices will also make the application process more exciting. If you narrow your sights to only one college, you may spend too much time worrying about getting into that particular school. This will prevent you from making a systematic search for alternative institutions.

### **Myth II**

#### **I Need to Decide on My Career Before I Can Choose a College**

The most common major of incoming freshmen in liberal arts colleges is "undecided." The average college student changes majors two or three times in the course of four years of college, and most college graduates change careers three to five times in their lifetime.

### **Myth III**

#### **We Can Only Afford a Low Priced College**

Do not let initial costs alone determine your future. Too often students rule out some colleges because the total cost appears to be more than their parents can afford. This may not be the case when all sources of financial aid are explored. Private colleges, in order to attract students from all income levels, offer significant amounts of financial aid and in the long run may be as affordable as less expensive public institutions.

### **Myth IV**

#### **Investigating Colleges is an Unpleasant Chore**

Looking at colleges should be a part of an exciting search for your future, and the admissions process should be approached with optimism and excitement. Your enthusiasm and optimism will show up in your application essays. The selection and application process is also a time of self-discovery that may prove to be more beneficial than the selection of a particular college.

## **Myth V**

### **I've Never Heard of This College, So It Can't Be Any Good**

Most people know very little about colleges. The average well-educated individuals can probably name only 50 of the 2,500 colleges and these tend to be the older eastern colleges, the large state universities, those with outstanding athletic teams and those that happen to be near their homes. It is important to remember that a college which is right for you may be one which is unknown to you. And some of the schools you have heard the most about may not be right for you. Try to keep an open mind throughout the entire process.

### **Common Mistakes:**

#### **Being Passive**

Letting the choice just happen instead of taking charge of your planning; Following the leads of your friends; Taking any suggestion that comes to you; Letting someone else decide for you; Applying to many colleges indiscriminately so you can postpone thinking about which to attend.

#### **Pleasing Others**

Applying to colleges you aren't really interested in just to make your parents, teachers, and classmates proud of you or to impress them.

#### **Losing Sight of Your Main Reason for Going to College**

Always keep in mind WHY you are spending four years of your life and \$40,000-\$260,000 in this endeavor. Before you can choose a college that is right for you, you should think about who you are, what you like and don't like, what you are good at and why. The degree to which you can effectively evaluate and compare the programs and resources of various colleges will depend greatly upon just how much thought you have given to what it is you seek from a college education.



# College Planning Timeline

## FRESHMAN YEAR

- Accept invitation to join Guidance Google Classroom
- Create a course plan for high school considering your overall goals
- If applicable, send IEP/504 accommodations to testing coordinator
- Attend academic advising meeting with counselor
- Develop good study habits
- Explore extracurricular activities
- Consider volunteer opportunities
- Find mentors to work with
- Try out various stress-relief methods
- Start tracking activities and accomplishments
- Maintain good grades, freshmen year counts!

## SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Strive for balance with strong grades, new challenges, but not overtaxing yourself
- Take another look at the course catalog to make sure you have the prerequisites for any upper level courses you'd like to take in the upcoming years
- Attend academic advising meeting with counselor
- Make your summer matter with a valuable experience - work, volunteer, research or anything else that interests you!
- Think about your testing strategy for the SAT or ACT

## JUNIOR YEAR

### OCTOBER

- Take PSAT (Counselors will review scores when they become available)
- Attend College Admissions & Financial Aid Night

### NOVEMBER

- Attend Financial Aid Night
- Attend Junior Parent College Night
- Student should schedule a meeting with his/her counselor to conduct a college search

### DECEMBER

- Registration deadline for January SAT
- Individual college conferences with student, parents, and counselor begin

- Academic Advising Meetings

### **JANUARY**

- SAT
- Registration deadline for March SAT
- Family Meetings
- Academic Advising Meetings

### **FEBRUARY**

- Log onto Naviance and update information
- Parents complete parent information sheet and return to school counselor
- Complete resume in Naviance
- Family Meetings
- Academic Advising Meetings

### **MARCH**

- SAT
- Registration deadline for April ACT
- AP students register for AP exams
- Academic Advising Meetings

### **APRIL**

- Use spring vacation to visit colleges
- Registration deadline for May SAT
- Register online or telephone admissions office to make an appointment to visit
- ACT
- Begin to ask teachers for letters of recommendation

### **MAY**

- SAT
- Registration deadline for June SAT
- Registration deadline for June ACT

### **JUNE**

- SAT
- ACT

### **SUMMER**

- Continue researching and visiting colleges
- Begin college applications and essays
- Set up Common App account

# SENIOR YEAR

## SEPTEMBER

- ACT
- Continue visiting colleges
- Narrow list of potential colleges
- Continue to work on applications
- Update colleges on Naviance account
- ED/EA Applicants: Set up college interviews and meet with your counselor
- Registration deadline for October ACT
- Registrations deadline for SAT
- Check list of colleges visiting BHHS and meet with representatives
- Attend Application Clinic to match Common App and Naviance accounts, invite teachers to write letters of recommendation and request transcripts
- Utilize BHHS College Counseling Website/Advance

## OCTOBER

- **ED/EA Applicants:** Notify school counselors and have all schools in Naviance and provide request for teacher recommendation forms by **October 1st**
- Attend Application Clinic
- Submit on-line financial aid forms
- Make sure you have ACT or College Board send score reports directly to the colleges to which you are applying
- Check all application deadlines in Naviance
- Attend College Fair at Westchester County Center
- SAT
- ACT
- Registration deadline for November SAT
- Submit financial aid forms
- FAFSA opens

## NOVEMBER

- Review final list of colleges with counselor
- Registration deadline for December SAT
- Registration deadline for December ACT
- SAT
- First quarter grades sent on request

## DECEMBER

- December 1st - Notify counselor of all applications and provide all colleges on Naviance, particularly those that have a deadline of January 1-15
- SAT
- ACT
- Registration deadline for January SAT

## **JANUARY**

- SAT
- Keep working in the classroom, as admission is generally contingent upon satisfactory grades
- First semester grades will be sent on request
- Make sure you have sent SAT or ACT score reports to each college to which you are applying directly from the College Board or ACT
- Continue checking Google Classroom, BHHS College Counseling Site and Advance for information on financial aid, scholarships, loans, etc.
- Consult your counselor to review your final list of colleges

## **MARCH & APRIL**

- Notify your counselor of all acceptances and denials
- Keep record of all correspondence from colleges
- Notify by letter or email all colleges to which you have applied either stating your intention of acceptance or informing colleges that you will not attend - this will give students on waiting lists a chance for possible acceptance
- Plan campus visits to your top choice colleges after you have been accepted
- ACT
- SAT

## **MAY**

- Update Naviance with your final college decision and also let your counselor know
- Notify your counselor of any scholarships, acceptances or grants you have received
- Complete all material that was mailed to you, i.e., health forms, room and board, etc.
- Remember **May 1st** is the deadline for sending your deposit
- Take AP exams if you are in AP courses. Many schools offer advanced standing based on AP exam results

## **JUNE**

- Your final transcript will be sent to the college you will be attending
- Enjoy your graduation and GOOD LUCK!

### **IMPORTANT LINKS**

#### **Naviance**

<https://student.naviance.com/auth/fclookup>

#### **BHHS College Counseling Site / Advance**

<https://sites.google.com/byramhills.net/bhhscollegecounseling/home?authuser=0>

**CONGRATULATIONS, GRADUATES!**

# **STEP 1**

## **Taking Standardized Tests**

**PSAT**

**SAT**

**SAT Test Dates**

**ACT**

**Test Optional**

# COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS

## PSAT

### **What is the Digital PSAT?**

The Digital PSAT (PSAT/NMSQT - Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) is given in October to high school juniors. It is somewhat similar in format to the SAT and is useful as test practice and also an indicator of SAT score to be expected. It is also the basis of some merit scholarships and the source of some college mailings and contact.

## SAT

EVIDENCE-BASED READING AND WRITING (score = 200-800)

MATH (score = 200-800)

TOTAL/ MAXIMUM POSSIBLE SCORE = 1600

### **What is the SAT?**

The SAT is a 3 1/2-hour paper and pencil exam or a 2-hour and 14 minutes digital exam that measures verbal and math reasoning abilities. Since high schools throughout the country are so different, the SAT helps colleges to compare students' reasoning abilities and readiness to do college level work.

### **Do all colleges require the SAT?**

Some colleges require a college entrance exam (either the SAT or the ACT). Many do not require an entrance exam. Since most students do not know yet where they will apply, we recommend the SAT be taken at least once. For a list of colleges that do not require the SAT, you can visit our guidance website. It is highly recommended that you confirm this with each school you are considering as policies change from time to time.

### **When should I take the SAT?**

Most students take the SAT for the first time in March of junior year. Some students may wish to take it earlier, depending on their readiness for the test and their college plans. Most students also re-take the SAT later that Spring or in October or November of senior year.

### **Is it possible to fail the SAT?**

There is no such thing as a passing or failing grade on the SAT. The test is scored on a scale from 200 to 800 for each part (EBRW and Math). Each college will have a different range for the scores that they prefer for the students they wish to attract to their campus.

### **Should I take the SAT more than once?**

That depends. You may be very satisfied with your score and choose not to take it again. Since your reasoning abilities continue to develop, as you get older, studies have shown that, on average, scores tend to increase from junior year to senior year. Many students choose to take it a second time and, occasionally, some take it a third time. Two times is the average.

Designed to reduce student stress and improve the test-day experience, Score Choice is available for students. This policy gives students the option to choose to send SAT scores by sitting (test date) and SAT Subject Test scores by individual test, at no additional cost. Score Choice is optional and if students choose not to use it, all scores will be sent automatically.

Score Choice will only affect scores submitted to colleges and universities; *all* scores will still appear on score reports given to students and counselors. Also, colleges and universities will continue to set their own test requirements policies, which may vary from college to college.

### **How do I sign up?**

The easiest way to register is by signing up online at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) (have your credit card number handy). The Byram Hills CEEB code is 330-225. Students who receive special accommodations should check with their special educator or the school testing coordinator.

# ACT

Some students choose to take the ACT instead of (or in addition to) the SAT. Virtually all U.S. colleges accept the ACT, including Ivy League schools, and some schools will accept the ACT in lieu of both the SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests. Last year, over 2 million students took the ACT. The following information will help you better understand the ACT.

## What is the ACT?

The ACT Assessment, or “ACT” as it is more commonly known, is a national college admission examination that consists of tests in: **English, Math Reasoning, Reading, Science Reasoning and Writing (optional)**. The ACT is not an aptitude or IQ test, nor is it a reasoning test like the SAT. Instead, the questions on the ACT are directly related to what you have learned in high school courses in English, math, and science. Because the ACT is based on what is taught in the high school curriculum, some students are more comfortable with the ACT than they are with traditional aptitude tests.

## How long is the ACT?

The ACT consists of 215 multiple-choice questions and is approximately 3 hours in length. There is an optional writing section. Please note that many of the most selective schools require the ACT with the writing section. The writing section adds approximately thirty minutes to the test. It is to your benefit to take the writing section.

## Will colleges that I apply to see my scores?

You maintain control over which scores colleges will see. You may take the ACT more than once and you can choose which test date scores will be sent to colleges (unlike the SAT, in which all scores from all test dates are sent). You may also take the ACT and the SAT and choose which of the two you wish to send to colleges.

## Availability of the ACT

Unlike the SAT, the ACT is not offered at most high schools. Consult the ACT website for testing locations.

## When is the ACT given?

In the U.S., the ACT is given on six national test dates in **September, October, December, February, April, June and July**. (Note: *July test date is not available in New York. For test sites located outside of New York, see [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org).)* Testing dates will be available in the School Counseling Department.

**For more information on scoring, national averages, registration information, and answers to FAQ’s, you may visit the ACT website at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)**



# What Is a Test-Optional College?

COLLEGE BOARD - February 1, 2019 - Last Updated October 28, 2021

## Test Scores and College Applications

During the pandemic, colleges have introduced more flexibility and choice into the admissions process. Many have decided to adopt a “test-optional” policy regarding college entrance exams, either temporarily or permanently. College Board supports these decisions, especially now.

Most colleges still encourage students to submit their scores when they can, but they don't require all students to do so in every instance. For most students who take the SAT, sending scores will strengthen their college application.

## What Is Test-Optional?

If a college or university has a test-optional admissions policy, that means they allow all or some applicants to decide whether to submit SAT or ACT® scores as part of their application. It doesn't mean that schools aren't interested in seeing all applicants' test scores—but if a student doesn't submit their scores, it won't be counted against them in the application review.

In a recent survey, representatives from test-optional colleges and universities reported that, on average, close to 80% of their applicants choose to submit test scores. Another survey showed that more than 80% of students who took the SAT said they wanted the choice to send their scores.

Understanding test-optional policies can help you make informed decisions about whether to take the SAT, the ACT, or both. The most important point is that policies vary widely. Be sure to read each college's policy carefully so you understand what you need to do to qualify for admission, scholarships, financial aid, etc.

## Variations in Test-Optional Policies

Here are some possible variations in test score policies:

### *Example 1: Test-optional admissions policy for some*

At some colleges, if your GPA or class rank meets the minimum requirements, you can decide not to submit SAT or ACT scores. Some applicants, like homeschooled or international students, are required to submit scores, regardless of GPA.

A rare variation of this is “test flexible.” This means you may be able to take a test other than the SAT or ACT, such as AP Exams, to meet the school's requirements for admission. Even rarer is “test blind”, which means the college won't look at test scores even if they are submitted.

*Example 2: Test-optional admissions policy for all*

In some cases, the college allows students to decide for themselves whether to submit test scores. Applicants are told, in essence, “if you think your scores are an accurate representation of your ability, feel free to submit them. If you feel they’re not, don’t.”

*Example 3: Test optional for admissions, but required for enrollment or scholarships*

Some colleges that are test-optional for admissions require SAT or ACT scores for other uses, such as academic counseling and placement, or for institutional research. Students who don’t submit their scores as part of their applications will be required to do so before arriving on campus.

Remember: Many schools that don’t require scores for admission still consider them when awarding merit scholarships. When in doubt, check with the school.

## **Test-Optional FAQs**

*Which colleges don’t require the SAT or ACT?*

The list of test-optional colleges is changing all the time, especially considering temporary policy changes in response to the coronavirus. Always check directly with the college to confirm their policy, either by going to its website or calling its admissions office.

*Should I still take the SAT if all the colleges on my list are Test-Optional?*

In short, yes. Most college admissions officers, including those at test-optional colleges, value the SAT as part of the admissions process. Even if you think standardized tests aren’t your biggest strength, there are some good reasons to take them:

- **You’ll keep your options open.** Most colleges still accept test scores, and most encourage them. Remember: Your college list isn’t set in stone: you can change it at any time.
- **You’ll stand out among the applicants.** If you get the score you hope for, and especially if it’s above average for the college, submitting your SAT score can help you in the admissions process. Even if your top-choice is one of the rare test-flexible colleges, you should still take the SAT. You may find you’ll do better on it than you have on the AP Exams or other alternatives that the college considers. And keep in mind that colleges consider test scores in context. Even if your scores aren’t above average for the college, if they’re high for your school or neighborhood, they’ll help you make a great impression.
- **You could get more than just admission.** At some colleges, the only criteria to be eligible for certain scholarships is a minimum SAT/ACT score and GPA. If you don’t take either of these tests, you take yourself out of the running for hundreds of thousands of dollars that could make college more affordable.
- **A high SAT score can offset a low GPA.** If you don’t take the SAT, colleges will have less information about your academic performance. If you have a low GPA but do well on the SAT, you’re letting colleges know you have the potential to succeed in college-level classes.

# **STEP 2**

## **Completing BHHS Pre-Application Paperwork**

### **The School Counselor Letter of Recommendation**

## **SCHOOL COUNSELOR LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION**

Almost every college requires a letter of recommendation written by the school counselor. This letter helps the admissions committee learn more about the student as a whole person, adding information that cannot otherwise be learned from reviewing grades and test scores. The counselors at Byram Hills High School take writing this letter very seriously and therefore, ask for your assistance.

In order for your counselor to prepare the best possible letter of recommendation for you, you must complete and submit to your counselor the following required materials. All materials should be submitted by early spring. Their purpose is to help your counselor learn about you through your own and other people's perceptions of you.

### **PARENT'S STATEMENT** (completed by a parent/guardian and submitted to your counselor)

This is a statement by the parent or guardian telling the counselor anything (and everything) that is felt will be helpful to the counselor in writing a convincing letter. We find that parents often add valuable information and insights that students often don't share with us. This form is also available on the guidance website and guidance Google classroom for you to type on, save and email to your counselor.

### **RESUME** (completed by you and submitted to your school counselor)

All of our school counselors require a resume from each one of their students. This activity helps to facilitate the college process for the student because it enables them to organize all of the necessary data that they will need to have on hand. The counselors also use this information to help them to write their letter of recommendation in regard to your child. You can find a sample resume on page 45 to use as a guide in creating your resume, or you can complete a resume in Naviance.

# **STEP 3**

**Learning About  
and Visiting Colleges**

**Finding A College That Fits**

**Visiting Colleges**

**The Admissions Interview**

**Available Resources**

**College Information Online**

# HOW CAN I FIND A COLLEGE THAT FITS?

Mary Lee Hoganson  
College Board online

The trick to picking a college? **Know yourself.** After all, you're not finding a college for your best friend or for your Uncle Henry. You're searching for a school that fits you-know-who. Few decisions you make in your life will seem more important than your choice of a college. In fact, your college decision will strongly influence the career paths you take, many of the friends you'll maintain for a lifetime, and even the area of the country in which you are likely to live and work. Even so, choosing a college is not an exact science. There is no one "perfect" college for anyone. Instead, there are many colleges that would be a fine match for every college-bound student. The trick is to identify your unique priorities for selecting a college, carefully research the characteristics of a range of colleges and universities, and, finally, match the two and select several options where you will apply.

## To Get Started, Think About YOU

As you begin, examine your priorities. YOU will be sitting in the classroom of your final choice, not your parents and not your best friend. Although it's a good idea to seek advice, in the end no one but you can tell where you'll be satisfied. Start by considering what you have and have not found important and rewarding in high school. Ask questions like:

- How do I learn best? In large or lecture-style classes or in small discussion/ seminar settings?
- Do I prefer being the best in a class, or do I need the presence of equally bright peers in order to challenge myself?
- Do I learn more quickly when structure is clear, or would I rather have the freedom to choose how I spend my time?
- What extracurricular activities have been most important to me? Which will I want to continue in college?
- What have I learned about my academic interests and abilities that will influence what I might study in college?
- Who are my friends? Do I want my relationships in college to be similar or different?

Answers to these questions will help you apply what you have learned about yourself during your high school years as you set priorities that will affect your final college choice.

Before you begin picking possible colleges, have a candid conversation with your parents. Are there limits to what they can or will contribute to your college expenses? Are there colleges

they hope you will consider? Are they comfortable with letting you travel far away to attend college?

Negotiate differences of opinion at the start of the selection process rather than at the end. You don't want to select a college that your parents will not support as a final choice. If you find your parents too narrowly focused on colleges close to home, or those with "name-brand recognition," your school counselor may be able to educate them about the wide range of quality colleges.

## ***Consider College Characteristics***

The next step is to make a list of “*everything I would want to know about a college before I decide to apply.*” Some considerations may be unique to your situation -- for example, strength of a particular athletic program or access to private music lessons. Other characteristics to be considered include:

**INSTITUTIONAL MISSION:** While this is not an exhaustive list, most students attend institutions in one of the following categories:

**Liberal Arts Colleges** focus on the education of undergraduate students. Classes are generally taught by professors who see teaching as their primary responsibility. Because most liberal arts colleges are smaller than universities, classes tend to be smaller, and more personal attention is available. As opposed to preparation for a specific career path, students who attend liberal arts colleges are exposed to a broad base of courses in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. In addition, they choose at least one area of in-depth study, which is their college "major." Many employers look for graduates of liberal arts programs, valuing their well-rounded preparation.

**Universities** are generally larger and may include a liberal arts college, as well as some professional colleges and graduate programs. They offer a greater range of academic choices and may provide more extensive resources. Class size often reflects institutional size. Some classes will be taught by graduate students. Professors at major universities are involved in research, which adds to the vitality of the academic community but may draw energy and resources away from undergraduate teaching.

**Technical Institutes and Professional Schools** enroll students who have made clear decisions about what they want to study and emphasize preparation for specific careers. You will want to be quite sure of your future direction before selecting one of these options.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities** find their origins in the time when African-American students were systematically denied access to most other colleges and universities. These institutions offer students a unique opportunity to experience an educational community in which they are a part of the majority. They often find committed faculty mentors who encourage their expectations of success.

**Women's Colleges**, with larger numbers of female faculty and administrators, offer female students confidence-building role models, greater opportunities to serve in a full range of student leadership positions, and a heightened awareness of career possibilities for women.

**Community or Junior Colleges** generally offer the first two years of a liberal arts education, in addition to specialized occupational preparation. At the end of a two-year program of study an associate degree is awarded. Many students continue their education at a four-year institution.



**INSTITUTION SIZE:** Size will affect many of your opportunities and experiences, including:

- the range of academic majors offered
- the extracurricular possibilities
- the amount of personal attention you'll receive, and even
- the number of books in the library

In considering size, however, be very sure to look beyond the raw number of students attending. Perhaps you are considering a small department within a large school, or vice versa. So, instead of the total number of students, consider the average class size for first-year students and upperclassmen. Investigate not just the number of faculty, but also how accessible faculty is to students.

**LOCATION:** Distance from home may be important. Do you want to visit home frequently, or do you see this as a time to experience a new part of the country? Some like an urban environment with access to museums, ethnic food, or major league ball games. Others hope for easy access to the outdoors or the serenity and safety of a small-town setting.

**ACADEMIC PROGRAMS:** If you know what you want to study, research reputations of academic departments by talking to adults already in the fields that interest you, and using print resources that evaluate academic departments.

If you are undecided, relax and pick an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Most colleges offer expert counseling to help the undecided student find a focus. In considering academic programs, look for opportunities. Pick a school that offers many possibilities, such as these:

- Study abroad programs or domestic exchanges (through which you may study for a term or year at another U.S. college).
- Internships or cooperative education programs. (The latter offer you a chance to alternate class work with paid internships as a way of enhancing your education and job skills.)
- Unique academic calendars. The college school year isn't always two semesters and summers off. Instead it's not uncommon to find academic calendars like these:
- 4-1-4, 4-4-1, or January term plans that offer one short and two long academic terms during which you may take an intensive course, arrange for independent study, do an internship, or pursue a project of special interest.
- A "Block Plan" in which students study one course at a time, usually for about three-and-a-half weeks, and then begin a new course (great if you learn well in short, intense bursts; not so great if you like a longer time to absorb material).

- ❑ Year-round calendars (usually with four equal quarters), which allow you to plan flexibly for time off campus--including time for jobs or internships.

**CAMPUS LIFE:** Consider what your college life will be like beyond the classroom. In order to grow in all ways, aim for a balance between academics and social life. What extracurricular activities, athletics, and special interest groups are available? Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students? Are students welcomed by the community? Is there an ethnic or religious group in which to take part? How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?

Colleges often require that you live in campus housing for one or more years. So, in considering social life, be sure to look carefully at the quality of life in the dormitories. Ask if housing is guaranteed to be available to returning students. If so, how are dormitory assignments made after the first year?

**COST:** Today's college price tag makes cost an important consideration for most students. At the same time, virtually all colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend. In considering cost, look beyond the price tag to assistance available.

**Two less obvious, but important factors are:**

**DIVERSITY:** You'll learn much from your classmates every day--in the classroom and out. Explore what you might gain from a richly diverse student body in the colleges that interest you. Consider the geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the students as a means of learning more about their world. Investigate what kinds of student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

**RETENTION and GRADUATION RATES:** One of the best ways to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percent of students who return after the first year and the percent of entering students who remain to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates are indicators that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.

## **VISITING COLLEGES**

An excellent way to learn about a college, the faculty, facilities, spirit, atmosphere, academic climate, and student values is to visit the school when college is in session. It is better to see with your own eyes rather than rely upon the view of someone else. This campus visit will be a valuable piece of information that you can use in evaluating a college. You will have the opportunity to evaluate how students live while observing where you will eat, sleep, study, worship, attend classes and take part in campus activities. You are likely to do better work if you are in an environment, which is compatible with your value system and needs. Parents are encouraged to accompany their sons and daughters.

### **HOW CAN I PREPARE FOR A COLLEGE VISIT?**

- Arrange for your visit in advance by visiting the college website and making an appointment or by calling the Admission Office. Find out when tours and information sessions are offered.
- Allow sufficient time for the visit -- preferably a full day with an overnight stay but not less than half a day.
- Familiarize yourself with the college courses or other literature before visiting so that you can ask intelligent questions.
- Give careful attention to your appearance, grooming and conduct. Often, notes are kept and placed in your application file. Remember to put your best face forward.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO DURING MY VISIT?**

- Visit several classes.
- Talk to as many students as possible. Ask them about the academic and social life on campus.
- Observe students as you walk around and ask yourself if you want to spend four years of your life with these people.
- Stay overnight in a dorm.
- Eat in the dining hall.
- Read the college newspaper.

## WHAT SHOULD I LEARN AND ASK ON THE VISIT?

### **Classes**

- What is the average class size for the freshmen? Upper class students?
- What is the faculty advisor system?
- What are the college's top three programs?
- What is the amount and kind of study necessary for success?

### **Campus**

- Does the campus appeal to you?
- How far is it from the local community? Will the city be a positive or negative factor?
- Is pride shown in maintaining a clean and well-ordered campus?
- Is campus security adequate?

### **Housing**

- Are freshmen required to live in a dorm?
- How is housing assigned? Which are the most appealing dorms?
- What percentage of students lives on campus?
- Where are the dorms located in relation to other parts of the campus?
- What are the other dining facilities like around the campus? Does your meal plan allow you to eat in them?

### **Religion**

- Are there opportunities to join religious organizations?
- Is there a place of worship on campus or nearby?
- Are philosophy or theology courses required?

### **Social and Recreational**

- What do students do on weekends? What percentage of the students remain on campus on the weekends?
- Are there fraternities or sororities? What percentage of the students belong? Are there opportunities for independents?
- Does the school have a student union or other recreational facilities?
- What varsity and intramural sports are played? Are the students active supporters of athletic events? Are the facilities adequate?
- What is there to do off campus? How expensive is it?
- Is a car necessary? If not, what are the transportation options?

### **Placement and Graduation Statistics**

- What percentage of graduates are accepted into graduate school of those who apply?
- What are some of the placement statistics of graduates entering the job market?
- Is there a career-planning center available to students?

### **General Atmosphere**

- What is the average dropout rate? Why do students leave?
- What is the composition of the student body? Where do students come from?
- Why did they choose this school?

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER THE VISIT?**

Write a thank-you note to the Director of Admissions and to any other staff who interviewed you. This should be done promptly upon returning home.

- Each school has advantages and disadvantages, and your objective after spending some time considering your own values and priorities is to evaluate the factors and their importance to you.

## THE ADMISSIONS INTERVIEW

Admissions offices use interviews differently from one college to another. At some schools, interviews are not available, while at others, they may be recommended. Sometimes they are strictly informative. (They have no bearing in the admissions process and are simply another way for you to gain information.) Others are evaluative. (They are used in conjunction with your application as part of the criteria to determine whether you'll get in.) If it is possible for you to interview, we recommend that you do so. The interview will rarely work against you, and may work to your benefit. It also serves as a great opportunity to show WHO you are and not just WHAT you've done. Rest assured that admission counselors understand that you will be nervous and will try to make you comfortable.

The interview has two purposes -- for you to get to know the college and for the college to learn about you. When you ask a question, its form can reveal things about you. Do not, for example, ask questions such as, "How large is the freshmen class?" or, "Does the college offer Chinese?" Since the answers are available with a glance on their website, the implication is that you were not interested enough to discover the facts for yourself. Remember that the interview is a dialogue, not a variant of "Twenty Questions." The answers that you give are less likely to be judged as simply right or wrong than as preludes to intelligent conversations. If your response to a question about your hobbies is that you like to read, be prepared to mention titles and authors and to say something about the books' content - otherwise find another hobby to talk about.

### INTERVIEW TIPS

- Be yourself.** Be real, but be appropriate. It is your opportunity to let the college know something about how you shape your education and your experience.
- Prepare.** Try a mock interview with a friend or with your counselor. You'd be surprised how helpful a rehearsal can be -- especially if you've never interviewed before.
- Familiarize yourself** with the college before you go in. Be able to discuss things that attract you to the college. They'll want to know why you are interested in their particular college.
- Dress neatly**, but don't overdo it. For example: no jeans, hats or formal attire.
- Don't be shy** about your accomplishments. Be ready to share anything that you are proud of. Also, be ready to honestly discuss any weaknesses (without dwelling on them as you want to put your best foot forward).
- Expand your answers.** For example, if asked what your favorite subject is, don't simply answer "Biology." Instead, begin to explain why Biology is your favorite. Provide examples that will illustrate your point.

- ❑ **Use the questions** you are asked as starting points by giving examples and illustrations, and then elaborate. Feel comfortable to talk about relevant school experiences, academic and extracurricular. Discuss significant travel, work and/or outside of school interests that have particular meaning to you.

**If there is something special** about your educational or personal life that you think should be shared, this may be the time. For instance, if there are family or personal circumstances, which have significantly impacted your educational experiences, the interview is an opportunity to discuss such relevant situations. If you are uncertain, check with your counselor for an opinion of what may be appropriate to disclose during the interview.

- ❑ **When asked if you have any questions**, you may want to inquire about the following:

**Academic Offerings:** sizes of classes, how “deep” are the offerings in your intended major? Are freshmen taught by professors or teaching assistants?

**Housing:** what are the options for freshmen? Are some students in triples? Is on campus housing guaranteed for all?

**Weekend activities:** Do most students stay on campus during weekends?  
(You should ask students presently enrolled the same question.)

**Special Services:** What kind of special services are available to students with regard to career choices and placement, personal counseling and educational planning?

Some colleges use alumni to interview and usually regard this as an important part of the process. Alumni are trained by their colleges and take pride in their efforts to find outstanding candidates.

### **What about college admission for the student with special talents?**

Collegiate institutions are interested in what makes you special. If you have an interest or talent and want to share this with the schools to which you are applying consider the following:

**Athletics:** Talk to your coach about opportunities to compete on the college level, and your desire to do so. Discuss and consider what level of competition would be best for you. When visiting campuses, try to arrange a meeting with the coach of your sport. Prepare a one-page athletic resume. It is possible to contact coaches via the college website.

**Art:** Prepare a portfolio. See an art teacher for guidance. Try to be professional. If you can, try to submit your work for local contests and art shows. Most students can display their work on a website such as tumblr.com. The address can be shared with colleges.

**Music:** If you are musical, check the college website to see how they want you to send your music. You may offer to have a live audition. Contact the Admission Office. If at all possible, try to arrange to perform or participate in local presentations.

**Drama:** Each college has its own specific requirements. You may have to audition. Please be aware that certain prestigious drama programs weigh GPA and SAT's above auditions or do not even grant auditions.

**Other:** If you are a serious collector or you have created your own business, send a business card and a synopsis of your company. Maybe you are a scientist, an inventor, or a computer whiz; let the college know.

### **How Do Colleges Choose Among Applicants?**

Before colleges decide whom they will admit, admissions directors and their committees consider the following:

- The student's high school academic record** (the student transcript);
  - a. type of courses pursued (college prep, advanced, accelerated)
  - b. grade point average
- SAT, ACT** or other entrance examination scores (if required).
- Letters of recommendation** from counselor, teachers, administrators and others.
- Marked improvement** in his/her scholastic achievement from year to year with special emphasis on junior and senior years.
- Indication of special ability;** art, music or leadership.
- College essays.**
- Service to the school.**
- Service to the community.**
- Extracurricular activities;** dramatics, sports, band, publications.
- Attendance record** and personal profile.
- Accuracy of the application.**
- The personal interview** (if required).



# RESOURCES

There is a wealth of information available to teach you about the unique aspects of each college or university. As you spend time researching, you will begin to narrow your list of colleges before you apply.

**The Byram Hills High School College & Career Center** is well equipped with software, college guides, viewbooks, and catalogs. To help you distinguish among them, each is defined below:

## **Naviance**

Your counselor uses software that considers all of the factors that are important to you in choosing a college. You will be meeting with your counselor to generate a personalized list of possible colleges.

## **Advance**

A comprehensive school counseling resource site for academic success, social-emotional wellness, and career and college readiness.

## **College Guides**

These guides contain a brief description of every college in the U.S. The information includes college location, phone number, web address, number of undergraduates, program of study offered, SAT ranges for the previous year's freshmen, admission requirements, application deadlines, etc.

## **College Catalogs**

Every college also publishes a catalog, which includes detailed information such as tuition and all fees, academic calendar, requirements for every major offered, course descriptions, campus policies, etc. This is a very informative and important resource that is, too often, underutilized by students. Some of the more popular resources are:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Barron's          | <a href="#"><u>Profiles of American Colleges</u></a>                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fiske             | <a href="#"><u>The Fiske Guide to Colleges</u></a>                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lovejoy's         | <a href="#"><u>College Guide</u></a>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peterson's        | <a href="#"><u>Guide to Four Year Colleges</u></a>                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peterson's        | <a href="#"><u>Guide to Two Year Colleges</u></a>                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peterson's        | <a href="#"><u>Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities</u></a> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The College Board | <a href="#"><u>Index to Majors</u></a>  |

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The College Board    | <u><a href="#">The College Handbook</a></u>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yale Daily Press     | <u><a href="#">The Insider's Guide to College</a></u>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Princeton Review | <u><a href="#">The K &amp; W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities</a></u> |

### **College Fairs**

Twice each year (October and May), a college fair is held at the Westchester County Center in White Plains. A large number of colleges send representatives who will answer questions, put you on their mailing lists, and provide you with viewbooks, catalogs, and other free information.

# College Information Online

The Internet has emerged as an essential reference tool for the college search. Some of the best uses of the computer in college admissions include: (1) searching databases for colleges and scholarships, (2) communicating with colleges and filing applications, and (3) registering for standardized tests and submitting financial aid forms. There are some drawbacks, so you should know those as well. The web is great for sending messages and sifting through objective information; it is less reliable in offering judgment of quality. The web will show you where a college is located and what it offers, but not how good it is.

Many websites are devoted to serving the needs of college applicants today. Many of these sites also sell products that are not worth buying (i.e., scholarship searches or consulting services.) Buyer beware!

Here are some useful college related sites:

## **College Searches**

### **Advance Website**

[Advance](#)

Here you can find college search, college application and career information tailored for BHHS students.

### **Collegexpress**

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

Here you can locate financial aid information, win a college scholarship, learn about playing sports in college, search colleges by state, majors and other factors, and ask questions about the college admissions process.

### **College Stats**

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

Discovering your dream school just got easier. Search our database of more than 3,000 colleges and universities to find the best advanced degree opportunities for you. CollegeStats.org lets you decide what matters most in your search for the perfect college.

### **College Board**

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

Use this college search software that high schools use online for free to find colleges that match your goals and interests. Includes in-depth information about all two-year and four-year colleges in the U.S., plus the complete text of *The Complete College Handbook*.

### **The Princeton Review**

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

Search this site by the school's name, region, state, size and cost. *The Princeton Review* also provides you with its rating of hundreds of colleges.

## **Special Group Searches**

### **Jesuit Colleges and Universities**

[www.ajcunet.edu](http://www.ajcunet.edu)

This service will assist you in searching, linking to and requesting an application from Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States.

### **Campus Pride Index**

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

Since 2007, the campus pride index has been the premier lgbtq national benchmarking tool for colleges and universities to create safer, more inclusive campus communities. The free online tool allows prospective students, families/parents and those interested in higher education to search a database of lgbtq-friendly campuses who have come out to improve the academic experience and quality of campus life.

### **HBCU Colleges and Universities**

[www.thehundred-seven.org/index.html](http://www.thehundred-seven.org/index.html)

Positively Promoting the Nation's Historically Black Colleges & Universities. Featuring the first and only searchable database of all academic programs offered by HBCUs.

### **Niche - Diverse Colleges**

[www.niche.com/colleges/search/most-diverse-colleges/](http://www.niche.com/colleges/search/most-diverse-colleges/)

Explore the most diverse college campuses based on key statistics and student reviews using data from the U.S. Department of Education. The ranking compares socio-economic, geographic, and ethnic diversity of students and staff as well as the overall level of tolerance on campus.

## **College Applications**

### **Common Application**

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

This site was launched by Peterson's, the college guide publisher. It allows you to cross reference answers on your applications with Peterson's database, thus forestalling errors such as saying you would like to major in engineering on your application to Oberlin College, a liberal arts institution. The service is free. Almost 300 public and private colleges and universities will accept this standardized college application. The "Common App" can be filled out on line and then, for some schools, sent electronically or downloaded and mailed. Paper copies are available in the Counseling Center.

### **College Board**

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

The testing giant boasts one of the most comprehensive sites, offering test registration, college and scholarship searches, a financial aid eligibility estimator, online applications, and general information on the college search.

## **U.S. News & World Report**

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

U.S. News posts its annual college rankings on this site. Apply online, find a scholarship and discover what the best jobs are. It also offers a college search program and message board.

## **Kaplan**

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

One of the nation's two largest test prep companies. Kaplan offers a college search, message boards, and interactive features on various facets of the process.

## **Naviance**

<http://student.naviance.com/byramhills>

Naviance Student is a web-based service designed especially for students and parents. Naviance Student is a comprehensive website that you can use to help in making decisions about colleges and careers. Naviance Student will allow you to build a resume, manage timelines and deadlines for making decisions about colleges. Students will use this site to communicate with their teachers and school counselor the list of colleges to which they are applying. This will be the primary site used to forward student records and letters of recommendation to the colleges.

## **Financial Aid Information**

### **Finaid**

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

This is the most comprehensive source of financial aid information on the net. The site is backed by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators and includes an endless number of links to sites that allow you to calculate your financial need, search for scholarships on several databases, learn the differences between Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, PLUS Loans and many other sources of aid, an download application forms and instructions. There is also an "ask the advisor" section, for when you feel stumped by this bureaucratic shuffle.

### **Fastweb**

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

The Internet's largest free scholarship search with over 500 new awards added daily. Simply provide some personal information and, in less than 5 minutes, **FastWeb** provides you with awards that match the criteria you've provided. In addition, students are assigned a mailbox they can check periodically for newly listed awards. Students can also find out more information on federal work-study and loans.

### **Sallie Mae**

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

This lender-supported website provides a financial need analysis calculator, a scholarship search database, a financial aid primer, and online account access. There are student loan repayment tables so you can see how your outstanding debt loan would really affect your monthly take home pay.

**U.S. Department of Education**

<https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>

This website can help you at every stage of the financial aid process, including completing and submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This is a must stop web site for every college bound student.

# **STEP 4**

**Writing the Essay or Personal Statement**

**Resume or List of Activities**

**Asking For Teacher Recommendations**

**Understanding “Early Decision” & “Early Action”**

**Completing the Application**

**Application Methods**

**The Common Application**

**Glossary of Terms**

## Writing the College Essay

The best thing and the worst thing about the application essay is that it is entirely in your hands. This is a part of the college admission process that is a clean slate just waiting for you to use to your best advantage. How different from your transcript where, perhaps, you got a low grade in a subject when you played three sports and worked part time. How unlike your SAT scores in math, where you have never been able to do as well on the test as you do practicing at home. The essay is a special opportunity, yet many view it as problematic.

What drives admissions committees to require essays? Why do they ask close to one million high school seniors each year to do this particular sort of writing? What are these gatekeepers at our nation's collegiate campuses looking for? What makes this part of the process, seemingly torture for some, so difficult? And how important is the essay when all is said and done? Let's take a look at these questions one at a time.

First, admissions officials want to know that, at the very least, you can write a respectable essay. Much of college work is expressed on paper, and the first question you answer with an essay is that you are up to the task. Once you can prove ordinary competence, as you will, a more challenging agenda is before you.

Nobody gets to adolescence without having beliefs, feelings, ideas or experiences that are cared about and deeply felt. Because as a teenager you are struggling to find your way in an adult world, many ordinary events are highlighted in meaning for you. Admissions officials know this and use essays to learn something about you that the usual questions asked in an interview and on applications may not reveal. Imagine how it feels to sit with a candidate's (your) file: paper after paper showing what others think of the candidate (you): transcripts, letters of recommendation, interview notes. None of these is your voice at the table. Then the admissions officer picks up your essay and can hear what *you* think, feel, notice, or reflect on. Some college admissions representatives advise applicants to produce essays that are at least 50% reflective.

It may be that there have been circumstances in your life that were especially challenging, family issues or health issues among them, which have moved you in a direction that most others would not experience. Knowing that such events may bring unusual outcomes, they explain academic underachievement, and often result in real maturation. These may be important to share in an admissions essay.

What makes the writing so difficult that many leave it to the last minute. Writing about yourself asks for a different kind of writing than do most high school assignments. You have had little experience with it. Talking about yourself on paper is challenging because it's largely unpracticed and because the choice in your essay, that is, the way you sound as a person, is difficult to capture. Admissions persons, however, are interested in reading about your efforts. They know that you probably won't win the Pulitzer for this essay; yet they want to know something about you from the inside, or something told in your own real style if you can manage it. Authenticity is the key. Speak from the heart.



Every once in a while a student is admitted to college because of an essay, but that event is rare. What your essay gives the reader is *another* reason to admit you. After all, college officials are admissions officers, not denial officers. As the discussion of your file progresses, a solid and maybe even interesting essay can only help your efforts.

## Making the College Essay Less Stressful

### **Estimate Your Workload**

Start writing the essay at least four weeks before the application is due. You may be able to use the same essay for several different applications, with some changes, but leave yourself enough time.

### **Put Yourself in the Picture**

Think of ways to express your own personality and values - Admissions Officers want to read what you want to write, not what you think they want to read. Be guided by the question: what do I want colleges to know about me? Even with a narrow essay topic, you can find ways to make it personal.

### **Go With the Flow**

- Don't worry about where to begin - just start writing your concept. When necessary, identify important people, events and ideas in your life. Concentrate on ideas and creative expression.
- Trust your words, what you write from inside yourself. You can have others read it, like family, friends, teachers or your counselor, but in the end the essay is yours.
- Write about something money can't buy; feelings, ideas, reflections or reactions. College admission officers really don't like to read travelogues.

### **Reorganize and Rewrite**

After you've written the first draft, leave it for a short time before coming back to polish the essay. Make sure it is organized, with an attention-grabbing lead paragraph. Make sure it is not too long - and make sure that it is "you!"

### **Check Mechanics**

No matter how creative or well organized, every essay should be technically correct - with good grammar, spelling, punctuation, and a smooth style. Ask someone else to read it, to pick up any flaws you might miss.

❑ **Stick to Deadlines**

Don't forget to submit your application and essay on time. Late submission can sometimes mean an automatic rejection with some colleges - and always leaves a bad impression.

## Teacher Recommendations

Virtually all colleges require your high school to provide a recommendation to accompany a copy of your official transcript. This recommendation is written by your school counselor. Many colleges also ask for a recommendation from a teacher -- sometimes two. It is the applicant's responsibility to know the recommendation policy of each college to which they apply.

This summary is designed to help you go about asking teachers to write recommendations so that they, in turn, can do the best possible job for you.

- Try to choose teachers who know you well. For example, if Mr. X had you in a sophomore class and again in a senior class, and also coached you in a sport, he might be a better choice than Ms. Y, who knows you only as a senior. Do not ask a freshman teacher unless you have them again as a senior.
- If your application form asks you to declare an intended major course of study, you might ask a teacher with whom you studied the same subject or one closely related.
- If you are asked for two teacher recommendations, it is generally a good idea to choose one from Humanities (e.g. English, Social Studies, Foreign Language) and the other from Math or Science.
- When you intend to ask a teacher for a recommendation, make an appointment with him or her -- before or after school or during a free period. This gives you and the teacher a chance to talk about your interest in the college(s). The more information your teacher has, the more complete and persuasive the recommendation will be.
- A recommendation from a teacher who is an alumnus/alumna of the college you're applying to; or an outside recommendation (e.g., mentor or employer) should mail or email their letter on their own to the colleges to which you are applying.
- Don't be afraid to ask a teacher from whom you've received less than "A's"! Effort, self-discipline, improvement, potential for continued growth, class participation - these are just as important as the grades you have earned.
- Request teacher recommendations through "Apply to College" in Naviance.
- Always** give a teacher as much time as possible to write the recommendation. Two weeks is a polite minimum...and **never** request a letter of recommendation from a teacher the day before December vacation and say, "It's due January 1st!"
- When a teacher agrees to write a recommendation -- and 99% of the time he or she will be sure to say "thank you." Remember that it takes quite a bit of time to write a college recommendation.
- Teachers who will write recommendations cannot be changed after October 1<sup>st</sup>.

- ❑ Later, when the colleges let you know their decisions, be sure to share that information with your teachers who have written recommendations. They're interested in your future -- and who better to tell them than you? Then thank them again for writing on your behalf.

## **Writing a Resume or List of Activities**

Most applications will ask you to list activities, interests, work experience and community service projects that you have participated in while in high school, but often don't provide enough space to fully explain what you have done. We strongly encourage you to prepare a separate document, which includes this information in a well-organized, easy to read format. There are many different formats that can be used. One sample is included on the next page, but you may speak to your counselor for specific suggestions. All students will create a resume in Naviance.

# ANDREA CARSON

7758 JASMINE LANE  
STONYBROOK, AZ 85385  
623-556-7409  
andrea.carson@gwhs.edu

## REFERENCES

### Bernard Garcia

Athletic Director, Soccer Coach  
George Washington High School  
623-634-8975  
bgarcia@gwhs.edu

### Pamela Hobbs

Tutoring Program Coordinator  
Monarch Middle School  
623-755-3014  
pamelahobbs@monarch.az.edu

## WORK EXPERIENCE

### English Tutor

Stonybrook, AZ

#### Monarch Middle School | Aug 22-May 23

Grade 11  
5 Hrs/Week  
Total Hours: 180

Tutored three students ages 12-14 in reading comprehension and language mechanics.

### Yearbook Editor

Stonybrook, AZ

#### George Washington High School | Sep 23-Present

Grade 12  
4 Hrs/Week

Led design work from initial layout through finished product.

## EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

### Summer Writing Program | Jul 23

Grade 11  
5 Hrs/Week

Tutored three students ages 12-14 in reading comprehension and language mechanics.

## ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENT

### Soccer | Mar 21-Jun 24

Grade 9, 10, 11, 12  
15 Hrs/Week

Served as team captain during my senior year.

## Understanding *Early DECISION* and *Early ACTION*

There are two types of early application processes: Early Action (EA) and Early Decision (ED). Under both plans, the application deadline is earlier than if you apply “regular decision” (usually November 1st or 15th). Additionally, you receive an early response from the college (usually by December 15th).

**Early Decision** plans allow you to apply early to only one binding college program. If you are accepted, your commitment to attend that college is “**binding**.” Therefore, you may not apply to more than one college under an ED plan; however, you may (in fact, you should) pursue other schools with regular decision plans. If you are accepted at your ED school, you must immediately withdraw all other applications that have been submitted.

**Early Action** plans are not binding. Therefore, you may apply EA to more than one college. The time frame for EA is generally the same as the time frame for ED. Colleges usually have either an ED or an EA plan, and occasionally have both.

**Restricted Early Action or Early Action "Single Choice"** is not binding, but no other binding "early" application may be filed. Please check the individual college website for specifics.

**Regular Decision** is the term used for the standard application process at most colleges. You apply before their regular deadline (usually January 1st or later), and you will get a response in April.

**Rolling Decision** is a term used for the application process that allows you to apply at any time, and the college makes decisions as they receive applications. In other words, they don't wait until they receive all applications before they decide on your status. As the applications “roll in,” colleges “roll out” their decisions every few weeks, depending on volume of applications. Be sure to check each college's website for specific dates and rules.

### What about financial aid when applying early decision?

If finances are a significant issue for you and your family, you may wish to reconsider whether early decision is right for you.

Sometimes, an early applicant may not receive as generous a package as a regular applicant. Since the early applicant is obligated to attend, the college has less incentive to provide more aid. If accepted under an ED plan, you will receive an estimate of your financial aid package. However, if the estimate is not enough for you to go to your ED college, then you are no longer obligated to attend.

Under EA, Regular, and Rolling plans, you can wait until you receive all of your acceptances and financial aid packages from all colleges before you make up your mind. You have until May 1st to make your decision.

## How do I know if I should apply early?

Often, you'll know. After you go through the process of researching and visiting colleges that are appropriate for you, if one college is clearly "the one" (and you've discussed the "academic fit" with your counselor), then you may be a good early candidate for that particular college. However, you still need to ask yourself some tough questions, such as:

- Have I visited the school and am I sure that this is the school for me, or will I have "buyer's remorse" later in the year when classmates receive several offers to choose from?
- Am I ready, willing, and able to prepare my application and essays by November 1st?
- Am I psychologically prepared for the possibility of rejection so early in my senior year? And right before the holidays?
- Do I have "back-up" colleges in mind in case I don't get in?
- Am I applying early to this particular college for the "right" reasons?
- Are my grades and SAT scores strong enough at the end of junior year so I don't need to count on senior grades to enrich my transcript?
- Is my family willing to pay tuition without being concerned about other competitive financial offers?

### **Please remember...**

On average, approximately 50% of early applicants are accepted. The remaining 50% are either *deferred* or *rejected*.

If you are deferred, that means your application will be moved to the regular decision pool with all applicants who apply under a college's regular decision plan. Regular decision has a later deadline, and also a later notification of whether you are accepted or rejected. Though some students will be accepted from the deferred pool, most will not.

***ED and EA plans are different at each college.  
Be sure to talk with your counselor about the best plan for YOU...  
and always read the fine print in each college's application.***

## The APPLICATION

Ordinarily, an application will consist of 4 main parts:

1. **YOUR PART** requests some basic biographic information, and usually includes one or more essay questions or a personal statement. **Be sure to thoroughly follow directions and answer all questions.** We recommend that you review your application before completing it in order to familiarize yourself with the questions and check with your counselor if anything is unclear. Make sure that you sign it before sending it. When asked to give your email address, be certain that it is appropriate!
  
2. **YOUR TEACHER'S PART** is often called the "Teacher Recommendation" or "Teacher Evaluation." Many colleges will require two teacher recommendations. Some schools do not require teacher recommendations. You must request teacher recommendations through Naviance only.
  
3. **YOUR COUNSELOR'S PART** is usually called the "School Report Form" or "Counselor's Report Form". This part requires that your counselor provide some basic information about you and requests a school counselor recommendation.
  - Once you are ready to have your counselor letter of recommendation and transcript sent to the colleges, enter all schools on your Naviance account and meet with your counselor. You may then complete "Request Transcripts" in Naviance.
  
  - If you are applying ED, you must notify your school counselor by **October 1st.**
  
  - If the application deadline is January 15th or earlier, you must notify your school counselor by **December 1st.**
  
4. **SCORES:** We recommend self-reporting your ACT and SAT scores on the Common App. If the college does not allow for self-reporting, use the ACT or SAT websites to officially send your scores to individual colleges.

**We strongly suggest that you contact your colleges a few weeks after** you release your scores from the testing service to verify that they received it -- just to be sure. But please note that processing time, from when the application is mailed to when it is opened and posted on computers, may take as long as 2 - 5 weeks. Don't panic if you receive a notification stating that the file is incomplete when you know that you have recently sent everything out. **Please be aware of application deadlines and instructions.**



# APPLICATION METHODS

We strongly encourage all students to submit college applications electronically. We use Naviance to submit student information to the colleges, therefore, students applying through non-electronic means can complicate the process.

## Applying Electronically

This is different from obtaining an application online. There is no paper involved. You enter the requested data and send your application directly from your computer. Many colleges and universities are equipped to enable you to apply electronically directly on their website and even prefer this. **Remember, you still need to notify your teachers and your counselor that you have applied to these schools.**

(Please see College Information Online section for application websites)

## The Common Application

The Common Application is one application that is used by over 800 colleges and universities. The advantage of using the common application is that you complete one application, and send it to all of the schools you've selected that accept it. The list of schools is online at [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org).

Some colleges require an additional supplement that can be obtained online.

Universal college application is an alternative to the Common Application and some find it easier to alter. Log onto [www.universalcollegeapp.com](http://www.universalcollegeapp.com).

## The Coalition Application

The Coalition Application is another option. Use this only if the school does not accept the Common Application or does not have its own application.

## **What if I have a learning disability or special needs?**

If you are a student with a learning disability, with an attention problem, with a physical handicap, you and your family will want to discuss with your counselor whether you will disclose your special need to the colleges. While most students who have been designated by the Committee on Special Education (CSE) do disclose, some choose not to. If you think you will be applying for accommodations to assist you, you may want to let the college know and explore how their services would work for you. There are at least three kinds of situations where you will want to consider some options with your counselor:

- You have moved through secondary school with an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) and want to communicate your special need to colleges with this plan.
- You have a Section 504 Accommodation Plan and want to have the same accommodations in college as provided for you previously.
- You have a disability, which has been diagnosed privately, and not handled by the school, and you think you will need some accommodations at the collegiate level.

It is up to you to disclose any special needs. Nowhere on your transcript is there indication of special accommodations.

If you have read this far, you realize that for some students who have special needs, there may be a lot to talk about. Earlier is better than later, and if you receive support from a learning specialist in the resource room or privately, you may want to conference with that person and perhaps have everyone sit down together. In any case, your counselor will be able to give you the collegiate perspective on these issues as they pertain to your situation.

## **The College Search and Application Process for Students with Special Learning Needs**

Most colleges and universities in the United States offer programs and services for students with special learning needs. Some schools are dedicated solely to the education of special learners, such as Landmark College, while others provide comprehensive programs like Curry College. Almost all colleges provide accommodations such as extended time testing and academic resource centers which offer various forms of support to students. Our school counselors know these colleges and universities well and will share the information at junior family meetings and upon request.

The school counselors know their students with special learning needs. This includes students who have IEPs or 504 Plans, as well as non-classified students. By combining their knowledge of colleges and universities and the needs of students with special needs, the school counselors can make the college search and application process more suitable for students and their parents.

Self advocacy is another important dynamic as special needs students search, apply, enroll, and succeed in college. During the college application process, self disclosure of a disability is

voluntary. If students and parents are not sure about disclosure, they can contact their school counselor for advice.

Overall, the college search and application process for students with special learning needs is similar to the regular processes. However, there are differences which require further research and discussion involving students, parents, school counselors, and college personnel in areas such as admissions, financial aid, academics, special education, residential life, health services, and counseling services. For example, some colleges require special application forms, while others may charge additional fees for specialized support programs and services.

Additionally, it is important for students and parents to know what high school courses are required for admission, and what documents are needed to apply for accommodations (e.g., bring a copy of the IEP or 504 plan to the college). Students and parents need to know what college courses are required to major in one academic discipline or another and to obtain a degree from one college or another. For example, if a student is language exempt in high school and a college requires one-to-two courses in a world language to complete a liberal arts core requirement, further discussion will be needed.

Typically, extended time means that students will need and receive additional time to complete assignments or tests at the high school or college level. However, extended time can take on other shapes and forms at colleges and universities. Thus, some special learners and their parents may want to consider self-selected timing options which may prove to be beneficial over the long haul.

Approximately 30% of college students nationwide graduate in four years by completing five courses or 15 credits in eight consecutive fall and spring semesters (the total equals 40 courses or 120 credits for most college majors). However, a number of special learners, in conjunction with their parents and college officials, decide to take four courses or 12 credits a semester instead. In this way, they will have more time in the fall and spring semesters to handle the academic workload. They make-up the other courses by attending summer sessions annually (and graduate in four years) or they make a decision to graduate in five years instead of four. Some special learners may find these kinds of timing options helpful. If any college student decides to attend summer sessions and/or enroll for a fifth year, additional tuition and fees may be charged.

When students and parents visit colleges or meet admissions representatives at college fairs, the following questions are important:

- Are the tutors in the academic resource center adult teachers or students and are they paid or volunteers?
- What are the requirements to become a tutor? What are the days and hours of operation for the academic support center?

Students and parents should also meet the director of the academic resource center whenever possible.

## **Standardized Admissions Tests and Testing Accommodations**

All BHHS students take a number of standardized tests each year and many are geared toward college admissions. For example, juniors take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) in October. Juniors and seniors also may take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and/or the American College Test (ACT) on other calendar dates.

Students with special learning needs may be eligible for testing accommodations such as extended time on the PSAT, SAT, or ACT. In order to receive these accommodations, the parent and student will need to apply directly to the SAT or ACT.

With respect to the SAT, students/parents can download and complete the parental consent form from <https://accommodations.collegeboard.org/pdf/ssd-consent-form-accommodations.pdf>.

This completed form should be returned to Maria Mascaro, Special Test Coordinator. She will complete the application on-line, provided the school has current (*within 5 years*) documentation on the student's disability. Should a student elect to apply to the College Board for accommodations, he/she may need to seek outside evaluations to meet their requirements. The parent may also provide any additional documentation, from licensed professionals, appropriate to the request for accommodations. Approval for testing accommodations from the College Board will cover all SAT's, AP's, and subject tests while a student is enrolled in high school. However, the application process could take up to seven weeks so apply well in advance. The applications for accommodations can be completed as early as the ninth grade.

- With respect to the ACT, students must register for accommodations during the year in which they want to take the test (generally junior year).
- If you are requesting extended time for the first time, register for an exam date online from the ACT website by creating or logging into your student Web account.
- In addition, complete an Extended Time application by downloading Page 1 of the application from <http://www.act.org/ACT Accommodations> Bring the application, and a copy of your admission ticket to the Special Test Coordinator.

If you are requesting Special Testing for the first time, complete a Special testing application by downloading Page 2 of the application from <http://www.act.org/ACT Accommodations> Complete Section "K" and return form to Special Test Coordinator along with Fee Payment.

ACT requires that testing be within three years of the application. Should a student elect to apply to ACT for accommodations, he/she may need to seek outside evaluations to meet their requirements. Read the instructions carefully since there are three types of locations that the ACT offers based on the student's special needs. Also log into <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act-educator/the-act-test/accommodations.html> for more information.

The SAT and ACT are different organizations and their decisions for accommodations may vary. Even though students may be eligible for accommodations in school, they may not automatically be eligible for those accommodations on these tests.

***\*KEEP ALL COMMUNICATION FROM THE COLLEGE BOARD AND ACT. YOU WILL NEED COPIES OF APPROVAL LETTERS TO APPLY FOR FUTURE TEST ADMINISTRATIONS.***

### **College Sports, Eligibility, and Special Needs Students**

With respect to college sports and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) which governs them, it is important to note that all student-athletes must follow specific guidelines to qualify for competition at the Division I and II levels. In order to be academically eligible, students must log onto <https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/> and register, send SAT or ACT scores to the NCAA, and request that a BHHS transcript be submitted to the Eligibility Center for approval.

Students who may want to participate in college sports and their parents should discuss eligibility and the fulfillment of all requirements, including NCAA-approved core course credits, with school counselors during the annual course selection time period each March. Since all students must successfully complete 16 NCAA-approved courses to participate in Division I athletics as college freshmen and 14 for Division II, particular attention must be paid to the requirements and the process.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

**AP (Advanced Placement):** An introductory college level course offered in high school to students of superior ability in that subject. A score of 3, 4, or 5 may qualify a student for college credit or to skip to upper level courses in that field once in college.

**ACT (Assessment):** A comprehensive, multiple-choice examination that includes English usage, reading, natural sciences, mathematics, and an optional writing section. Many colleges accept the ACT to determine eligibility for admission.

**Associate Degree:** A degree granted upon completion of a two-year, full-time program of college study or its part-time equivalent. It can be applied toward a four-year degree at many colleges.

**Bachelor's Degree:** A degree granted upon completion of a four-year, full-time program of college study or its part-time equivalent. Called a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree, depending on the course of study.

**CEEB (College Entrance Examination Board):** The board responsible for administering PSAT, SAT Reasoning Test and Subject Tests, as well as Advanced Placement examinations.

**CEEB Code Number:** 330-225 is the code number for Byram Hills High School.

**Class Rank:** The standing of a student, relative to others in the class, based on his/her high school grades. We do not assign a class rank at Byram Hills High School.

**Common Application:** A standardized application form used by a consortium of colleges for admission. Available at [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org).

**Cooperative Work-Study Programs:** Programs through which a student alternates between full-time college studies and full-time paid employment related to an area of study. Often requires five years for bachelor's degree.

**Deferred Decision:** Passed over for Early Admission/Decision to a college but granted an opportunity for further consideration in spring admissions review.

**Deferred Admission:** A policy whereby a college to which you have been accepted allows you to take a year off before starting, as long as you have paid your tuition deposit and do not use the year for academic purposes.

**Early Action:** An admission policy of some highly selective colleges to notify students of acceptance by mid-December. The student need not respond until spring and may apply to other schools.

**Early Action Single Choice:** Same as above, except student may NOT apply early elsewhere.

**Early Admission:** The admission of an exceptional student to a college prior to completion of high school.

**Early Decision:** A policy whereby superior students apply and are accepted to college by mid-December. Student and high school must sign a contract that "if accepted, student will attend."

**EOP (Education Opportunity Program):** A New York State Aid program for academically and educationally disadvantaged students at the State University of New York (SUNY).

**Expected Family Contribution:** The portion of student tuition, room and board that the family is responsible for, as determined by the FAFSA

**FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid):** A government form required of all students applying for financial aid.

**Federal Pell Grant:** Financial assistance from the federal government based on the Expected Family Contribution. Award does not have to be repaid and is given directly to the student by the college or credited towards tuition.

**Federal Perkins Loan:** A federally subsidized loan from the college to the student. These loans have low interest rates and are repayable over an extended period once the student graduates.

**Federal Stafford Loan:** A federally subsidized loan for which the government may or may not pay the interest while the student is in college. Repayable over an extended period once the student graduates.

**FSEOG (Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant):** Federal funds available through institutions to a limited number of undergraduate students with Grant financial need.

**Grant:** A non-repayable form of financial aid: a scholarship.

**PSAT/NMSQT(Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test):** Given in October of the junior year, this two-hour test is an early evaluation tool of how a student will perform on the SAT. It does not go into the student's permanent record, but it serves to determine eligibility to compete for a National Merit Scholarship.

**Grade Point Average:** Student's overall scholastic performance, computed at the end of the junior year based on unweighted grades.

**Rolling Admission:** The policy of admitting students on a continuous basis within several weeks after receipt of a completed application. Often used by state universities.

**SAT:** Test of evidence-based reading and writing, and mathematical abilities given by College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) at specified test centers, on specified dates throughout the world. Many colleges use this test to determine a student's eligibility for admission.

**TAP (Tuition Assistance Plan):** A grant program offered by New York State to residents. Eligibility is determined by need. Funds must be used for a New York State college or university, public or private.

**TOEFL:** A test of English as a foreign language for non-native English speakers. Can be used in conjunction with SAT scores to show academic proficiency in language.