

## **THE COLLEGE COUNSELING PROCESS AT TAFT**

### **Table of Contents**

COLLEGE COUNSELING STAFF .....	3
PHILOSOPHY .....	4
PREPARING FOR THE COLLEGE PROCESS .....	4
Course Selections and Academic Planning .....	4
Getting Involved.....	6
Using the Resources of Taft .....	6
Standardized Tests.....	6
PSAT .....	7
SAT .....	8
Subject Tests.....	8
ACT .....	8
Advanced Placement Tests.....	8
Visiting Colleges .....	9
THE FORMAL COLLEGE SEARCH, APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESSOUR VARIOUS ROLE .	9
The Counselor’s Role.....	9
The Parents’ Role .....	10
The Student’s Role .....	11
UPPER-MID WINTER / SPRING.....	11
Counselor Assignments .....	11
Initial Meeting with Your College Counselor .....	12
Naviance Family Connection .....	12
Upper-Mid Parent Program .....	13
Subsequent Meetings.....	13
College Rankings.....	16
Formal Visits to Colleges .....	16
The Taft College Fair .....	18
SUMMER ACTIVITIES BETWEEN THE UPPER MID AND SENIOR YEAR .....	18
Summer Checklist for Students and Parents.....	18

Student’s Summer Checklist .....	18
Parents’ Summer Checklist .....	20
ESSAY PROMPTS .....	21
Writing Your College Essay .....	22
SENIOR YEAR.....	23
FALL.....	23
Building a Balanced Application List .....	23
The Various Types of Admissions Plans (ED, EA, REA, Rolling, Priority, ED2, and Regular).....	24
Early Decision, or ED.....	24
Early Action, or EA.....	24
Single Choice Early Action / Restricted Early Action .....	24
Rolling Admission.....	25
Types of Admissions Decisions .....	25
Thoughts about applying Early .....	25
Meeting College Admissions Representatives at Taft.....	27
Visiting Colleges during the Senior Year.....	27
Taft’s Policy on College Days.....	27
Recommendations .....	28
Teachers’ Recommendations.....	28
Supplemental Recommendations .....	29
The College Essay .....	29
Sending Test Scores .....	29
First Quarter Grades .....	30
Deferred from ED or EA .....	30
FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS .....	31
SCHOLARSHIPS: IT’S NEVER TOO EARLY TO LOOK.....	31
LOANS:.....	32
Federal Stafford Loans for Students and PLUS Loans for Parents .....	32
Private or Alternative Loans.....	32
FINANCIAL AID CALCULATORS .....	32
HELPFUL WEBSITES .....	33
LATE FALL.....	33

WINTER .....	34
Application Deadlines and Required Materials.....	34
Mid-Year Grade Reports .....	34
Missing Materials .....	34
Continuing to Work, Research, and Demonstrate Interest .....	34
Third Quarter Grades.....	35
SPRING.....	35
Admissions Notifications .....	35
Waiting Lists .....	36
Visiting Colleges (one last time) .....	37
Enrollment Deposits and National Candidates' Reply Date.....	37
Deferring Enrollment.....	38
Final Transcripts .....	38
APPENDIX .....	38
THE RECRUITED ATHLETE.....	38
NCAA.....	39
GLOSSARY OF TERMS.....	39

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## **PHILOSOPHY**

The Taft College Counseling Office's mission is to i) provide a student-centered process geared towards educating and supporting students and their families as they navigate the college search and selection process; and ii) present the student's character and achievements to prospective colleges in an accurate, nuanced and compelling light. Particular emphasis is placed on developing students' analytical skills to discover schools which match their interests well; self-advocacy skills so that they can present themselves effectively and authentically in the process; and understanding of the process so they can maximize those elements which are within their control. In order to best serve our students and the Taft community, we are committed to educating ourselves on the issues of our profession through attendance at conferences, visiting college campuses, constant review of media reports in our field, and careful cultivation of relationships with our colleagues in admissions.

## **PREPARING FOR THE COLLEGE PROCESS**

While much has been written about the best ways to maximize one's chances for admission to a selective college, nothing is more important than a student's academic record throughout the high school years. Grades earned in the Lower Mid Year set an important tone; consequently, building the strongest base (Grade Point Average) in that first year will go a long way to help potential college results as a Senior. Here are some things to consider at the outset.

### **Course Selections and Academic Planning**

The courses you choose to take can tell a college a lot about you. Do you seek challenge? Is your intellectual curiosity limited to certain subjects?

College admissions officers are fond of telling students that given a choice between an "A" in a regular section or a "B" in the AP, the student should take the AP and get the "A." Admissions officers find that more amusing than do students who are facing very

real choices, but it does serve to underscore this basic truism: both grades and curriculum rigor matter. There are scores of ways in which the various colleges account for rigor, but virtually all do so in some fashion. Hence, with the advice of teachers, Deans, the Academic Dean, and the College Office, you should select the hardest classes available *as long as you can maintain or improve your most recent grades*. Obviously, predicting one's grades takes something of a crystal ball, but know that it is easier to drop from Honors or AP if the work is too hard than to move up if you are not sufficiently challenged.

In the first three years, Taft's curriculum is fairly proscribed, but some students are tempted to double up in a language or math at the expense of another subject. The wisdom in doing so is a very complex calculus involving GPA, test scores, targeted colleges, and more. Before straying from the standard "five solids" of English, math, science, language, and history, you should discuss your ideas with a college counselor.

For most students, it is the Senior year course selection that offers a great deal of choice, and hence, the choices which telegraph to the college something about who you are intellectually. Colleges speak of a 'balanced curriculum' and usually do so with admiration. A balanced curriculum will show a senior year with all five majors represented. That said, some students' programs of study are *not* balanced. A student who has a deep, informed passion in a given area, might be well served following that passion at the expense of balance. What professor wouldn't want to teach a student who simply loves learning in that field? However, liking one subject more than another does *not* constitute a deep and informed passion. Such a passion is demonstrated by following it outside of the classroom, in one's activities, perhaps; or in how you spend your summer.

While some students have a passion they wish to follow, others simply don't like a certain subject. If you *can* succeed in a subject not to your liking, stick with it and study hard. Accepting challenge is more than taking AP courses; it is also pushing yourself to learn – at whatever level – across the spectrum. Don't drop a subject because 'it's boring'. If faculty and advisors recommend abandoning a field, follow that advice.

## Getting Involved

One's first year at Taft should be a time to explore, to try new things, and to get involved in the extra and co-curricular life of the school. This does not mean that students should join a dozen clubs, play three sports, sing in every ensemble, or try out for every play. What it does mean is that they should begin to look for and to try things that play to their strengths. The athlete who is particularly strong in one sport should consider trying a new sport in a different season or try something in the arts. The talented artist, musician, or actor should look to find ways to share his or her skills as well or try their hand at a sports team. Those who are passionate about math and science should consider joining the Math Team or the Robotics Club. Students who enjoy a good discussion might be perfect for the Debate Team or the Model UN class, and strong writers could be of great help as members of the newspaper or yearbook staffs. The key is to get involved, meet a variety of people and give back to the community.

## Using the Resources of Taft

One of the most difficult things for new students to do is to reach out for help when they begin to struggle at Taft, but that is exactly what we expect. One's first action should always be to go to his or her teacher for extra help, and while it may seem strange to visit a teacher's home or apartment, students quickly find that a bit of one-on-one instruction can really help to clear things up. Other places to go for help include the Writing Center for help with essays, reports, and papers; the Math Table for help with homework problems; or the Morehead Academic Center for help with study skills, time management, or support of learning differences.

## Standardized Tests

For most students at Taft, standardized testing does not begin until October of the Mid Year when the entire class takes the PSAT. Exceptions to that would likely be for those Lower Mids who are strong physics students or who are particularly advanced in mathematics or a foreign language. The College Counselors work closely with the Department Heads and instructors to be sure that, when needed, students register for appropriate Subject Tests. While a student's academic record has always been the most important factor in an admissions decision, standardized test scores also play a significant role at most colleges. Our suggested timetable for taking PSAT, SAT and ACT examinations is as follows:

PSAT: October of the Middle and Upper Middle years.

SAT: May of the Upper Middle year, and August, October, November, and/or December of the Senior year (if necessary and recommended by the student's college counselor).

ACT: February and April of the Upper Middle year and September, October or December of the Senior year (if necessary and recommended by the student's college counselor).

Subject Tests: June of the Middle and Upper Middle years, and August, October, November, and/or December of the Senior year, if necessary.

More specific information will be sent to students in advance of registration deadlines by Taft's Testing Coordinator. Additionally, please feel free to contact any of our college counselors should you have questions or concerns about any testing-related issues. A limited number of testing fee waivers are available for students for whom the cost would be an economic hardship. Students who are eligible should work with their counselor to be sure they are used most effectively.

By clicking on the links below, students can establish personal testing accounts and then register for all appropriate standardized tests as suggested by their teachers and college counselors.

[The College Board-SAT registration](#)  
[ACT registration](#)

## PSAT

The Preliminary SAT is given in October of each year to Mids and Upper Mid students. Unlike the SAT, **students are not required to register in advance** of the test but do so on the actual test day. For the Mids the test is simply an opportunity for them to learn to be comfortable in a large scale testing situation; to manage their time on test sections; and to get some good feedback on their strengths and challenges in critical reading, mathematics, and writing. For the Upper Mids, the PSAT is a bit more significant. Though not a required part of the college admissions process, scores on the PSAT are used to determine Commended Scholars and Semi-finalists in the National Merit Scholarship competition, and many colleges and universities also use the results and demographic data as a basis for their marketing outreach efforts. Finally, PSAT results can also be very helpful to Upper Mids in advance of any SAT test prep that they might consider.

## **SAT**

The SAT is usually taken in the spring of the Upper-Mid year and again in the fall of the Senior year if necessary. Scores from the SAT or ACT are required parts of the admissions process at the vast majority of schools to which Taft students apply. In most cases our students take the SAT two or three times, but it is best to discuss individual testing plans with your college counselor during initial meetings.

## **Subject Tests**

Subject Tests (formerly known as Achievement Tests) assess a student's body of knowledge in general areas of literature and mathematics and in specific areas such as chemistry, physics, biology, U.S. History, and foreign languages. While not all colleges require Subject Tests for admission, some of the schools to which Taft students apply do so. In virtually all cases, only two Subject Test scores are required, but it is fair to say that the stronger and the broader a student's Subject Test profile, the more attractive the candidate.

## **ACT**

The ACT (American College Test) is another standardized test that can be submitted in support of a student's application to college. It is universally accepted in place of the SAT, and many students find it to be a more "user friendly" test. It consists of four sections: English, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics, and Science Reasoning. There is an optional writing section. We recommend all students take the writing section. Being able to compare a student's SAT and ACT results and to discuss which of the two tests a student actually prefers can help inform future testing plans. Finally, while it is true that most colleges and universities do accept the ACT in place of both the SAT and Subject Test requirements, students should never assume that to be true for all schools. They should carefully check the standardized testing requirements for each school to which they ultimately apply.

## **Advanced Placement Tests**

Students who take Advanced Placement level courses at Taft are required to sit for the Advanced Placement Tests in those subjects each May. AP examinations are graded on a scale of 1 to 5, and scores of 3 or higher may actually enable a student to receive college level credit or advanced standing for those efforts. While no college or university requires AP examination results for admission, students who present a strong set of AP results

with their college applications are very likely to have an advantage over those who have not taken AP classes or AP exams.

### **Visiting Colleges**

Most students and families begin to visit colleges in earnest during the spring of the Upper-Mid year and during the summer before the Senior year, but if time and travels permit, visiting college campuses as early as the Lower Mid year can be very helpful later. The purpose of such early visits is not necessarily to try to find one's perfect college, but rather to get a sense of the possibilities: big, small, public, private, urban, rural, northern, southern, etc. Drive through a campus or two on the way to visit a relative, or stop by a college or university near your home. The more schools that you see the more likely you will be able to articulate just what kind of school you'd like to attend when we college counselors begin to ask such questions.

## **THE FORMAL COLLEGE SEARCH, APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS OUR VARIOUS ROLES**

### **The Counselor's Role**

Our goal, as your child's counselor, is to support him or her fully and help find the 'right' school. That may be putting it simply, but that's really all it is. To reach that goal, we will:

- Meet with each child individually. We will be there to listen to his or her hopes and goals.
- Help them build a well-balanced and sensible list based on what they share with us as their priorities. We will help them examine those priorities.
- Remind them (and you) of all deadlines and requirements when it comes to standardized tests, college applications, and financial aid.
- Ensure they are informed of all opportunities to meet with admissions professionals on campus.
- Review their potential course selections and suggest changes if necessary.
- Help them decide which standardized tests to take.
- Provide each student with tips and suggestions about visiting colleges, writing essays, determining which teachers to ask for letters of recommendation, and completing their applications.
- Write a thoughtful, supportive, and comprehensive letter of recommendation for each student that is sent to each college.

- Continue to build and maintain professional relationships with college admissions officers across the country.

Ultimately, however, the most important thing we can do is to be there for our students and your children.

### The Parents' Role

And you, as parents, certainly want to know all that you can do to help your child in this process. Here are a few things to remember:

- This process – itself – is constantly in flux. We will give you our best estimation of how things will work out, but the college admissions landscape can often change from one year to the next.
- Therefore, we encourage every student to build a well-balanced list – including *reach*, *possible*, and *likely* choices based upon historical admissions selectivity data and any other special considerations.
- Please remember that your child will continue to mature throughout high school. Their views can change radically from week to week or moment to moment.
- Each student knows, intuitively, that you have hopes and expectations about the end result. As the process unfolds it is not uncommon for a student to respond in individual, and sometimes unexpected, ways.
- Our partnership is in support of your child. So, again, open communication is essential. Please stay in touch throughout the coming year. And when family dynamics seem to be getting in the way of logical discussions, we'll be here to listen to each of you and help to assure that all opinions receive fair hearing.
- Please take the time necessary to familiarize yourself with the Naviance Family Connection - our online database and process management tool – it will provide you with a wealth of information. Should you or your student lose the code and find that you are unable to access the Family Connection, we can easily re-set your account and send you a new code by email.
- You will find the “my colleges” section most helpful. It will give you access to various websites, e-mail, and contact information for colleges. This is also the site where you and your child will keep “the list” of prospective colleges and active applications up-to-date. The “in-box” will have messages from your child’s counselor, which will also go out via regular email as well.
- Please check your “profile” to assure that all of your contact information is current. This is our best way to keep in touch with you and to provide you with important and timely information and suggestions.
- While you will want/need to help your child manage this process, you will also want/need to be clear about *which* of you is managing *which* parts of this process.

For example: who is responsible for testing registration, and who is making arrangement to visit colleges. Ultimately, it is your child's responsibility to be aware of all admissions requirements and deadlines, but your help in keeping them aware of such things will, in most cases, be appreciated.

- The most important thing you can do is to listen and to advise, without directing.
- And, of course, you get to be the chauffeur, assuming you have the ability to visit colleges. Visiting schools, if you are able, is a valuable way to confirm your child's choices and your child's thinking; to express interest in a college; and to spend invaluable time with your child. Have fun with it!

### **The Student's Role**

Obviously, this entire process centers on your child. Each will need to embrace the coming months and each will inevitably do so in his or her own way. Ultimately, your child is the one going to college, so he or she will need to be self-reflective, organized, thoughtful, thorough, and hard-working. Our hope is that our students will:

- Consider, with thoughtful introspection, what they really care about. Each student needs to give real consideration as to why he or she is going to college and what sort of school will be a good match.
- Work on an ongoing basis (by meeting regularly with their college counselor) to build a preliminary, and then a final, list of colleges and be responsible for researching the schools on the list.
- Keep their Naviance accounts up to date, particularly the "prospective" and "active" application lists.
- Complete testing registration in a timely fashion.
- Ask teachers for recommendations well in advance of all deadlines.
- Discuss with their counselors how to highlight and present their distinctive talents (artistic, athletic, musical, dramatic, leadership, volunteer, or academic) to their potential colleges.
- Complete applications in a timely fashion.
- And, most importantly, become fully engaged in their college search, application, and selection process. With our collective help and support as counselors and parents, they can successfully own and navigate their way through this exciting rite of passage.

## **UPPER-MID WINTER / SPRING**

### **Counselor Assignments**

Students are assigned their college counselor in December of the Upper-Mid year and learn about those assignments at a series of group meetings where we help students to

register for the SAT's, ACT's, and Subject Tests that we recommend they take in the second semester of that year. Students do not have the opportunity to choose their college counselor, but in quite a few cases the college counselors do choose to work with students that they have come to know through coaching, advising, or other means, and will often choose to work with younger siblings of former advisees.

### **Initial Meeting with Your College Counselor**

The active phase of the college process starts in the winter of the Upper-Mid year. If students have a preliminary list of colleges, they should bring it with them. Otherwise, there is no other preparation necessary. Typically, this meeting is very helpful to the counselor, but students often come away with more questions than answers. Here's why:

Every student comes to his or her initial meeting with a different understanding of the college process. Some know almost nothing (and know that); others know a great deal; and still others *think* they know a great deal but are misinformed. In the first meeting the counselor will assess how he or she can effectively help by asking questions about students' goals, dreams, and assumptions and by challenging them when appropriate. We want student to know not just that they want (by way of example) a big university, but *why* – indeed *if* – a big university is right for them. Maybe the big sports/social scene at a big university is compelling, but students might really benefit from the kind of faculty contact that only exists at a smaller school, and, want to go to graduate school; if so, what are the student's priorities? Depending on a number of factors, the counselor will also discuss which standardized tests to take; help to plan college visits over March break; discuss how colleges will regard the transcript, and more. And, as with any meeting with the counselor, students should be sure to have any questions answered.

A final note: it is essential that students are extremely open and honest with their counselor. What is said in our meetings is confidential; we will not discuss with parents or school officials anything that students wish to keep private (unless your safety or that of others is at risk), but we need to know what students are truly thinking if we are to help them reach their goals

### **Naviance Family Connection**

The Naviance system which includes The Family Connection, is an internet-based tool that helps college counselors, students, and parents to manage and track all aspects of the college admissions process. Students and parents will each be given access to a

password-protected account at the beginning of the formal college process. The Family Connection offers valuable insight into the college admissions process with college search, scattergrams, scholarship information, and college application statistics. It allows us to deliver electronically all of the supporting documents for our students' college applications to approximately 1,000 colleges, including every Common Application member institution. It helps us to maintain a database of college contacts and visits from college admissions representatives; to track college applications; and to analyze historical results from our school. All students are introduced to the system during their initial meeting with their college counselors, and all parents are instructed on how to use the system at our Upper-Mid Parent Program. Those who are unable to attend are sent detailed set of instructions about how to log in and use this excellent tool.

### **Upper-Mid Parent Program**

A special parents' program is held each fall for Upper Mid parents. During this formal introduction to the college process at Taft, an invited college admissions dean serves as the keynote speaker and provides important insights into the process from their perspectives. Additionally, current and former students who have already been through the process offer their suggestions on how best to manage the process as a family.

### **Subsequent Meetings**

During the late winter and early spring of the Upper-Mid year, students will work with the college counselors to build an initial list of colleges that appears to meet the student's needs and wants. If your parameters and priorities are vague, that list will be quite long – as many as twenty-five colleges; if you have a clear sense of what you seek, it might be fifteen or fewer. While the list of schools should be the student's list, parents should be sure to mention additional schools for consideration to both their child and his or her counselor.

### **College Guide Books**

Guidebooks and related websites can aid you in your college research. Although many of these books and sites are objective and filled with statistics, there are a several very helpful subjective guidebooks offering a balanced and even-handed opinion of a campus. We highly recommend the Fiske Guide to Colleges and the Insider's Guide to the Colleges. Although the written narrative on each campus gives a good, holistic sense of the feel of a campus, the detailed information can still be out-of-date. Make sure you

check things out for yourself through other sources by visiting the college, by talking to current students, and by exploring each school's website.

### **General Guides**

**The Fiske Guide to College.\***

**The Insiders' Guide to the Colleges\***

**Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges**

**Collegeview.com**

**Collegeboard.com**

**Cass & Birnbaum's Comparative Guide of American Colleges, The College Board Handbook, Lovejoy's College Guide, and Petersons Guide to Colleges and Universities** are all books that contain good, factual information and statistics.

**Guide to Women's Colleges**

**Ivy League Programs at State School Prices**

**The K & W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled**

**Princeton Review's, Visiting College Campuses** (Great resource for planning a college tour.)

**Princetonreview.com**

**Colleges That Encourage Character Development**

**College Choice & Admissions: The Best Resources to Help You Get In**

**Colleges that Change Lives** - a great book that profiles small "hidden gems" that are not ultra-selective

### **Majors/Sports**

**4-year College Index of Majors & Sports**

**Top Colleges for Science**

**The Complete Guide to Animation and Computer Graphics Schools**

**Sports Scholarships and College Athletic Programs**

**Guide to Architecture Schools in North America**

**Cultural/Religious/Way of Life**

**African-American Students Guide to Colleges\***

**The Multicultural Student's Guide to Colleges\***

**Jewish Students Guide to Colleges**

**Hillel Guide to Jewish Life on Campus**

**Choose a Christian College**

**The Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students' Guide**

**Making a Difference College Guide** (schools that encourage community service)\*

**The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students**

**Film/Theater/Art**

**The Complete Guide to American Film Schools**

**Directory of Theater Training Programs**

**The Performing Arts Major's College Guide**

**Peterson's Professional Degree Programs in the Visual and Performing Arts**

**Guide to College Courses in Film and TV**

**Understanding the Admission Process**

**The College Admissions Mystique** by Bill Mayher

**Questions and Admissions** by Jean Fetter (former dean of admission at Stanford)

**Getting In** by Bill Paul

**Greenes' Guides to Educational Planning: Making it Into a Top College and The Hidden Ivies**

\* These guides include extensive, subjective commentary on individual colleges.

## College Rankings

For the most part we'd suggest that when you look at the various rankings of colleges (and you will look; we all do) that you do so with a careful eye. Do not put too much stock in something that has been created from subjective comments of college presidents, admissions deans, and students and from quasi-objective data that some schools have actually tried to manipulate in order to improve their rankings. The bottom line here is that you should never allow a ranking to be your sole determination of what the best school might be. Students need to determine what the best school is for them.

## Formal Visits to Colleges

Researching websites, guidebooks, and brochures is helpful to understand the structure and statistics that represent what a school has to offer. However, the college visit remains the best way to assess a student's "fit" with a school. Visiting can be a challenge logistically and financially, so it is important that you make the most of your time on campus. There are two basic categories of college visits: exploratory, and targeted.

## Exploratory Visits

During March break of the Upper-Mid year, many families choose to take exploratory visits to see different kinds of colleges to get a better idea of what type of school they may want to attend – large or small, urban or rural, public or private, liberal arts or technical, etc. During such visits students generally take a campus tour, attend an information session, and / or have an interview. If offered an interview, students should take it; you may not be able to come back a second time. Talk with your counselor before any interviews to be sure you are prepared for them. Students' task is to return to Taft able to articulate not just *that* they liked a college, but *what, specifically*, made them like it. This will help the counselor offer further suggestions of colleges to examine. On these visits it is easy to be swayed by the charm of a tour guide, nice weather, or a pretty campus; a vague 'I liked it' does not move one forward; rather, one should strive to be able to articulate specifics, such as: "I like their J plan and the way they handle fraternity rush. They have an excellent advising system, which is important because I don't know my major..." Students should try not to discuss their observations and opinions with their parents until after they have written them down -- and, DO write them down! By keeping a notebook of impressions of each school as you visit, students will be able to compare and contrast their specifics later.

## Targeted Visits

In the summer and fall of the senior year, students should plan to visit as many of their targeted colleges as possible. A good strategy is to visit the “likely” schools first: the more schools that you visit, the more articulate and impressive one will be in answering interview questions. Students should look at the calendars of targeted colleges, and if possible use late August to visit those that are already in session. Whenever possible, students should strive to see colleges when the students – potential classmates – are on campus. In these targeted visits the goal is to determine whether the student will apply, and if so, to be able to articulate in an interview or essay *why* they are a good fit for the college.

Do not do an informal walk-through when you have time for a thorough visit. You’ll learn more when you hear admissions officers and tour guides speak about the college. Since more schools now consider “**demonstrated interest**” as a factor in their admissions decisions, it’s crucial that they know students have taken the time to formally visit their campuses. If the college doesn’t know that the student visited, it is only reasonable that they would assume interest in their college is low. Hence, you should call or check the website well in advance to find out the college’s tour schedule and visit policies. Do they offer interviews? Can students sit in on a class? Will they arrange a meeting with the Pre-med advisor, a coach, or a conductor? Can students spend a night in the dorm? The more thoroughly targeted the visit, the better.

Some tips on making the most of your time on campus:

Before the visit, study the college through print and web media. Students should determine what they *don’t* yet know, so they are prepared to fill in the voids when on campus.

- The equivalent of “class dress” is fine, but if students are completely comfortable in more formal attire, that’s fine, too.
- If an interview is offered, take it, even early in the process. Taft students are uncommonly comfortable with adults and uniformly make a good impression. However, students should talk with their counselor before any interviews to be sure that they are prepared.
- If the student gets out of the car and has a strong feeling of “I don’t like this place,” go through with the visit anyway, and look for things that are good about the college even though they know they won’t apply. Maybe we can find those qualities in some other school.

- While on tour, avoid exchanging opinions. Form your own opinions before you compare observations.
- On the tour, stay close enough to the guide that you can hear what is being said. Ask the tour guide every question that pops into your head, even if you feel awkward doing so.
- Go to the cafeteria, library, student center, or some other public place where you can observe and talk with the people who know the college best.
- Pick up printed materials: the newspaper, weekly events guide, etc. to see what students are concerned with and about.
- Look at posters on the walls and kiosks to see what kinds of speakers, concerts, and organizations are on campus.
- If you know someone enrolled at the school, try to connect with him/her so that you can get further insider insights.
- Take notes of your thoughts and reactions. This will be especially helpful if the application asks, “Why are you applying here.”

### **The Taft College Fair**

In mid-April of each year, Taft holds its spring College Fair. Over 125 colleges and universities from across the nation and from several foreign countries send admissions representatives to our campus to meet with our students and to discuss their academic offerings and their admissions requirements. Both Middlers and Upper Mids are invited to attend. For the younger students the fair provides an opportunity to browse and pick up literature from a range of colleges and universities. For the Upper Mids the evening is often more focused, and students are advised to speak with representatives from colleges that they have already begun to consider or, following our suggestions, to meet with admissions officers from schools that are similar in nature to ones that they currently have on their prospective list.

## **SUMMER ACTIVITIES BETWEEN THE UPPER MID AND SENIOR YEAR**

### **Summer Checklist for Students and Parents**

#### **Student’s Summer Checklist**

- Essays** – Your college essay is one of the most important pieces of your application, and it’s also the one part that you control completely. Plan to write a

few drafts in response to some of the essay prompts listed below and email them to your counselor as soon as possible.

- Student Questionnaire** - Please complete the questionnaire in the Naviance “Family Connection” as soon as possible. The link to this is located in the left hand margin of your “about me” page in the Family Connection. Be sure to “save” your work as you go along.
- SAT/ACT Registration** - Registration for the SAT should be possible in mid-June. ACT registration opens in mid-July. If you have questions about which tests you should take, please contact your counselor.

To register: **ACT** - <http://actstudent.org/regist/elecereg.html>

**SAT** - <http://collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/reg.html>

- Prospective College List** - Log into your “my colleges” section of the Family Connection and review your current list of potential colleges. Add or delete schools as necessary and visit each school’s website to gain as much information as possible about each place.
- Visit Colleges** – Plan to visit as many colleges as possible this summer. Visit both small and large schools to gain a perspective on the differences between those types of schools. Take the official tours; sit in on information sessions; and be sure that the admissions office knows you are visiting.
- Teacher Recommendations** – If you have not already done so, continue to consider whom to ask about writing a recommendation. All Teacher Recommendation requests must be finalized no later than September 30<sup>th</sup>. If you have questions or concerns about whom to ask, please contact your college counselor as soon as possible.
- “Rolling Admission”** - If you are considering colleges or universities with rolling admissions, you should plan to complete and submit your application as soon as you return to school in the fall.
- Common Application ([www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org))** - Establish an account. Complete the Common Application online before the end of the summer. You should also review and begin to work on school-specific supplemental essays for some of the

colleges to which you are likely to apply. The vast majority of the colleges to which Taft students apply accept the common application.

- SAT and ACT preparation** - Review your past results and work regularly on practice problems that can be found in books and at collegeboard.org. Discuss with your counselor whether test prep is needed. If so, consider doing some on-line test prep like Prepworks or enroll in a test prep course near your home.

### Parents' Summer Checklist

- Family Connection** – If you have not done so already, log into your Naviance Family Connection account.

<https://connection.naviance.com/fc/signin.php?hsid=taftschool>

Verify that the personal profile information for both the student and parents is accurate. Your user name and temporary password were emailed to you in the fall. If you have misplaced that log-in information, please send an email to [cgatling@taftschool.org](mailto:cgatling@taftschool.org) and your account will be re-set.

- Parent Questionnaire** - Please send (via email) answers to the parent questionnaire or complete the questionnaire in the Naviance “Family Connection” as soon as possible. The link to this is located in the left-hand margin of your “about me” page in the Family Connection. Your insights will help to provide important information that will aid us as we work to craft the most accurate official recommendation possible for your child. Be sure to “save” your work as you go along.
- Prospective College List** - Review with your child the prospective college list in the “my colleges” section of the Family Connection. Add schools as necessary.
- SAT or ACT Registration** – Make sure that your child is registered for all appropriate SAT or ACT examinations for next fall. Registration dates and links are included on the Student’s Checklist. Contact your counselor if you have any questions about which tests (if any) you should schedule.
- Meeting or Telephone Conference** – If you have not already done so, please plan to speak in person or by phone with your child’s college

counselor sometime after January of your child's Upper Mid year to assure we are all "on the same page."

- College Essays** - Encourage your child to continue to work on his or her college essays. The sooner that he or she gets started with this the better.
- College Visits** - As time and resources permit, visit as many colleges as possible. Be sure to visit schools that span the range of admissions selectivity.
- Transcript** - Review your child's transcript to verify that there are no errors or discrepancies. Let us know about any problems.
- Parents Weekend** – Plan to attend our annual fall Parents' Weekend at Taft. Individual appointments with your child's college counselor will be available throughout the weekend, with preference given to those families who have traveled a great distance and who are unable to return to campus frequently.
- Enjoy the summer with your child!**

## ESSAY PROMPTS

**You may have heard it from this year's seniors .... Students should be sure to take some time to get a jump on their Common Application essay.**

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
  
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma — anything of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
  
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
  
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
  
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

**Send drafts of your essays to your college counselor for review as soon as possible. Don't put this off until the end of the summer!**

### **Writing the College Essay**

- The essay should tell the reader more about the student as a person
- Students should consider writing about their values, goals, and passions
- The essay should be specific to the student, not generic.

### **Topics to Avoid**

- Anything that is in poor taste
- Relationship Issues
- “The Big Game”
- Parent bashing
- Excessive negativity
- Anything that seems like student is not going beyond “The Taft Bubble”

## **Good Topics**

- A moment in your life
- Family dynamics
- A story that illustrates who the student is: values, intellect, wit, creativity, dreams, or goals
- Finding the extraordinary in the ordinary

## **Tips**

- Choose a topic that is not found in the rest of the application
- Write about what the student cares about
- Show growth and be honest
- Students should not be afraid to talk about themselves, but they should be modest
- Don't go beyond the 650 word limit

## **SENIOR YEAR**

### **FALL**

#### **Building a Balanced Application List**

Together with your counselor, it is your job to make sure that some of these colleges are “likely” schools, meaning that your chance of admission is estimated to be better than 70% (we avoid the word “safety” because there is no such thing as a safe application). Similarly, we want you to aspire to colleges that are a “reach,” where your chances are thought to be lower than 30%. How we balance the high and low ends on the starting list and final list, and how long that final list may be, will be different for each student. Using the admissions data (scattergrams) that are a part of the Naviance Family Connection will be a great help to students and counselors as they discuss how to “shape” a final list of colleges.

The first question to ask is, “How well do I take disappointment?” You must be honest with your answer. If you have been cut from a team you *really* wanted to make, or (perish the thought) really wanted to go to Hotchkiss but didn't get in, and were able to move on without much effort, you are a candidate to aim for more reaches than some students. For most of us, rejection hurts. Consequently, it is important to have a final college application list that contains an equal balance of reach, possible, and likely schools. Those who might be fearful of rejection should plan to build a list in which

likely colleges outnumber the reaches. No list is sensible without *at least three* likelies; we want you to have a *choice* at the end of the day. Many students choose to discuss the question of how ambitious they should be with their parents and/or their Taft faculty advisor as well as their college counselor.

### The Various Types of Admissions Plans (ED, EA, REA, Rolling, Priority, ED2, and Regular)

The old axiom, “Don’t put off until tomorrow that which can be done today” is not as true when it comes to making decisions. With decisions, taking more time might bring new information that would alter your thinking. This is especially true with high school students entering their crucial senior year. Regrettably, some colleges apply different standards of admission to early applicants. Such practices pressure students to think in terms of “strategy” in the admissions “game” without giving enough thought to finding the right match. This section will help you frame your thinking about early applications, but it is essential that your college counselor be a part of your decision. First, let’s define the various application options.

#### Early Decision, or ED

Under this type of application plan, a student applies early in the senior year – usually by November 1<sup>st</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>. Admissions decisions are then usually sent in mid-December. If admitted, the student **MUST** enroll (assuming financial need is met), so obviously one can apply to only one ED school. In most cases one **CAN** apply to other colleges under non-binding plans but must withdraw those applications if admitted ED.

#### Early Action, or EA

As with ED, under an EA program the student applies in early or mid-November and, in most cases, receives a decision by mid-December. EA is “non-binding,” meaning that if a student is admitted, he or she has no obligation to confirm his or her enrollment until May 1st (the National Candidates Reply Date). A student can usually apply to multiple EA colleges and can even apply to a ‘binding’ ED college (understanding that the ED application *is* binding).

#### Single Choice Early Action / Restricted Early Action

While most schools who offer early action plans allow students to apply to other schools with similar plans, there are a number of colleges that offer “single choice” Early Action – also called Restricted Early Action. Schools with this type of application plan do not

allow you to apply “early” anywhere else— with one possible exception -- you may apply under an EA to your home state’s public university. Like regular Early Action, this is a non-binding plan, and students are allowed to apply to any number of other schools under regular admissions plans and have until May 1<sup>st</sup> to make an enrollment decision. If any of this seems unclear, please see your college counselor for help.

### **Rolling Admission**

Rolling admission allows a student to apply at any time in fall or early winter. The college or university will then offer a non-binding decision as soon as they can process the application (usually within four to six weeks). It is strongly advised that students apply as soon as possible (early in September) to rolling schools, for as spaces are offered, the standards of admission can become more selective. If a school has a “preferred deadline,” be sure to meet it. Most schools that offer rolling plans have *only* rolling admission.

### **Types of Admissions Decisions**

There are three basic types of admissions decisions: acceptance, rejection, or deferral. The first two are rather obvious, but the last can be a bit confusing. If a student is deferred, it generally means the school needs more information before making a decision. In some cases, they would like to see another set of grades or scores. In other cases, the school may wish to see how the student compares to others in the Regular Decision pool.

### **Thoughts about applying Early**

Some colleges offer both ED and EA plans, but most offer one or the other -- if they have an early program at all. Some use their early decision programs aggressively, filling over half the class in December, while others do not. Consequently, how a college uses its early program influences its relative selectivity in both the early and regular rounds. Generally speaking, the likelihood of admission under an EA plan versus admission under a Regular Decision plan is virtually the same. However, at some colleges admissions chances can be enhanced by choosing to apply under an ED plan. That fact leads many students into strategic thinking at the expense of finding the best fit. Whether or not to apply early is a decision of great importance, and one *must* discuss this with his or her counselor early in September of the Senior year.

Most ED and EA college deadlines are 11/1 or 11/15; consequently, students must notify their college counselor of their intention to apply under such a plan by October 1<sup>st</sup>. That

allows teachers and counselors sufficient time to write powerful letters in support of a student's candidacy.

Just because one *can* get into a college under an early plan doesn't mean that one *should*. Apply ED only when you are certain the school is perfect for you. While applying ED to some schools *can* make a big difference in your chance of admission, doing so isn't a magic bullet. If your grades, test scores, and extracurricular activities are significantly below a college's usual standard, they will not admit you. In other words, if the school is a reach for you, applying early probably isn't going to work. However, if your record seems to indicate that admission to a specific college is a "possible," applying early might just shift you into the "likely" category.

Some other factors to consider before applying early decision:

- Do you anticipate a Senior year that will be significantly stronger than your Upper Mid performance? If so, perhaps you should wait for regular decision or ED 2. That will allow schools to see your fall semester's grades before making a decision.
- Are you a financial aid applicant? If so, talk this through with your counselor. Sometimes a college will offer a preliminary aid estimate, when asked. There are complexities to the process for aid applicants and we want to make sure students and their families understand them before making an ED commitment.
- Don't think that getting in ED will save you a lot of work on other applications. Since you'll learn of your admissions decision within two weeks of regular decision deadlines, you'll need those applications and supplements to be complete and ready to mail if you receive unfortunate news.
- Don't apply ED 'to get it over with.' While we understand that desire, it is a defeatist approach that may actually close other potential doors for you.
- Don't apply ED to a school without spending a day, or better, a night on campus when the college is in session. If you don't truly understand the people and ethos of the college, you will not know whether or not you want to spend four years there.
- Recruited athletes should *expect* a coach to push for an early decision commitment (if the college has one), but do not agree to do so without getting the coach's assessment of your chances of admission. Often, it is a good idea to have your counselor speak with the college coach and/or an admissions officer for an honest discussion of your chances and to get an early review of your financial aid application (as needed.)

Because it is non-binding, applying EA is not as weighty a step as applying ED. Students often use EA (or rolling admission) to secure an offer from a less selective school so that they can go through the winter knowing that they are already admitted to college. That can be a healthy strategy if, and only if, it is a college where you would be pleased to enroll. If you are admitted EA, it is our expectation that you will significantly reduce the number of other colleges to which you will apply and only do so for schools that you prefer over your EA acceptance.

### **Meeting College Admissions Representatives at Taft**

During the fall and early winter, many college admissions officers visit Taft to meet with prospective students or formal applicants. To facilitate those meetings, we invite colleges and university representatives to attend one of our fall college fairs; to hold evening information sessions; or to conduct personal interviews in the late afternoon or early evening. As mentioned previously, since many colleges have begun to use one's "demonstrated interest" as a factor in their admissions decisions, we strongly recommend that students strive to meet with these college representatives when they visit Taft.

### **Visiting Colleges during the Senior Year**

While we hope that students have used their breaks and vacation periods to visit colleges, we understand that there may be times when initial or follow-up visits need to be made during the academic year. Such visits may be particularly helpful when students are trying to decide between two schools in advance of applying under an early decision plan. With that understanding, the following visit guidelines have been established:

#### **Taft's Policy on College Days** (as it appears in the Student Handbook):

- Students are allowed to miss three class days during their Taft career for the purpose of visiting colleges. While these days are almost always taken during the Senior year, there are rare cases in which students request to use one of their college days during the Upper Middle year. Green college visit cards, available in the Dean's office, must be signed by the teachers whose classes will be missed and then by one of the college counselors and the class dean. Cards should then be brought to the Dean's Office for final approval at least 48 hours before departure.

Students are encouraged to use school vacations and Free Day weekends for college visits in order to allow them to use their College days for visits in late April after college

acceptances have been received. College Days may not be used to extend the length of vacations. Students who find it unavoidable to take an extra college day will lose Friday weekends and be assessed class cuts at the discretion of the Director of College Counseling and the Dean of Students. Seniors should understand that College Days are to be used only for the purpose of meaningful college visits and should not be viewed as “free days” that they are entitled to take for any purpose.

## Recommendations

### Teachers' Recommendations

Most private, selective colleges require one or two recommendations from teachers. Ideally, you should ask teachers from eleventh grade who have taught you in an academic subject. These teachers have witnessed your progress over a full year. Senior teachers may be used in some cases. The teacher who gave you the highest grade may not necessarily be the one who is likely to write you the best recommendation; it is more important that the teacher knows you well. Be sure to ask your college counselor for advice on who might be most helpful.

Once you have decided whom you would like to write your recommendations, you should ideally ask him/her at the end of the Upper- Mid year. This will allow the teacher the time to write your recommendation over the summer. In some cases it may be better to wait until the beginning of the senior year to ask a teacher to write for you. If that happens, you should plan to ask your teacher for a recommendation no later than October 1<sup>st</sup> if you are applying under Regular Decision plans and no later than September 15<sup>th</sup> if you are applying under Early Decision or Early Action plan. The College Counseling office will process your teacher recommendations and will be sending them electronically.

Please be aware that some colleges and/or special programs may require or encourage teacher recommendations from specific subject areas. For example, if you are applying to a technical institution or indicating science or engineering as a proposed field of study, one of your teacher reports should be from a math or science teacher.

Always waive your right of access to a letter of recommendation. Colleges will take a letter more seriously if they know you do not have access to it, so you should always

waive this right. Additionally, you should always thank your teachers in writing for their help. Recommendation writing is a time-consuming task; consequently, your warm, genuine acknowledgement of their help is very important.

### **Supplemental Recommendations**

Extra letters of recommendation seldom have much positive impact on an admissions decision. For the most part, they are a neutral factor; in excess, they can become a negative factor. Letters that might fall into the helpful category are those from coaches, teachers of non-academic subjects, or employers who have something significant and different to say about your character and growth. These letters are only appropriate when they add information that otherwise wouldn't be in the folder. Depending on specific school policies, additional recommendations may need to be mailed rather than sent electronically.

Letters from acquaintances of your parents that basically say "he's a nice boy" or "she is a sweet girl" are meaningless and potentially irritating. Letters from political figures who don't really know you or alumni whose stake in you or the college is limited are equally of limited help. If you must have extra letters, don't go overboard, and be aware of the old adage: "The thicker the file, the thicker the student."

### **The College Essay**

The importance of a well-written, thoughtful, and reflective college application essay cannot be overstated. Often, at highly selective colleges and universities, the essay can help make the difference between offers of admission, places on waiting lists, or outright denials. In the previous section, "Summer Checklist for Students" we offered tips and suggestions for writing the essay and encouraged students to write their essays during their break. Unfortunately, history has shown that many students will wait until the last minute to write or complete their essays. Avoid procrastination and know that our college counselors always look forward to helping students with their essays, but the more time they have to review them, the more help they can be.

### **Sending Test Scores**

While there have been a significant number of colleges and universities that have become "test optional," the vast majority of colleges and universities to which Taft students apply still require some array of standardized testing results to complete the application.

**STUDENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SENDING THEIR SCORES TO THEIR SCHOOLS, AND THEY ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR KNOWING WHICH SCORES NEED TO BE SENT.** Test scores are not listed on the Taft transcript. Some schools require the results of all tests ever taken; some allow students to pick and choose which and what kind of scores to send; and other may require that a student send his or her best composite score from a single testing date. With this in mind, it's imperative that students research the testing requirements for each of their schools. Our college counselors will gladly help students sort this all out, but again, **STUDENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SENDING THEIR SCORES DIRECTLY FROM THE SPECIFIC TESTING AGENCY.**

### **Online Admissions Accounts**

Many colleges use a web-based account for each applicant. Students are responsible for checking their accounts to make sure all materials have been received. Admissions decision are often posted on these accounts as well.

### **First Quarter Grades**

Despite the fact that Taft only posts grades on student transcripts by semester, grades from the first quarter of the year can help to bolster a student's early decision or early action application. Not all schools request first quarter grades, but some do. Consequently, when asked, we must report them. With this in mind, the importance of a great start to the senior year cannot be overstated. Students who wish to voluntarily send their first quarter grades to colleges should speak with their respective college counselor to discuss the best way to do so.

### **Deferred from ED or EA**

What does it mean to be deferred during early decision or early action?

A deferral basically means "maybe." Your application will be placed into the regular pool and be considered with all the regular applications. Colleges may do this because they want more information such as updated test scores or semester grades. Other colleges want to see what the entire applicant pool looks like before they make a decision on your file. Please see your College Counselor to discuss a specific strategy regarding your deferral.

## **FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS**

When students begin to think about choosing colleges, parents begin to think about paying for them. It is still early in the game, and we will help you with financial aid and financing issues along the way. Following are a few issues to consider at this initial phase of the college process. We will continue to give you information and updates throughout the college application process.

### **Financial Aid Applications**

Students (and their parents) apply for financial aid when they send in their admissions applications. Students are responsible for financial aid deadlines and requirements which they can find on the financial aid website for each college or university.

All schools require the FAFSA and the many require the CSS Profile. Most schools set up an online account for each financial aid applicant. Students are responsible for logging into their account regularly to ensure that they do not miss any of the financial aid requirements or requests for further information. Students who do not stay abreast of the financial aid requirements for their schools risk getting a delayed decision regarding their financial aid or reduced awards.

### **Scholarships: It's never too early to look**

There are a few ways to find out about scholarship offerings; here we offer two. The first way is to go online to one of the search engines on the web. The second may actually yield greater results: think very carefully about the affiliations you and your family have. If your child played baseball on the town team, see what types of scholarships they might offer. If you attend a church, synagogue or mosque, there may be local or nation-wide scholarships available to people in your denomination. Think about your ethnicity and its affiliations. For instance, if you are of Armenian heritage you may find a scholarship through your local or nationwide Armenian association. If you do not attend but your grandmother is heavily involved, investigate to see what might be available to you. This extends to any ethnic group or nationality. Be creative; ask your parents and your grandparents. Check the local service organizations: Rotary, Lions, Elks, etc. Ask your parents to check with the industry in which they work. Labor unions and trade associations often have scholarship opportunities available. The scholarship associations that send information to Taft are listed in Naviance, and our database is updated as we receive information. This is a time for exploring options; the actual scholarship search will start in the fall.

## LOANS:

### Federal Stafford Loans for Students and PLUS Loans for Parents

Since July 1, 2010, all new federal education loans are made through the Federal Direct Loan program through the US Department of Education. There are three loan programs that fall under the Federal Direct Loan Program. The Federal Stafford Loan is for students and is guaranteed for any student enrolled at least half-time. Loan limits are \$5,500 for Freshmen, \$6,500 for Sophomores and \$7,500 each year for Juniors and Seniors. If families feel they need further funds, parents can apply for the Federal PLUS Loan that is based on the credit score of the borrower.

The Stafford Loan has the best interest rate and repayment terms, the PLUS loan follows as an excellent educational loan for families. If further funds are needed parents may borrow from private (or alternative) lenders.

### Private or Alternative Loans

There are banks and companies that offer families private educational loans. Borrowers must be very careful in entering into a contract with one of these lenders as many have complex interest rate structures and aggressive collection procedures. There is excellent information on the web at [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) regarding private lenders, or students and parents can call the college financial aid offices of the schools they plan to attend to ask for suggestions about other loan options.

## FINANCIAL AID CALCULATORS

Colleges post an online calculator on their financial aid website to help you determine your “financial need.” These calculators are simple tools, and some families do not always use them properly. When that happens, they often get a rosier picture from the calculators than they would from an actual financial aid application. One of the better financial aid calculators can be found on [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) if you want to give it a try, but remember to read all of the caveats in the process to get the best estimate of your financial need.

**Questions and Concerns:** Please feel free to contact Catherine Ganung (our financial aid specialist) with any questions about financial aid and financing at [cganung@taftschool.org](mailto:cganung@taftschool.org) or 860-945-7983.

## HELPFUL WEBSITES

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)- The Free Application for Federal Student Aid required by almost all colleges as a financial aid application

[www.profileonline.collegeboard.com](http://www.profileonline.collegeboard.com) – The College Board financial aid application used by many private colleges and universities in addition to the FAFSA.

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) – A broad overview of everything related to financial aid: loans, grants, etc.

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) – A comprehensive search engine for scholarships of all types.

[www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com) – An additional site for scholarship searches.

Don't forget to check the Document Library in Naviance (under College Hints) for a full description of Financial Aid Procedures, Timetables, Terms, etc.

## LATE FALL

The time between early application deadlines and regular decision deadlines must be used wisely. For those who applied early, it's natural to want to take a break from the process for a while, and for those who chose not to apply under any early plan, it's equally natural to assume that there is plenty of time left to complete all applications, essays, and supplemental requirements. Unfortunately, this time is complicated by our week-long Thanksgiving break, followed soon after by the final examination period which ends the first semester.

This is a stressful time for students and faculty alike. Just when each group wants to take a well-deserved break, they are confronted by the January 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. Students find themselves scrambling to complete supplemental essays, and many faculty members have a significant number of teachers' recommendations to write. **To ensure that students are presented in the best light possible to colleges, we strongly advise them to complete all parts of all of their college applications at least a week before any deadlines so that they can be reviewed by their college counselor.**

## WINTER

### Application Deadlines and Required Materials

Regular decision deadlines for the vast majority of colleges and universities to which Taft students apply fall on either January 1<sup>st</sup> or January 15<sup>th</sup>, and in a few cases the deadlines are as late as February 1<sup>st</sup> or March 1<sup>st</sup>. **Students are responsible for submitting their applications and standardized testing results on or before all stated deadlines.**

Taft is responsible for sending: 1) the Official School Report (also called the Secondary School Report or Counselor's Report), 2) an official transcript, 3) a counselor's letter of recommendation, 4) one or two teachers' letters of recommendation, and 5) a school profile – which describes the Taft curriculum, demographics, grading scale, test score ranges, and college matriculation history.

### Mid-Year Grade Reports

Following quickly on the heels of the School Report Form, Taft will then send a Mid-Year Report for all applications. These forms will be sent throughout the month of January.

### Missing Materials

After submitting applications, it's imperative that students check their Taft email accounts regularly, as well as any on-line application tracking systems (Naviance and college sites) to ensure that all required application materials have been received. NB: Please be aware of the fact that it can often take two weeks or longer for admissions materials to be acknowledged and/or recorded as "received" on college websites. If materials are still missing two weeks after a deadline, please contact your counselor so that duplicates can be sent.

Please be assured that the college application process is a forgiving one. With extraordinarily few exceptions, no student's chance for admission will be hurt if a piece is missing. Just be sure to bring it to our attention as soon as possible.

### Continuing to Work, Research, and Demonstrate Interest

Once all formal college applications have been submitted (usually by February 1<sup>st</sup>), there is more to do than simply wait for decisions to arrive. The most important thing to do is to continue to try to do your best in every class. Just as in the early application phase,

many colleges may ask for third quarter grades to help them make final admissions decisions.

Secondly, take time to dig more deeply into the websites of your potential colleges. We are constantly surprised to learn that many students are unaware of the range of potential majors or the specific graduation requirements of the colleges to which they have applied. Doing as much research as possible before admissions decisions arrive will be of great help and allow you to choose your college with confidence.

Finally, don't miss out on opportunities that allow you to show your strong interest in each school. Keep in touch with admissions representatives by sending updates on your grades and activities; schedule an alumni interview near your home; or be sure to sign up for interviews that are often offered by colleges right on the Taft campus.

### **Third Quarter Grades**

As was the case with first quarter grades and early applications, the same is true for third quarter grades and regular decision applications. Don't succumb to the "senior slide;" keep working to the best of your ability so that if a school calls for an update, you'll have a similarly strong or stronger record to show.

## **SPRING**

### **Admissions Notifications**

Admissions decisions usually start to arrive in mid-March, but the bulk of the decisions tend to arrive during the last week of the month. Virtually all decisions will arrive no later than the first week in April. Most are now sent via email or made available at a certain time on a specific day when students can log-in to their accounts to learn their fate. Despite this somewhat less personal means of notification, don't make this a public display. Check your email or computer by yourself, and be sure to remember that an admission decision, positive or negative, is not what defines you. Also remember that one person's "likely" is another's "reach." You should certainly share your news with family and friends, but don't go running down the hall at school shouting, "I got in to X, Y, or Z." Also be cautious about posting your results to social media. Be sure to share your news, good or bad, with your college counselor. In some cases we do learn about final decisions directly from the colleges or universities, but many times we do not know the outcomes. Lastly, please be sure to let the teachers who wrote on your behalf know of your decisions and to thank them for their help.

## Waiting Lists

As application numbers to highly selective colleges have increased, so has the number of students placed on waiting lists. Here are some FAQ's that should be of help to you:

### What is waiting list?

A waiting list is a list of students who meet the admission requirements, but they will only be offered a place in the class if space becomes available.

### When will we know if a space becomes available?

As we get towards the end of April, schools start getting a sense of whether or not they may be going to their waitlist. In some cases, schools will even go to their waitlist in April, however more schools make waitlist decisions during the first two weeks of May. In rare instances, students will come off of waitlists in June, July, or even August.

### Should I pursue all of my waitlists or just focus on one?

Interest plays an enormous role at most schools so if you honestly can't say that you're sure you will go to that school if you're offered admission, it probably does not make sense to pursue that waitlist. While it is okay to stay on more than one waitlist, it is absolutely not okay and unethical to deposit to more than one school. You can only attend one school, so you should only deposit to one.

### Do colleges rank their waitlists?

Most colleges do not rank their waitlists; instead, they will admit students based on the college's needs and the student's interest.

### What should I do if I want to pursue a waitlist?

The first thing you need to do is immediately return the response card or respond on-line through the link provided by the school. If they don't have a clear response mechanism, send an email to the school. You should follow this up with a detailed letter explaining why this is your first choice; how it's a perfect match; and if it is true, state that you will definitely enroll if offered a space. You should also update them with any new information from the second semester - strong grades, awards, etc.

### What do colleges look for when selecting students from their waitlists?

It really depends on the institution's needs. Some schools may need more boys or girls.

Some may need business majors or engineers. Again, the colleges will not know their needs until the end of April at the earliest. You should also note that in most cases, financial aid is limited at best, so ability to pay is another very important factor.

### Do additional letters of recommendation help?

Yes, in many cases, you can ask another teacher or an alumnus to write a letter for you. You should meet with your college counselor to discuss whom to ask.

### Should I visit campus and interview?

It depends on the school. Some schools welcome visits and will meet with you, others prefer that you don't. Please see your college counselor to discuss what approach would be best for you.

### **Visiting Colleges (one last time)**

While it is our hope that each student is admitted to his or her first choice college, in many cases students do not have clear first choices, or they find that the choices they do have make it difficult to decide. Scheduling a return visit to a couple of places can be of great help. If you do choose to revisit a school, take the time to check it out carefully. Sit in on a class or two; spend time in the student center watching interactions and listening to conversations; stay overnight in a dorm; and don't be afraid to ask a current student why he or she chose that particular place.

### **Enrollment Deposits and National Candidates' Reply Date**

On or before May 1<sup>st</sup> all students must notify their chosen colleges of their intention to enroll and submit an enrollment deposit (if required). Failure to do so may cost a student his or her place at that institution. Similarly, students should also notify all of the other schools to which they were admitted that they do not plan to enroll. It is unethical and highly inappropriate to confirm an enrollment at multiple schools or to submit multiple deposits. If discovered, it is quite likely that a student would lose his or her place at both institutions. It is, however, acceptable to maintain your spot on a wait list and send a deposit at another institution. Making your intentions clear is imperative not only to solidify your place at an institution, but also to allow institutions to determine how many students they can expect that fall or whether or not they may be able to make admissions offers to students whom they had placed on their waiting list.

## **Deferring Enrollment**

Increasingly, many students are choosing to defer their enrollment in college by taking a “Gap Year.” Taking a year off before jumping into your college studies can be a great idea, and doing so is welcomed by virtually all college and universities. There may be many good reasons for a student to consider taking time off. Please speak with your counselor if you’d like to discuss this option. If you have definite intentions of deferring your admission to an institution, you must determine that school’s deferral plan, as every school has different policies about holding a student’s place.

## **Final Transcripts**

The last phase of the college application and enrollment process requires that our office send each student’s final transcript to his or her chosen college or university. Students should be very mindful of the fact that final transcripts will be scrutinized by admissions officers. Poor performance in the second semester can result in a revocation of one’s offer of admission. As was the case with the enrollment deposit, only one final transcript can be sent for a student. The exception to that is in cases where a student has chosen to remain on another school’s waiting list.

## **APPENDIX**

### **THE RECRUITED ATHLETE**

Being a varsity athlete at Taft does not mean you will be a varsity athlete in college. Your Taft coach will likely know if you can play in college, and at what level you might be actively recruited. If not, try to participate in a summer camp before Senior fall in order to get another perspective. The first step is a private, honest conversation with your coach about your game and your prospects; this should happen at the end of the Upper Mid season. Next, you will want to get on the radar screen of every college in which you might conceivably be interested. The easiest way is through a letter or email that lets the coach know:

- Your position, experience, and interest in playing in college
- Your contact information
- Your coach(s) contact information
- Statistics that represent your game – goals, batting average, saves, height, speed, etc.
- Any camps or showcases that you will be participating in during the summer before Senior year

- Your general academic profile – Taft GPA, SAT/ACT scores
- Your college counselor’s contact information so they can contact us if they need a copy of your transcript

## NCAA

The vast majority of colleges belong to the NCAA, which breaks schools up into three groups. NCAA-I and II colleges have athletic scholarships; Division III does not offer scholarships at all. Athletes thinking about scholarship colleges need to register with the NCAA Eligibility Center and should look at the Eligibility Center Registration page: [www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org).

To be eligible to compete at a scholarship school, you must meet certain academic standards. One hurdle is the number of NCAA sanctioned academic classes you have taken. To find out which Taft classes are sanctioned, go to this website, and enter 070880 as the school code.

<https://web1.ncaa.org/hsportal/exec/hsAction?hsActionSubmit=searchHighSchool>

In addition, you need an NCAA acceptable balance between grades and test scores. Here is where you can see the sliding scale you must meet.

[https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/hs/d1\\_standards.pdf](https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/hs/d1_standards.pdf)

For Division III athletes, these requirements do not apply; it is up to the athletic conference and the college to determine your eligibility.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**3-2 Program:** Degree program in which a student begins his/her studies at one institution, generally a small liberal arts college, and after three years, transfers to another larger institution to complete his or her studies. Most of these programs are in engineering. Three-two programs can be either single or dual undergraduate degree programs; others are undergraduate and graduate B.A./M.S combinations.

**4-1-4 Plan:** A college academic calendar usually including a fall term with four courses, a shortened winter or January term with one course, and a spring term with four courses.

**Accelerated Programs:** Exceptionally selective admission programs that offer admission to undergraduate and graduate programs, generally for medical school, to freshman

applicants. Program length can vary from seven to eight years, often including summer coursework.

**ACT:** American College Test. This is a standardized college admission test that is accepted in place of (or in addition to) the SAT by almost all colleges. The test measures a student's abilities in English, mathematics, science reasoning and reading, and includes an optional writing section. Students receive a score in each of the four areas that ranges from 1-36, with a composite score that is the average of each of the four sub-scores.

**Admissions Committee:** The group of admissions officers and some combination of faculty members and administrators who review each candidate's application and make decisions regarding admissions.

**Advanced Placement (AP) Exams:** Tests sponsored by the College Board for students who have taken college-level (AP) courses at Taft. Some colleges may allow students to receive college credit for high scores on these exams; still others will place students out of introductory-level courses into higher levels.

**Bachelor of Arts (B.A. or A.B.):** Traditional four-year degree awarded by a liberal arts college or university following successful completion of a course of study. These degrees may be granted in any number of fields in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences or fine/performing arts.

**Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.):** Four-year degree offered by fine arts, design, theater, dance and other visual and performing arts programs. Admission to B.F.A. programs can be based to a large extent upon artistic talent, determined through an audition or portfolio review, and to a lesser extent upon standardized testing and academic performance.

**Bachelor of Science (B.S.):** Four-year degree usually awarded for successful completion of requirements in the natural and physical sciences, or for more professionally oriented programs, such as engineering or business.

**Class Rank:** A student's academic standing based on his or her academic record as compared with that of the other members of the class. Like most independent schools, Taft does not rank its students.

**College Board:** The organization which sponsors educational testing (the SAT, AP exams) as well as the CSS Profile form. They also produce much other college-related information and material.

**College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB):** Another name for the College Board. In filling out applications and other college forms, students are frequently asked for their high school's CEEB code. Taft's is 070-880.

**Common Application:** Allows a student to complete one application form ("The Common Application") for participating colleges. Students send the information to each college from the Common Application website. Many of the participating schools include their individual supplemental applications on the Common Application website.

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

**Consortium:** Several colleges and universities in a particular geographic area sometimes join together in a consortium, which gives students the opportunity to take courses at all member institutions.

**Cooperative Education (Co-op):** College-sponsored programs designed to help undergraduates meet college expenses and gain work experience, alternating periods of study with periods of work in a field related to a student's academic or professional interests. Traditionally, but not exclusively, used by students in such pre-professional programs as engineering, computer science and business. Many schools award college credit for the work outside the classroom.

**Core Curriculum:** College courses required for graduation, consisting of a comprehensive selection from such fields as the humanities, social sciences, natural and physical sciences, the fine arts, etc. Depending on the college, core curricula can range from a handful of courses to well over half the required courses necessary for graduation.

**CSS Profile:** Used by many selective colleges in addition to FAFSA to award financial aid funds. The CSS Profile is similar to the FAFSA, but is customized by the colleges to supply additional financial information. <http://profileonline.collegeboard.com>

**Deferral:** This is an admissions decision which may be received if a student has applied under an Early Decision or Early Action plan. A "deferral" means that the student has not yet been admitted or denied; the application will be placed in the pool of "regular decision" applicants for another review, and an admissions decision will be sent in late March or early April. (Students who apply Early Decision and are deferred are no longer bound by the ED agreement and can apply to other schools).

**Deferred Admission:** This option, initiated at the student's request, allows the student to

postpone enrollment for one semester or one year in a college where he or she has been admitted. The student then may take a year for travel, work, or other projects before attending college. Most colleges will grant deferrals to students who present a well thought-out plan for what they will do for the semester or year.

**Demonstrated Financial Need:** Amount, as determined through federal, private and/or institutional financial aid forms, which is the difference between the total cost of attendance at a college and the estimated family contribution to the college cost.

**Double Deposit:** Accepting two colleges' offers of admission by submitting a deposit to secure a spot in the freshman class at both schools. This practice is prohibited by the regulations of the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC), and is vehemently discouraged by the College Counseling Office.

**Dual Degree:** Also called a "Joint Degree." Academic program of study which allows student to either major in two separate undergraduate fields in completely distinct disciplines (such as engineering and business, or business and foreign language), or to pursue a joint undergraduate-graduate degree program (such as joint BA/MBA, BA/JD, or BA/MD programs).

**Early Action (EA):** A non-binding admission program in which the student applies by a stated early deadline and receives a decision early (usually mid-December). If admitted EA, students are under no obligation to enroll at the college. Typically, students who are not offered admission under early action are deferred; however, it is possible for an applicant to be denied outright and not automatically deferred for later consideration.

**Early Action Single Choice:** See "Single Choice Early Action."

**Early Decision (ED):** A binding admission program in which the student applies usually by November 1st or November 15th and receives a decision by Christmas. If accepted ED, the student must enroll. Some schools have a second but later ED date, called ED2.

**Early Decision 2 (ED2):** A binding admission program with a January deadline. Students submit multiple applications but apply to one college under an ED2 plan. Usually decisions are received within a month of receipt of the ED2 application. If offered admission under the ED2 plan, the student is required to enroll and then withdraw all other college applications.

**Early Evaluation:** A non-binding admission process in which a student is tentatively notified of their admission decision in January or February, receives their official offer in

late March, yet does not need to respond to the college until May 1st. Offered by very few colleges (Wellesley is one of them).

**Educational Testing Service:** The company that produces standardized tests for the College Board. They also produce, and own, the TOEFL.

**Estimated Family Contribution (EFC):** The amount of money, determined through information submitted with federal and institutional financial aid forms, that a family can afford to spend for college. This figure will appear on your Student Aid Report (SAR).

**Extracurriculars:** Activities in which students participate outside of the classroom, such as athletics, student organizations and clubs, volunteer work and community service, music lessons or groups, or part-time jobs.

**FAFSA:** Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Required of all applicants for financial aid for every U.S. college and university. Determines eligibility for any financial aid monies supported by federal money (Pell Grant, Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans and Work Study). [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

**Fee Waivers:** Forms which document a student's inability to pay for college admission related fees, such as SATs and college applications. Students must meet the guidelines for eligibility as determined by the College Board. Fee waivers are available through the College Counseling Office for eligible students.

**Grade-Point Average (GPA):** Numerical conversion of letter grades into a cumulative average, by term, year or academic career.

**Grants:** Financial aid money from the federal/ state government or matriculating college which does not require repayment, like a loan. This is money that is "granted" to you and that you don't have to pay back.

**Hook:** A subjective factor in the admissions decision-making process which can influence, to varying degrees, a student's admission decision. Examples include legacy status, athletic recruitment, exceptional artistic talent, or membership in an underrepresented population.

**Humanities:** Fields of study including English, literature, foreign languages, philosophy, classics, history, music, fine arts, theatre and religion.

**Internship:** A part- or full-time paid, volunteer, and/or for-college-credit position

offering hands-on experience in a student's academic or professional field of interest. Internships are undertaken either while enrolled during the academic year or in the summer.

**Ivy League:** While its eight members (Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Penn, Princeton and Yale) are highly selective colleges for admission, the designation “Ivy League” only refers to their membership in a common athletic conference.

**Joint Degree:** Also may be known as a “Dual Degree” program. Academic program of study which allows student to either major in two separate undergraduate fields in completely distinct disciplines (such as engineering and business, or business and foreign language), or to pursue a joint undergraduate-graduate degree program (such as joint BA/MBA, BA/JD, or BA/MD programs).

**Language Proficiency Examination:** An examination in a foreign language used to determine whether a student has satisfied a college’s foreign language requirement and, if not, which level of foreign language course is appropriate for the student.

**Legacy:** Having an immediate family member, generally a parent, and occasionally a sibling or grandparent, as an alumna/us of a college to which the student is applying.

**Liberal Arts:** A broad-based introduction to a wide variety of subjects, including the social sciences, humanities and natural sciences. Generally does not include professional programs, such as business, engineering or nursing, although these programs may contain some coursework in the liberal arts. Taft has a liberal arts curriculum, as do many colleges and universities.

**Loans:** Financial assistance which must be repaid over an extended period of time, generally after a student completes an undergraduate degree.

**Major:** Concentrated field of collegiate study in one academic discipline, requiring a set number of required courses for completion beyond any required core curriculum requirements. Students concentrate in two academic fields by “double-majoring.”

**Minor:** A secondary field of concentrated study during the final two years of college, similar to a major yet with fewer requirements.

**Matriculate:** Academic term meaning to “enroll at” or “attend” a college or university.

**Mid-Year Report:** A form requested by colleges that reports senior grades. Taft submits senior fall grades to each of the schools on a student's Naviance list at the end of the fall semester.

**National Merit Commended Student:** A designation given to students by the National Merit Corporation for students who score high on the PSAT/NMSQT examination, but do not pass the state-specific threshold score to become a Semifinalist.

**National Merit Finalist:** A designation for students who are eligible for merit-based academic scholarship (that is, eligible to be named a National Merit Scholar), based upon the student's strong PSAT/NMSQT scores, high school record and counselor recommendation.

**National Merit Scholar:** A National Merit Finalist who receives a merit-based academic scholarship, sponsored by a member organization or college, or the National Merit Corporation.

**National Merit Semifinalist:** The initial designation by the National Merit Corporation for students who pass a state-specific threshold score on the PSAT/NMSQT examination.

**National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA):** National organization which supervises and regulates most intercollegiate athletic programs. Based upon size of institution and level of competition, these programs are divided into three divisions: Division I, II and III. Division I and II schools generally award athletic scholarships; Division III colleges do not. Student athletes who wish to play DI and DII sports will need to submit information online to the NCAA clearinghouse to establish eligibility for recruiting and play.

**Need Blind:** The practice of admitting students purely on the strength of their academic records without taking into account ability to pay.

**Need Aware or Need Sensitive:** The practice of taking into account an applicant's ability to pay before admitting him or her to college.

**Pell Grant:** Named in honor of Sen. Claibourne Pell (RI), a Pell Grant is a federally funded grant designed to help students with the lowest Estimated Family Contribution (EFC). Eligibility is determined through the information provided through the FAFSA.

**Perkins Loans:** Federally-funded college loan with a low interest rate and deferred repayment programs. Eligibility is determined through the information provided on the FAFSA.

**Pre-Law/Pre-Med:** Not a major or academic discipline, per se, but an intended direction for graduate school allowing a student to concentrate in many different fields of study. Law and medical schools offer basic guidelines on undergraduate courses for students interested in gaining admission to these graduate programs. However, students can generally integrate these basic requirements into many diverse majors, including business, engineering and other non-traditional pre-professional majors.

**Prior-prior year (PPY):** Parents and students will use completed 2015 tax returns (Prior-prior year) to apply for financial aid for the 2017-18 school year. This year is the first year that financial aid offices will use income tax returns from the previous year to calculate financial aid awards. **The FAFSA will now be available October 1, 2016, unlike previous years when it did not open until January.** This is good news for families because it makes the application and timing of financial aid much easier for most students. If your income has dropped significantly since the prior-prior year, financial aid offices will consider special circumstances. You can speak to your Taft College Counselor or your college financial aid office for more information.

**PSAT/NMSQT:** A two-hour and ten-minute standardized exam that mimics, in many respects, the SAT. It contains verbal sections, math sections and a writing skills section. This is many students' first chance to see how their skills compare with those of other college-bound students across the country in their age group. Students also compete for national scholarships (Merit Scholarships, Achievement Scholarships, National Hispanic Scholar Recognition Program) and are placed on college mailing lists. Taft students take the PSAT in the fall of their Mid and Upper Mid years.

**Rate of Attrition:** Percentage of students who do not return to college, due to academic, financial or personal reasons, usually after their freshman year.

**Regular Decision:** A term used to describe the application process in which an institution reviews most of its applicants prior to notifying the majority of its candidates. Regular decision deadlines fall in January or February for most colleges.

**Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC):** U.S. military program offering one-, two-, and four-year scholarships at select colleges and universities, covering tuition, books and

fees in addition to a living stipend, in exchange for a set number of years of service in a branch of the military.

**Rolling Admissions:** A term used to describe the application process in which a university or college reviews applications as they are received and offers decisions to students as applications are reviewed. NOTE: Some rolling admission institutions may defer students initially. This does not mean that the student has been denied or placed on a wait list. A deferral simply means that the admission committee will review the student again later on in the cycle once new grades and standardized test scores are available.

**SAT Reasoning Test:** Originally called the Scholastic Assessment Test (hence the acronym SAT), the SAT Reasoning Test is owned and produced by The College Board and is required by most colleges in the U.S. to assess verbal, mathematical, and writing skills. There are three scores of 200 - 800, one for critical reading, math, and writing. From these three areas, a composite score is calculated on a 2400-point scale.

**SAT Subject Tests:** The College Board's standardized tests in specific academic subjects (e.g., U.S. History, English Literature, Spanish Language, Math, Biology, etc.). These tests are often used by many highly selective colleges to help with admissions decisions, and by other colleges to determine course placement.

**Secondary School Report:** A form required by colleges which requests a copy of the student's high school record, other pertinent academic information, and a written evaluation (recommendation) from the student's college counselor.

**Selective Service:** U.S. Department of Defense bureau which requires registration by all eighteen-year-old male U.S. citizens. Confirmation of registration with the Selective Service is required for eligibility for federally-funded financial aid money.

**Self-Help:** The portion of a student's financial aid that includes college work-study or loans.

**Semester:** The most common academic calendar, dividing the year into two equal terms.

**Single Choice Early Action:** Though similar to Early Action, this plan prohibits students from applying "early" (EA or ED) to any other colleges or universities.

**Social Sciences:** Academic fields of study which focus on human behavior and societal interactions, such as psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology and economics.

**Stafford Loan:** Formerly known as “Guaranteed Student Loans” and renamed in honor of former Sen. Robert Stafford (VT), Stafford Loans are low-interest loans sponsored by the federal government for students enrolled at least part-time in college. Loans can be both subsidized (for students with demonstrated financial need) and unsubsidized (for students who do not qualify for need-based financial aid). The U.S. government will pay the interest on subsidized Stafford Loans until six months following a student's final semester of enrollment as a full-time student, but students with unsubsidized Stafford loans are responsible for the interest on those loans from the time of their disbursement.

**Student-Faculty Ratio:** The ratio determined by dividing the number of students by the number of professors. Thus, an 11:1 student-faculty ratio means there are 11 students for every 1 faculty member. “Average class size” frequently provides more useful information about faculty-student interaction in a college.

**Student Aid Report (SAR):** The form returned to a student following evaluation of the FAFSA by the U.S. Government’s Central Processing Agency. Copies of the SAR can be reviewed through the FAFSA website, [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). The SAR includes a student’s EFC and any further instructions that the central processing agency may have for a particular student.

**Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):** Examination administered by ETS that assesses the fluency in English of a non-native English speaker. The TOEFL tests reading, writing, speaking and listening in English.

**Transcript:** A student’s official school record of grades and courses.

**Trimester:** Academic calendar divided into three roughly equal terms per year.

**Waitlist:** A limited number of freshman applicants who are neither admitted nor denied admission are placed on a waitlist and told they will be notified after May 1st if spaces within the freshman class become available. Waitlists are utilized by most selective institutions to ensure that they will meet their target enrollment numbers.

**Work-Study Program:** A federally sponsored program that allows students to pay for part of their educational expenses through part-time work on campus. A portion of the work-study salary comes from the college employer; most is through federal subsidies. Only students with demonstrated financial need are eligible for work-study jobs.

**Yield:** The number of students admitted to a college who matriculate.