



Future Planning Handbook

Introduction to AMSA School Counseling Office:

The mission of the AMSA School Counseling Office is to help each student identify, apply, and matriculate to colleges that fit their interests, abilities, and goals. Most important to this mission is the relationship between students and counselors. We strive to know all students well so that we can best advise them and help them reach their post-secondary goals. In order to do this, we try to involve families in all aspects of the college application process. Sending children to college is a family decision, so we hope to communicate frequently with parents.

Additionally, we expect that students conduct themselves with integrity throughout the college application process. We require that students represent their achievements honestly to their counselors as well as on their college applications and in college interviews.

With these cornerstones of integrity and personal care for each individual, the AMSA School Counseling Office will do its best to make the college application process a self-affirming one that puts each student on the path to a productive and fulfilling future.

The AMSA Future Planning Handbook is a resource the School Counseling Department has assembled for students. The goal of the handbook is to provide college-bound students with information and strategies that will be helpful to them as they conduct their college search and to provide information for those not going directly to college.

The Future Planning Handbook is just one resource available to students and their families and contains just some of the information that students will need during their selection process. Other resources available to students in the Counseling Department include the Naviance program, college reference handbooks, college catalogs, information on alternative programs, interim options, and testing information. AMSA's counseling department is dedicated to provide counseling and counseling materials that are free from bias and stereotypes on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, and homelessness. The AMSA College and Career Planning web site also has links to many valuable resources for the college planning process, financial aid, and testing information. You can access this information on www.amsacs.org under *Student Life*, then *Guidance* then *College and Career Planning*.

As always, students are encouraged to work closely with their guidance counselors throughout this process. Good luck!

Important Information

AMSA School CEEB Code: 221349

Counseling Department Phone: (508) 597-2400

Counseling Department Directory Link:

http://amsacschool.enschool.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=232324&type=d&termREC_ID=&pREC_ID=staff

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JUNIOR YEAR TIMELINE

Fall

- ✓ **Mid October** - Take the PSAT at AMSA (scores available in December/January)
- ✓ Make sure you are registered for a **Naviance** account
- ✓ Attend AMSA **college visits** from admissions reps (look at list in Naviance, need pass from teacher)
- ✓ Save your best graded papers, with teacher comments (some colleges will require these as part of their applications), gather artwork for a portfolio, if you are considering studying art in college,
- ✓ Attend AMSA's Financial Aid Night that will be scheduled in October.

Winter

- ✓ Prepare for ACT/SATs! AMSA usually offers an SAT Prep Course.
- ✓ Plan which SAT, ACT and SAT Subject tests you plan to take. Check testing websites for registration deadlines.
 - SAT offered in March (no subject tests in March), May and June
 - ACT offered in February, April and June
- ✓ Register for February ACT (deadline in January) or March SAT (deadline in February) if that is your plan
- ✓ Schedule an individual college planning meeting with your guidance counselor.
- ✓ Create a new/appropriate email account just for college or use your AMSA student email address.
- ✓ Record/keep track of all extracurricular activities since 9th grade in your Naviance "resume"

Spring

- ✓ Register for ACT or SAT and/or SAT Subject Tests for April, May and/or June if needed.
- ✓ Visit colleges over April break!
- ✓ Complete the Student Autobiography (under Surveys on Naviance)
- ✓ Ask two teachers for Letters of Recommendations (form needed and available on website)
- ✓ Give parents **Parent Brag Sheet** to complete and email to your Guidance Counselor (found on the AMSA website)

Summer

- ✓ Write a rough draft of your college essay
- ✓ Continue to research colleges and narrow your list
- ✓ Discuss cost of college with parents

SENIOR YEAR COLLEGE CHECKLIST

August-September

- ✓ Register for tests – fall SATs/SAT IIs/ACT tests
 - ACT offered in September, October and December
 - SAT offered in October, November and December
 - Check each college’s website to see if they require SAT II Subject Tests and if so how many (usually 2 or 3) they require
 - Most colleges will accept test scores from the fall (September-December) test dates even if you are applying Early Action/Early Decision
- ✓ Register/begin completing your Common Application online:
 - Add schools to “My Colleges” tab
 - Look at supplement requirements (most schools have one)
 - Check each college’s website for additional requirements (interviews, subject tests, art portfolio, etc.)
 - If a school is not on the Common App, it requires their own application available on their website.
- ✓ Confirm that TWO academic teachers are writing your letters of recommendation ASAP.
- ✓ Meet with your guidance counselor (who will also be writing a letter of recommendation), and update/finalize your list of schools.
- ✓ When your list of schools is finalized, complete a green Early Transcript Release Form (found in the Guidance Office) with your schools and application deadlines and hand in to your Guidance Counselor by the specified dates (on back of form)
- ✓ Remind your parents to email your **Parent Brag Sheet** (found on the AMSA website) to your guidance counselor.
- ✓ Meet with college admission representatives who will be visiting AMSA throughout the fall (sign-up on Naviance, **ask permission**, and receive pass from teacher if you are missing class).
- ✓ Consider **EA/ED/REA deadlines** (most are November 1st or 15th):
 - We recommend having at least one Early Action school, which is non-binding.
 - Early Decision is a binding agreement that you will attend if accepted.
- ✓ Discuss Financial Aid with parent(s)/guardian. Complete CSS profile if Early Decision/Early Action schools require it early.
- ✓ Continue to visit colleges-- you have two “passes” to visit college campuses (see your guidance counselor for the College Campus Visit Form).

October

- ✓ Finish your college essay! Have your English teacher and/or guidance counselor edit before **OCTOBER 10th**. Your counselor will NOT have time to review your essay after this date if you are applying early.
- ✓ Prepare your final list of schools, and notify your guidance counselor.
 - Students applying **Early Decision** must notify their counselor by October 1st for November 1st deadlines.
- ✓ Register for November tests
- ✓ Update Naviance account: Move colleges from “colleges I’m thinking about” to “colleges I’m applying to”

- ✓ **Pay attention** to Early Decision/Early Action deadlines. Make sure your counselor has a copy of your final list of schools, has edited your personal statement, and reviewed your extracurricular section before submitting applications.
- ✓ Write thank you notes to the teachers writing your letters of recommendation!

November-December

- ✓ Send score reports from www.collegeboard.com (SATs only) or www.ACT.org (ACTs)
- ✓ Submit applications a few days prior to deadlines. **Do not wait until the night of the deadline** because the system is very slow, *and likely to fail*, at these times due to the high volume of users.
- ✓ Finish applications for January 1st or January 15th deadlines, try to finish all applications before Winter Break.

January-February

- ✓ Complete and submit Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)—file taxes early!
- ✓ Some schools also require the College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile.
- ✓ Check each college's website for financial aid requirements and deadlines. The *Net Price Calculator* is also available on every website.

March

- ✓ Final deadline for submitting financial aid information to colleges.

April

- ✓ Colleges will notify applicants of whether or not they've been admitted.
- ✓ Take opportunities to re-visit campuses, meet with your counselor to discuss college options, and notify those colleges that you are no longer considering.
- ✓ Ask counselor for help with comparing financial aid packages if you need it.

May

- ✓ May 1 is the deadline to make your final decision!
- ✓ Notify your accepted college of your enrollment plans and submit the deposit.
- ✓ Meet with counselor about any waitlist issues.

June

- ✓ GRADUATION!

BEGINNING THE COLLEGE PROCESS

1. Start a college folder: This will contain all relevant passwords and account information for College Board, Common Application, Family Connection/ Naviance, individual college websites.
2. Make sure you know your Family Connection/Naviance username and password. If you have forgotten, please see your counselor.
3. Research SAT, SAT II and ACT test dates and registration deadlines. Make sure you register for appropriate tests and dates. Revisit the College Board site to have results sent electronically to appropriate colleges as necessary. Research if your colleges require SAT II/Subject Tests.
4. Ask teachers for recommendations: Before summer break of junior year, speak with TWO teachers you would like to ask for letters of recommendation. We recommend one math or science teacher and one humanities teacher. You will need to indicate which teachers have agreed to write for you and enter their names into your Naviance account. Click on "Colleges I'm Applying To," scroll down to Teacher Recommendations, and click on add/cancel requests.
5. In Senior Seminar, you will set up an online Common Application account. Many schools accept The Common Application, reducing the number of times you will have to fill in basic information about yourself. Naviance electronically syncs supporting documents (letters of recommendation, school profile, and transcript) with The Common Application.
6. Log in to your Naviance account. **Complete the privacy notice (FERPA) with your Common Application log in information:** Select the "Colleges" tab and go to "Colleges I'm Applying To." It is highly recommended that you waive your rights as described so colleges know that counselor and teacher recommendations will remain confidential – when these are not confidential, they carry less significance in the admissions decision process. AMSA cannot send your transcript or other application unless you have signed the FERPA agreement.

RECAP: TOP 11 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

1. **Do your homework.** Read up on the schools that interest you! Use all available resources, including the college search program available on Naviance.
2. **Visit the schools that you are interested in.** Schedule a tour and interview, attend an Open House and stay for an overnight, if possible. Consider sitting in on a class and eating a meal on campus. Really check it out!
3. **Put your best foot forward.** Remember that you are making an impression! Dress your best when you visit, and be conscientious in all your correspondence.
4. **Talk to students.** When you visit, be sure to talk to current students; they can give you the inside scoop!
5. **Ask questions.** Try to bring either a written or mental list of questions when you come for a tour or interview. No question is too trivial, but try to put some thought into it, too.
6. **Showcase your special talents and qualities.** If you are involved in something special, make sure your application highlights your activities.
7. **Be yourself.** Try to find schools that have the things you want; instead of trying to become something you are not just to please an institution.
8. **Ask for recommendations early.** Give your teachers plenty of time to write your recommendation letters (ask before summer vacation). Sometimes they are the only things that colleges are waiting for before they can review your application. Write a thank you note to teachers for writing you a recommendation.
9. **Know your deadlines.** Be conscious of when things are due—applications and financial aid!
10. **Be sure to proofread.** Before submitting your applications and essay, make sure you proofread everything! Ask a parent for help because it is easy to miss small errors.
11. **Keep strong grades.** Whether you are applying early or regular decision it is important to remember that colleges are very interested in your senior year courses and the grades you earn. Senior year grades are reported to colleges for term 1, term 2 and final grades.

THE COMMON APPLICATION & OVERVIEW OF THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

Elements of a Complete Application

College admissions offices rely on the following information to gain a sense of your academic potential and whether you would be a good fit at their schools:

1. Transcript of courses and grades from freshman through senior year (including term 1).
2. Personal Statement: An essay of approximately 500 words about a topic of your choice
3. Counselor Recommendation, which compiles information about your academic, social, and extracurricular accomplishments (both at AMSA and outside of school) and presents you in the context of your experience at our school. The counselor recommendation highlights significant commitments, explains what appears on your transcript, and when necessary, addresses extenuating circumstances.
4. Teacher Recommendations: Most colleges require two recommendations from teachers of academic subjects. We recommend one from math, science or comp science, and one from a humanities teacher.
5. Standardized Testing: Most colleges require either SAT Reasoning test or ACT scores. About 100 colleges also require SAT II tests in two subjects.

Most students will submit their applications to college using the Common Application (www.commonapp.org). Please be aware, however, that most colleges require a SUPPLEMENT to the Common Application, which can also be accessed at the Common App website.

The application offers the opportunity to distinguish yourself among a large applicant pool. This is especially relevant if you plan to apply to highly selective schools, since those applications are generally more thorough and demand more personal responses. Setting yourself apart from other applicants is probably the most important way to improve your chances at being admitted to selective colleges.

It is your responsibility to submit your application by the required deadline. Putting the application together, sending your SAT, AP, and ACT scores, writing essays, and meeting deadlines are indicators of your readiness to deal with the independence required of college students. Your Guidance Counselor will be happy to help you get organized, provide you with advice, and guide you through the process of applying to college, but the responsibility of actually submitting your application to your colleges is yours.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR COLLEGE LIST

There are more than 3,000 colleges in the United States, which means that there are lots of colleges that will fit your interests and goals. However, narrowing down your options can be daunting. You can use the following criteria to begin narrowing down the list of schools you might be interested in attending. You should also try to visit colleges before or during your junior year to get a better sense of what sorts of campuses you like and dislike. And, of course, the school counselors are here to help you decide which schools might best fit your personality, educational goals, and preferences.

- **Geographic Location:** In what region of the country do you want to attend college? There are certainly benefits to attending college relatively close to home (like coming home to do your laundry!) but attending college in a different region of the country can broaden your horizons. Furthermore, you are more likely to be admitted to schools far from Massachusetts because you provide geographic diversity to those schools' pools of applicants.
- **Setting:** Do you want to go to college in a city, or in a suburban or rural area?
- **Size:** Do you want to go to a big school, the benefits of which include access to research opportunities and a breadth of courses and activities, or to a small school, where you'll likely have smaller class sizes and more access to your professors?
- **Academic Programs:** Which schools have departments related to what you think you might like to study? Keep in mind, however, that most students change their intended majors at least once in college.

Other things you might consider:

College Character

- What does the college look like? What does it "feel" like? Can you see yourself in these surroundings for four years?
- What is the campus atmosphere? Intellectual? Socially concerned? Artistic?
- How big is it? Small (less than 2,500), medium (2,500-6,000), large (greater than 6,000)? Coed? Religious or nonsectarian?
- What are the library facilities like? Is the main library used for study or socializing? Are there special collections?
- What are the types and availability of residence facilities? What percentage of students live in dormitories? Off-campus? Are first-year students housed together?
- What are dining facilities like? Dining plans? Accommodation for special diets, especially vegetarian?
- What are the health facilities on campus? Medical or dental plans for students?
- Is there a career guidance center? How active is it?
- Are students satisfied with the way things are run? What are some "hot" campus issues?

- What kinds of entertainment are available on and off campus? Movies? Plays? Concerts? Exhibits? Lectures? Clubs? At what cost? What percentage of students can be found on campus on a typical weekend?
- What does the college offer for freshman orientation? Is there a mentoring program? What sort of guidance is available to new students?
- How does the college reach beyond its walls to serve and reflect the surrounding community?
- How safe is the campus? Does campus security offer programs to ensure safety of students (i.e. escorting students from the library to dorms after dark)? Are such services used by students?

Admissions & Financial Aid

- What criteria are used for admission? Does the college require SAT Reasoning, SAT Subject Tests, ACT? If Subject Tests are required, which ones? Does the college accept the ACT in lieu of the SAT Reasoning, or in lieu of both SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests? How significant are extracurricular activities, strength of academic program and essays?
- Does the college admit by major? How does the admissions competition differ among specific programs, majors?
- Does the college meet the total financial need of all accepted students? Is it need blind? (see financial aid vocabulary) What is the standard balance of grant/loan/work? Are merit scholarships available? Are student jobs available only to students on financial aid or to anyone? (You may be referred to the college financial aid office for detailed information of this kind.)
- Does the college honor the Score Choice policy of the College Board or do they request all scores?

Academic Program

- What is the grading system? What are the graduation requirements in terms of number of courses and specific required courses? What type of advising system is in place for freshman?
- What degrees are offered? Does every department offer a major? Are there liberal arts or professional technical degree programs?
- If it is a university, what colleges does it contain? Can a student change from one program to another? Are there special academic programs? Junior year abroad? Exchange programs? Interim intensive courses (such as January term)? If the school offers a joint program, is there inter-campus transportation available so that you can take the courses you want on another campus? Is the college calendar run by semester? Trimester? Quarter? Interim term?
- How does the college support students with learning disabilities? Is peer tutoring available? Writing or math labs? A study skills center? Special resources for students with learning differences?
- Are honorary and professional societies are sponsored? (Phi Beta Kappa, etc)
- What courses are open to freshmen? What courses are required? Which are electives? When can you take a seminar? Is it easy to get into the courses your want?
- How large are classes? How many are in the introductory biology class? Introductory psychology?, etc.

- What does the college consider to be its strengths? What does the college consider to be its weaknesses?

Student Body

- Where does the student body come from? Is there racial, cultural and socio-economic diversity? Is there genuine institutional support for a diverse student body?
- What is the ratio of men to women? What percentage actually graduate in four years? Five years?
- What percentage of seniors go on to graduate school? Medical School? Law School? MBA programs? How are graduates employed?

Faculty

- What is the faculty-student ratio? What are considered outstanding departments by students? Who will be teaching the courses you want to take? Is there a published student evaluation of courses and professors?
- Are there advisors and professional counselors available? Are they used?
- Are the professors accessible? Do they post office hours?
- Is the faculty diverse in terms of gender, race and culture?

Extracurricular

- What percentage of the student body is engaged in community service? Is the student body considered to be socially/environmentally/politically conscious? What organizations are the most active?
- How important are fraternities and sororities? What percentage of the student body joins? What is social life like for those who do not join? Is there a House system?
- Are there adequate athletic facilities? Intramural sports? Intercollegiate teams?
- What role do the arts play in campus life? What sort of activities are available outside the classroom?

Once you have found some schools that you like, you will need to decide on the schools to which you will actually apply. On average, students should plan to apply to between six and ten colleges. However, in some circumstances your guidance counselor will suggest that a student apply to more or fewer schools.

Students should apply to several schools in each of the following categories:

- Reach: College and Universities where the majority of admitted candidates have a stronger academic profile than you present. Use admissions statistics (found on college websites, on Naviance, and on College Board, Barron's and Peterson's guide books and websites) as a guideline.
- Match: Colleges and universities where your academic profile falls solidly within the middle 50% of admitted students.
- Safety: Colleges where your academic profile exceeds the statistics of the middle 50% of admitted students.

A couple of notes about making your list:

- You should not apply to colleges that you would not be happy to attend. Your safety schools should be places where you're reasonably confident that you would be admitted AND where you would be happy!
- Keep in mind that admission to any college or university is not guaranteed. It is best to consult with your guidance counselor about which schools should be considered "safety," "match," or "reach" schools.

ESSAYS

The Common Application requires one 250-650 word essay. Furthermore, most colleges will also require additional essays as part of their supplements to the Common Application. The following provides some advice on how to approach this essay. However, no amount of advice replaces thorough, thoughtful editing. Students should plan to produce several drafts of each of their essays before submitting them and should leave time for their guidance counselor, English teacher, and another trusted editing source to provide comments.

The Personal Statement

"The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response." The Common Application

Here are the updated prompts from 2015-16 as an example. Always verify the prompts required for your application year.

- *Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.*
- *The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?*
- *Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?*
- *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 that is 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.*
- *Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.*

Essay writing tips:

- Michelle Hernandez, former admissions officer at Dartmouth, writes in her book *Acing the College Application*, **“The best essays take one small slice of life and expand it into something meaningful.”** She goes on to say, **“The most difficult part of writing the Personal Statement Essay for most students is deciding on a topic. Essays should be deeply personal yet not overly philosophical, and they should attempt to be original (avoid common essay themes like scoring the winning goal to lead your team to victory or how traveling in Europe changed your perspective on life).”**
- Essays that examine one moment in time or one aspect of your life or personality are generally better because they are usually not boring. Many good essays also discuss some aspect of students’ family lives or cultures.
- In terms of essay tone, a good rule of thumb is that, if you were to give your personal statement to your best friend and ask him/her, “Does this sound like me?” the answer should be, “yes.” If you are a serious person, you should write a serious essay. If you are a funny person, you should write a funny essay.

ACTIVITIES/EXTRACURRICULARS

One of the things college admissions offices are looking for in prospective students is commitment not only to academics but also to activities outside of class. This could include school clubs, sports teams, etc., or activities you pursue outside of school like jobs or volunteer work. In fact, the Common Application includes a section that asks applicants to list and describe the activities in which you’ve participated since your freshman year of high school.

Though participation in extracurricular activities is important, you should not feel pressured to spend every single moment outside of classes participating in organized activities, nor should you try to be involved in dozens of extracurricular activities. Rather, colleges want to see that you have pursued several interests to the fullest extent possible. As a freshman in high school, it is advisable to try lots of different activities in order to determine what you like. Then, as you progress through high school, you should narrow down your interests and begin to pursue them in more significant ways—by taking on leadership positions within clubs or by pursuing internships outside of school with organizations related to your fields of interest.

Hernandez writes, of the Activities Section of the Common Application: “The activity list is one of the most crucial parts of the whole application because it establishes the student’s talents, passions, interest level, and impact on his or her local community. The key is depth and breadth, not length. It is far better to have a few passionate interests than scores of low-level

‘joiner’ activities. It should be a forum for briefly explaining any nontraditional or unusual activities, interests, hobbies, work experience, or anything else that takes place outside of the school day. Admissions officers are looking for high-impact students, students who will become very involved in their future college’s campus life and who will be able to influence and lead those around them. They are also looking for extraordinary talent. Think of the activity list as your chance to have a twenty-minute conversation directly with an admissions officer to explain everything you do that is important to you. For those activities that are unusual, you’ll need to give detailed explanations to make clear what your involvement was. The activity list is crucial for students who have significant activities that take place outside of their immediate school environment.”

One word of caution: It is tempting to exaggerate how much time you’ve spent participating in various activities or exaggerating the significance of your role in clubs or projects. However, please avoid doing this. First, doing so is wrong and does not speak to your integrity as an AMSA student and a college applicant. Second, college admissions officers are quite familiar with the academic and extracurricular demands on high schools students, and they are likely to be able to identify exaggerations, which will of course harm your application. As always, honesty and integrity are more important than college admissions.

Helpful Tips for Activities:

- It is a good idea to write out your activities section before you enter them into the common app.
- Colleges like to see consistency of participation, so think carefully about adding activities in which you participated for a semester or for a very short period of time. It is acceptable to leave out activities that were not particularly meaningful to you.
- You should check the “intend to participate in college” box for any activity that you’ve even considered continuing. Colleges want applicants who will be involved in extracurricular activities in college.
- If you have a lot of extracurricular activities, you might also consider adding them in the section of the common app called “Additional Information.” I will help you format this word document, do not repeat activities you have already listed, and do not leave the activities section blank and only attach a resume. Colleges may not even look at the additional information section.
- Remember that the person reading your application won’t necessarily be familiar with some of your activities. This is why it’s good to concisely explain what the activity entails in the “details and accomplishments” section.
- Remember there are 52 weeks in a year, but only 38 weeks in your school year.

TEACHER RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Most colleges require applicants to submit two letters of recommendation from academic teachers (math, science, English, computer science, history, foreign language) of their choosing. The following provides some advice on how to identify the best people to write for you and how to ask for recommendations. Please see the recommendation form (at the end of the handbook); you must fill one out for each teacher writing a letter.

You should plan to ask two teachers of academic subjects to write letters of recommendation for you. It is best to ask these teachers before you leave for summer vacation after junior year.

Who to Choose: The following guidelines will help you to determine which of your teachers is the most appropriate to write your recommendations:

- When the person taught you: It is best to pick teachers who taught you in the 11th or 12th grade. Colleges are interested in hearing from teachers who have taught you in Upper-level courses, since those are most like the courses you'll encounter in college.
- How well the person knows you: In general, you should pick the two teachers who know you the best to write your letters of recommendation. The only time that you might want to deviate from this advice is if you plan to study a particular subject in college but the two teachers with whom you're closest teach subjects that are completely unrelated to that subject. (For example, if you want to study neuroscience but the teachers who know you best teach Spanish and ELA.) The best recommendations are those that are most *specific*, so asking teachers who will be able to offer lots of insights about your strengths as a student and who can give examples of them are the best recommenders.

How to Ask:

- Make sure you request recommendation letters politely: The best way to approach a teacher about writing you a letter of recommendation is to say something like, "Mr. X: I was wondering if you would feel comfortable writing me a strong letter of recommendation for the colleges to which I'll be applying next year?" It is important to ask in this fashion because you want to make sure that you are asking for letters from teachers who considered you to be a good enough student to warrant a strong recommendation. If a teacher is not comfortable writing for you, simply ask another teacher instead. Finally, please do not ask more than two teachers for letters of recommendation. AMSA teachers are very busy, and it is not

respectful of their time to have them write letters of recommendation that you will not use. We strongly recommend that you send colleges **ONLY** two recommendation letters.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews are part of the application process at some—but not all—colleges. In general, the smaller and more selective a school is, the more likely it is to suggest or require interviews. The only way to know whether your college requires or recommends interviews is to look at the school's website and investigate its admissions requirements.

There are two types of college interviews: On-campus interviews and Alumni interviews. On-campus interviews are fairly rare. Only small, liberal-arts college do on-campus interviews, and they are generally optional and occur during the summer between a student's junior and senior year of high school. Alumni interviews are more common and generally take place after a student has applied to a particular college. At that point, the student will generally be contacted by an alumnus from the school to schedule an interview.

Though they can be intimidating, interviews are often mostly helpful to students' applications and are rarely harmful. They also tend to be more informal than job interviews. The purpose of the interviews is to get a sense of a student's personality, interests, and passions, and to give him or her an opportunity to ask questions about a particular college. Essentially, interviews allow applicants to showcase for colleges what does not come across in a paper application.

The following are a list of typical interview questions and some tips for making the best possible impression of an interviewer:

Typical Interview Questions:

- Why are you interested in attending (name of school)?
- What's the last book you read, and what did you think of it?
- What is your favorite subject in school?
- Who has been most influential in your life?
- What are some college majors you're considering?
- What extracurricular activity has been most meaningful to you?
- Could you please describe a time that you had to overcome a challenge?
- How do you manage your time?
- What types of extracurricular activities are you interested in pursuing in college?
- Could you tell me a little bit about your family and how your family has affected your high school experience?

- What do you think is the most significant contribution you would make to a college campus?
- What are three words that your friends would use to describe you?
- What do you do when you have free time?

Tips to Remember for Making a Good Impression on your Interviewer:

- If you visit a school, check before arriving on campus if the school's admissions office does evaluative interviews. If it does, then you could try to schedule one to coincide with your visit.
- It's important to show interest in the school for which you're interviewing. You want to be yourself—but a slightly more excited and personable version of yourself!
- Remember to be polite—shake the interviewer's hand firmly when you meet him or her, introduce yourself, and make eye contact during the interview. Also, if an alumni interviewer contacts you via email or telephone, be polite when corresponding, and be sure to get back to the interviewer promptly.
- Practice your answers to the frequently-asked questions. It's likely that several of them—or questions very similar to them—will come up, and if you have rehearsed your answers, you will feel more comfortable during the interview. (Note: Don't MEMORIZE answers to the questions—you don't want to seem like you've rehearsed—but rather make note of some of the things you would mention if you were asked a particular type of question)
- Have a list of good questions ready for the interviewer. Try to avoid asking questions whose answers are obvious or are available on the website (so don't ask something like, "Does Haverford offer engineering?") Instead, ask more nuanced questions (something like "Do most students study abroad, and what support does the university offer for students who want to study internationally?") If the person interviewing you is an alum of the school, you should feel free to ask him or her questions about his or her own experiences at the school.
- After your interview, it's nice to send the interviewer a short, hand-written thank-you note.
- Make sure you do some research about the school before your interview. You don't need to spend days doing this, but make sure you're familiar with the majors the school offers, where it's located, etc. It's even better if you can speak comfortably about something at the school that you're excited about—for example, a club or a particular course you could take.
- Dress professionally. For boys, khaki or dress pants and a button-down shirt are appropriate, and for girls dress pants or a skirt and a dress shirt or sweater. You want to look put-together but not overly fancy.
- Sometimes, if you are having an interview with an alum of a school, he or she will ask you to meet at a coffee shop or at his or her office. Take the location of the interview

- into account when you decide what to wear. Also make sure that you know how to get to where you're meeting and that you are on time.
- Avoid being critical of other people (especially your parents or your teachers) in the interview. You don't have to rave about them, but if you say negative things you can come across as ungrateful.
 - Most importantly, BE YOURSELF. The purpose of the interview is to get to know what your personality is like and to understand who you are outside of your application. Remember that there are no right and wrong answers to any of the questions the interviewer asks you, so don't get stressed out if someone asks you what you think is a difficult question. Remain calm, and do the best you can to be true to who you are.

VISITING COLLEGE CAMPUSES

A guide book or college website might suggest that a certain college is right for you, but the only way to really tell whether you'll be happy on a college campus is to see it in person. It is completely acceptable to leave some of your college visits for your senior spring, once you know where you have been admitted. However, the College Counseling Office strongly recommends that you visit at least a few of the schools to which you think you might apply. One reason for this is that Admissions Offices keep records of which students have visited campus, and they will consider this while reviewing your application. Students who have visited campus sometimes seem more serious about attending a particular college.

While you are on your visits, pay careful attention to how you feel. Many students report getting very strong positive or negative feeling about a college while they visited, and you would not want to attend a college where you don't feel comfortable and happy on campus.

In general, a college visit will include both an Information Session and a campus tour. Sometimes, however, a college might allow you to schedule an on-campus interview while you are visiting. For this reason, it is sometimes a good idea to contact the Admissions Office or visit the school's website before your visit to let them know that you'll be coming to campus and to see what sorts of activities they recommend that you participate in while there.

Finally, it is a good idea to speak to current students while you are on campus. You might stop a few students and ask them what they like or dislike about the school. You could also ask the students for recommendations of restaurants so you can get a sense of where students typically eat and hang out.

EARLY APPLICATIONS

In some cases, applying to college early can maximize a student's chances of being admitted or can make the college application process less stressful. However, understanding the various early application options can be confusing. The AMSA Counseling Office is happy to help you understand the early application policies at the schools where you apply. Make sure you fully understand these policies before you send in your applications!

The following provides an overview of some of the more common early policies:

- ❖ **Early Decision:** Applications are generally due November 1 of senior year and are binding. For the student, this means that if you can narrow your choices down to one school and you apply under early decision, you must attend the college if you are admitted.
- ❖ **Early Action:** Early Action applications are non-binding, so students can apply to more than one school Early Action and can wait until May to decide which school to attend.
- ❖ **Restricted Early Action/Single Choice:** This is a type of early action program that requires that students apply to only ONE early action school. However, it is non-binding, so if a student is admitted early action single choice, he or she can still apply to other schools regular decision and does not have to attend the early action school.

Here are a few things to keep in mind about early applications:

- It is important to make sure, if you decide to submit early applications, that you have put the necessary amount of work and preparation into your applications in the early autumn of your senior year. If you rush through your early applications and do not submit your best work, you will have to submit sub-par applications to all of your schools, which will diminish your chances of admission. In general, it is better to submit your best work in a regular-decision application than to submit careless work early.
- Second, it is essential that you understand completely your schools' early application policies. You MAY NOT submit more than one early application if you choose to apply anywhere early decision or early action single choice. This is non-negotiable, and the College Counseling Office will notify your colleges should you knowingly violate their early decision policies.
- Should you choose to apply to a college early decision, make sure that you are certain that it is your favorite school, and that you are prepared to attend should you be admitted. This means that you also agree to accept whatever financial aid package the school offers.
- If you do a good job of getting organized early (writing your personal statement during the summer before senior year, making your list and visiting schools before senior year) then you should be in a good position to apply early action to several of your schools. If

you feel prepared to do so, we recommend that you submit early action applications because it may improve your chances to being admitted to certain schools, and it can make the remainder of your senior year less stressful.

As with all parts of the college application process, your guidance counselor is happy to help you develop a strategy for whether and where to apply early!

FINANCIAL AID

The Guidance Office will provide detailed information about applying for financial aid and merit scholarships. However, the following are several important pieces of information about financing your college education.

- **College is expensive!** Many private colleges cost \$50,000 per year or more, including tuition and room and board. In general, however, the more expensive the school, the more likely the institution is to offer generous financial aid.
- **Students' eligibility for financial aid is determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** which students and families complete in the winter of senior year as well as, in some cases, the College Scholarship Services (CSS) profile. Both these forms require students and families to answer questions about family income and assets in order to determine how much each family is expected to contribute to a student's college education.
- **The majority of financial aid students receive comes from their colleges—not from private scholarships**, which are extremely competitive and often cannot cover the majority of the costs associated with attending college.
 - The majority of aid offered by colleges is need-based. This means it is based upon your family's income and assets. This does not mean that you will not receive any aid if your family is middle- or upper-middle class. However, you should not necessarily expect to receive very much aid if this is the case in your family.
 - **Many colleges have merit-based scholarships** that can offset many of the costs of attendance. However, the deadlines for these scholarships are often in the fall. It is important to check these deadlines and adhere to them if you hope to be considered for merit-based scholarships.
- **Financial aid can be unpredictable.** Students may receive generous financial aid from one institution and very little aid from another, comparable institution.
- In general, we recommend that students follow our directives to apply to 6-10 schools. Do not disregard any schools because of cost, but **make sure you apply to at least one or two "financial aid safety schools"**—where you know you will be able to afford the

cost of attendance (for example, you might apply to several Massachusetts public colleges because their tuition prices are smaller).

- **Have a candid conversation as a family BEFORE senior year.** Colleges consider paying for college to be a family responsibility, but it is each family's prerogative to determine how much they want or are able to pay for college. Many families may also decide that they will be willing to pay for some schools but not others. Having a serious discussion about these decisions, and sharing this information with your college counselors can help to make your college application process smoother. (Of course, families are never required to divulge private financial information)

SCHOLARSHIPS

Below you will find several resources where information about scholarships can be found. Be sure to thoroughly investigate all options.

Stay organized! Many scholarship applications will require you to submit:

- ✓ Official high school transcript
- ✓ Letter (s) of recommendation
- ✓ Copy of the *Student Aid Report* from your FAFSA form (for need-based scholarships)
- ✓ Essay (depends on scholarship)
- ✓ List of extracurricular activities (use Activities section of common application)

Naviance

1. First, we would like you to fill out the **Scholarship Form**. Login to your Naviance account, click the "About Me" tab, and then find the **Scholarship Form** on the left side of the page. Please complete this survey as soon as possible it will help you apply to most scholarships.
2. Next step, click the "Colleges" tab and scroll down to "scholarship list." This list contains local and national scholarships, amount awarded, deadlines, links to the scholarship's website, and/or the scholarship application in a document or PDF (some require applications to be printed and mailed to the scholarship committee). However, this year many applications are online.
 - ❖ The scholarship list is constantly being updated so check regularly!
 - ❖ Remember Naviance /AMSA Guidance is just one tool to help you with your scholarship search. This list should help you think of other places to look for scholarships.

Local Scholarships

- In general, the smaller the geographical area a scholarship covers, the better your chances of getting one.
- Explore categories you might not have considered, such as religious, community service, fraternal, military, union, banks, credit unions, professional and local organizations.
- Don't forget your parents! Many large companies offer scholarships or tuition programs for children and employees.
- Do not overlook student jobs. Employers such as fast-food chains, department stores, and supermarkets often award scholarships.

Institutional Scholarships

- Research what kinds of scholarships are available at the schools you are interested in.
- Explore college websites and financial aid offices for this information
- Eligibility for scholarships can be based on merit, financial need, intended major, ethnicity, or a variety of other factors.

Free Scholarship Search Services

- A scholarship search company collects information on hundreds of awards and compares your student characteristics with scholarship restrictions. Based on your answers to a questionnaire, you will receive a list of possible scholarships, as well as email notifications.

IMPORTANT: Watch out for scams that charge you for information that's available for free.
You should never have to pay for scholarship information or applications!

Helpful Websites:

www.fastweb.com

www.collegeboard.com

www.scholarships.com

www.studentscholarships.com

www.southernnewengland.aaa.com/sne/student/index.php

OPTIONS TO CONSIDER (If college is not your next stop)

As a counseling department, we realize that an immediate transition to college after graduation is not the perfect fit for all students. It is our hope to express as many possibilities and positive options to students as they plan the next phase of their lives and careers.

Students interested in alternatives to college and a year between graduation and college (Gap Year) range greatly in ability and academic stature and our message to them is: **there are many alternatives that can be very fulfilling and enriching experiences.** These experiences can be as varied as your imagination allows and can help create a greater sense of self as you prepare for the job world or for future schooling.

College admissions officers often look favorably on an alternative year between high school and college, feeling it can help a person develop into the kind of student who can take good advantage of what their school has to offer. Some of the aspects of an alternative year that can contribute to an individual's growth are: an additional year of maturing, a hands-on learning experience, the experience of living away from home and experience in dealing with different kinds of people and situations. These skills are equally attractive to employers for those students who choose to transition directly into the world of work.

So, what are these alternative year options? The list is long, and research is the only sure way to make the right fit, but here are some ideas and programs to get started:

City Year <http://www.cityyear.org/joincorps>

- ten month full-time community service
- stipend provided
- various learning environments in the United States

AmeriCorps <http://www.americorps.org>

- one year full or part time volunteer commitment
- local opportunities as well as throughout the United States
- leadership skills focus

Experiment in International Living <http://www.experiment.org>

- programs available in 26 countries around the world
- 3-5 week programs
- community service, language study, travel
- placement with a host family

American Field Service (AFS) <http://www.afs.org>

- International and intercultural learning experiences
- 140 programs available in 46 countries
- programs for individuals ages 15-24
- host family placement
- community service
- year, semester and summer programs available

School for Field Studies www.fieldstudies.org

- environmental field studies abroad
- programs in 6 countries
- semester and summer programs available

National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) www.nols.edu

- 10 day to full semester courses
- travel abroad or in the United States

Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) www.outdoors.org

- outdoor survival skill and environmental seminars
- one day to one week programs
- many New England based programs available year-round

Military service options

- Military academy information
- Enlistment
- Reserve Officers Training (ROTC) in any branch while attending college

Trade School information

- Beauty schools • Electrician
- Auto repair • Plumbing
- Transportation • Culinary Arts

13th Year/Post Graduate Year/Preparatory Schools

- See Guidance Counselor for information on schools that offer PG years

Internet Job Searches

- www.careerplacejobs.com, www.occupationaloutlook.com, Naviance/Careers

Planned Alternative Year

- *Dynamy* and *Time Out Associates* are two examples of businesses that specialize in preparing individual experiences for their paying clients. Their staffs will help you explore options that will cater to your personality and desires and then help you through the application and preparation process.

Sample Resume

Having a resume can be a helpful tool when you are filling out your applications, or if you are applying for a job or internship position. Resumes vary greatly, but here is a sample to give you an idea:

Student Name

Address • Phone Number • [Email](#)

EDUCATION ***Advanced Math and Science Academy Charter School***, Marlborough, MA
Date of Graduation: June 9, 2017
GPA:
List any college acceptances, anticipated major/minor
List any school awards won, academic distinctions

WORK EXPERIENCE

Employer, Location (*dates of employment—list in order or most recent*)
Job Title

- Briefly describe your duties, bullet format

Employer, Location (*dates of employment—list in order or most recent*)
Job Title

- Briefly describe your duties, bullet format
-

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Organization Name, Location (*dates you volunteered—list in order or most recent*)
Title/Role at the organization

- Briefly describe your role, bullet format
-

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Activity, Location (*dates you participated—list in order or most recent*)

- Briefly describe what the activity entails, position, awards, etc.
-

INTERESTS

Interests/Hobbies

- Description

Sample Letter to Collegiate Athletic Coach

Dear Coach _____:

I am a junior/senior at Advanced Math and Science Academy (AMSA), where I am a member of the _____ team. I also play for (any outside league or team). My (sport) achievements are as follows:

AMSA Varsity Soccer:

- Senior Year: Captain, Starting Midfielder
- Junior Year: Starting midfielder; 2nd leading goal scorer with 8 goals; led team with 12 assists; First Team All Shoreline; Team Record: 11-2-2; Class S State Champions
- Sophomore Year:
- Freshman Year:

East Side Kickers (Select Travel Team):

- Grades 10, 11, 12
- Starting Midfielder, etc....

Camps Attended:

- Williams College Soccer Camp, June, 20XX

My grade point average is 3.5, and I am taking AP English, AP etc. (If you are a junior, mention what you are currently taking and what you will take senior year.) My SAT score is 1780. (Mention SAT II's if the college is very competitive or if you have strong scores.) I was inducted into the National Honor Society as a junior and have been active in my school community (list clubs/activities).

I would like to be considered as a student athlete at (college name), and hope that you will be able to send me some information on your program. I also hope to be visiting your campus and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you if you think I might be a good fit for your program.

Sincerely,

(Your full name)

Helpful Websites

- **ACT**, www.act.org: use to register and send ACT test and score reports
- **College Board**, www.collegeboard.org: use to register for SATs, send score reports to colleges
- **Financial Aid Applications**
 - **FAFSA**, <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> is usually the only aid application that most families need to complete
 - **CSS/Profile**, www.collegeboard.org required in addition to the FAFSA for mostly private schools (used by some public universities such as: UNC, U. Arizona, U. Michigan, UVA)
- **EFC (expected family contribution) & Net Price Calculator**
 - College Board's BigFuture website, www.bigfuture.org: go to "Pay for College" then "Tools & Calculators"
 - COLLEGEdata website, www.collegedata.org: another useful online resource
- **Scholarship search sites:**
 - Merit Aid, www.meritaid.com
 - Fastweb, www.fastweb.com
 - ScholarPRO, www.scholarpro.com
 - Scholarships.com, www.scholarships.com
- **Colleges That Change Lives**, www.ctcl.org a book and website that highlights 40 liberal arts colleges (both private and public)
- **College Navigator**, <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>, fueled by the U.S. Department of Education's monster database
- **Forbes magazine's college rankings** <http://www.forbes.com/top-colleges/list/>, more impressive than US News & World Report's rankings
- **The Center for college Affordability and Productivity**, www.centerforcollegeaffordability.org
- **College Results Online**, www.collegeresults.org, a service of the Education Trust and a great source to check any school's graduation rates, and to generate lists of comparable schools

- **Unigo** (www.unigo.com) and **College Prowler** (www.collegeproowler.com), provide comments, reviews, and videos from current students who share their opinions about their schools
- **College Majors 101**, www.collegemajors101.com wonderful resource to research college majors
- **College Week Live**, www.collegeweeklive.com live streaming video presentations with hundreds of schools worldwide
- **Virtual School Visits**: many schools provide virtual tours on their websites, or you can go to www.YOUUniversityTV.com which provides videos of many schools