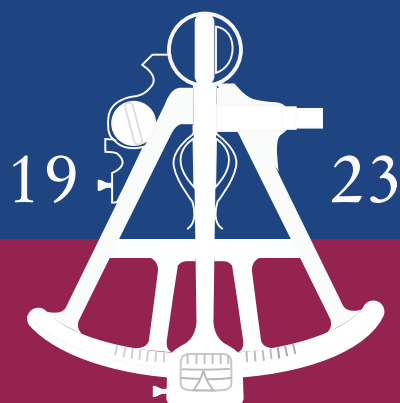


Navigating the College Process



Belmont Hill School
2020-2021



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NAVIGATING THE COLLEGE PROCESS

Belmont Hill College Counseling Handbook

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INTRODUCTION: NAVIGATING THE COLLEGE PROCESS

During the next eighteen months, you and your family will take an exciting excursion into your future: you will learn about colleges, visit them, apply to them, and by May 1, 2021 enroll in one of them. But before you can make important decisions about your future, you must revisit your past and take stock of your present. Consider this handbook your guide to the process that will take you back into your personal history as well as deeper into your present – then ultimately deposit you at the threshold of your future.

At Belmont Hill, we have three guiding principles in the college selection process. First, we believe in keeping college admission firmly in perspective: college is only the next step – not the last one or even necessarily the most important one – in your education and life. Second, we believe that the process is most productive when the student takes the lead, placing parents in supportive roles as determined by the family. Finally, the college counselors at Belmont Hill are best understood as match-makers who seek to match each boy with colleges that best meet his needs and interests.

With these three principles in mind and a spirit of adventure in your heart, you will find new opportunities and wisdom in the months ahead.



BELMONT HILL COLLEGE COUNSELING EXPECTATIONS, POLICIES AND ETHICS

EXPECTATIONS

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THE COLLEGE COUNSELING OFFICE:

- The four most important responsibilities of college counselors are to help students match colleges to their needs and wishes, to help students understand their realistic chances of admission to a variety of colleges, to help students understand how best to present themselves as college admissions candidates, and to advocate for students during colleges' candidate evaluation periods.
- Counselors are available to facilitate the college selection and application process.
- Counselors are available to support and counsel families throughout the college research, selection, and application process.
- Counselors arrange informative meetings for the school community, as needed.
- Counselors meet regularly with students and, less frequently, with parents, and are available by telephone and email and personal office visit to answer students' and parents' questions and address their concerns.
- Counselors schedule and publicize college representatives' visits to Belmont Hill.
- Counselors write a positive, thorough, and honest statement about each student on behalf of Belmont Hill School.
- Counselors manage the transmitting of school support materials for each student's applications to colleges: the student's transcript, the Belmont Hill Secondary School Report (including the counselor's statement), the teacher recommendations, and the Belmont Hill School Profile.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF STUDENTS:

- Students are to complete college office assignments, meet deadlines, and update their SCOIR pages.
- Students are to undertake the researching and exploration of colleges through exploring the colleges' websites, reading, visiting, and talking.
- Students are to take responsibility for attending an appropriate number of visits by college representatives in the fall. They are to determine what classes they can miss without jeopardizing their schoolwork and to ask a teacher's permission three days ahead to miss class for a college representative's visit.

Students are to identify and apply to at least three "likely" colleges where they have a strong statistical possibility of being admitted and where they believe they will be happy.

- Students are to take responsibility for knowing colleges' deadlines and requirements.
- Students are to register for standardized tests and have their scores sent to colleges.
- Students are to keep college counselors informed of developments in their college process and plans.
- Students are to be ethical in their application practices: each application should be the work of the student, and it should accurately reflect the student's life and work. Students must answer truthfully any questions about their disciplinary history.

HOW PARENTS CAN BE HELPFUL:

- We encourage parents to be as open as possible with their sons in discussing college plans, including tangible issues like finances and logistics, as well as less tangible factors such as a parent's emotions about the family changes ahead and a parent's own experiences with college admission and attendance (or lack of it).
- We encourage parents to educate themselves about contemporary college admissions pressures so that they can be a productive and realistic support system for their son.
- We believe that parents do well to be encouraging and supportive in the college process, but they should make college applications the student's responsibility as much as possible. Ask your son how he would like you to help, perhaps by making a calendar or college file, or by making arrangements for college visits or registering him for standardized tests. As best you can, follow your son's lead.
- Parents are asked to support an ethical approach to college admission.
- We expect parents to take time to complete the Parent Questionnaire before we begin meeting with their son. Parents know their children better than anyone else does, and their knowledge helps the college counselors.
- Parents must take responsibility for filling out financial aid forms such as the FAFSA and the CSS Profile. The college counselors are available to advise and support.

POLICIES

- No teacher, administrator, or staff person is to show any student a recommendation written about him, or about any other student. This policy gives Belmont Hill significant credibility with colleges. Students can trust their college counselors and teachers to be positive in their recommendations.
- Students are to do their own work on applications. They may – and should – ask a trusted teacher or parent or peer to help with proof-reading, but they should be the authors of essays, and they should fill out all information in applications.
- Belmont Hill will not support students in any unethical dealings with colleges: failing to comply with an Early Decision or athletic agreement, getting unethical help with an application, misrepresenting any aspect of the high school record (including disciplinary or honor offenses), double-depositing in May (officially enrolling in more than one college) – such actions and others like them may be considered a breach of the school's Honor Code and could result in disciplinary action.

ETHICS

BREACHES OF ETHICS BY APPLICANTS

Any breach of the following ethical principles by the applicant or enrollee, or by the secondary school that sponsors his application, may result in a college's withdrawal of an offer of admission.

- A student must abide by the provisions of an Early Decision, Restrictive Early Action, or Early Action plan. The one exception to this rule involves a financial aid award that does not meet the student's need. In this case the student and college counselor should work together with the college financial aid office to arrive at a resolution.
- By May 1, a student must make or retain a deposit and promise to enroll at no more than **one** college. Students may, however, retain a place on another college's wait list after promising to enroll at a college.
- Belmont Hill must report certain changes in status that develop for a college admission candidate or admitted student. Occurrences that qualify as reportable "changes in status" include but are not limited to: honor offenses, significant disciplinary action, failure to qualify for graduation, and convictions and other legal offenses. This ethical obligation continues through a student's senior year until graduation. In some cases, a student's change in curriculum necessitates reporting to colleges.

BREACHES OF ETHICS BY COLLEGES

Any breach of the following ethical principles by a college may result in the college's dismissal from the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC). Please alert your college counselors if you notice any unethical college practice.

- When accepting a student, no college may require a deposit or commitment from the student before May 1, except in the case of binding Early Decision applicants. If a college states or implies that you must make a deposit or commitment in order to hold your place in a class, make a request in writing for a deposit deferral until May 1. (A college may require a housing deposit before May 1, however.)
- A college may not officially accept a student before the student has officially applied to the college.
- A college may not require a deposit or commitment from a student in order to retain a place on a waiting list.

THE JUNIOR QUESTIONNAIRE AND PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

At the end of first semester exams, members of Form V are asked to fill out a multi-page questionnaire that leads them through some of the introspection that serves students well in the college process. Juniors who take the most care with this project do themselves double service: they look inward and also begin communicating outwardly about their life, and they provide important information to their college counselor, whose statement to colleges about each senior is an important part of Belmont Hill's college advocacy for students. Parents are asked to complete a different Parent Questionnaire before their son's first meeting with his counselor.

THE STUDENT RÉSUMÉ

At the same time that juniors complete their questionnaire, they are asked to produce a résumé. This document will be useful on a number of occasions through the second half of junior year, the summer that follows, and senior year. Students should take care to represent themselves effectively and should update the résumé regularly through the coming months.

COLLEGE CONFERENCES

Students have four official conferences with their college counselor between January of junior year and December of senior year. Parents may request a conference with the college counselor at any time after the student's first conference. Though the conferences vary according to the interests of students, the primary purpose of each conference is as follows:

- First conference, between late January and spring break: In this get-to-know-you conference, the conversation turns to college only near the end. The counselor's goals are to check in on several elements of the college search (standardized testing, athletic aspirations, and more) and to get a sense of the student's personality, interests, wishes, and goals.
- Second conference, between spring break and commencement: Because most juniors now have an SAT or ACT in hand, junior year grades are getting closer to their final form, and most students have visited a few colleges, the counselor and student can work more seriously with the college list in this meeting. The counselor and student explore SCOIR "scattergrams" together in an effort to be sure that students are realistic in their college lists, and they talk about which college programs will best suit their interests and needs. During and soon after this conference, the counselor will enter a list of colleges in his account on SCOIR; this list should be seen as a starter list.
- Third conference, in September: In this meeting, students update their college counselor on events of the summer and their current feelings about college. With a cumulative GPA now available, senior year courses on the transcripts, and final admissions results for the previous year, it's time for serious "reality checks" on the SCOIR scattergrams and a final sorting of colleges into categories of "Likely," "Target," and "Reach." Final decisions about Early Action and Early Decision should be close to complete or almost complete, and the final college list, due in mid October, should almost be ready.
- Fourth conference, in November: This meeting will be used to plan subsequent strategy following early application notifications.

TAKING YOUR HISTORY INTO THE FUTURE

During the summer, on their own or in the College App Express class, rising seniors complete a Common Application, due as school begins. This assignment is the most important one of the process, and those students who have made the most of their questionnaire, résumé, and conferences will be most ready to do an effective job on their application. A senior's college counselor reviews each Common Application and works with students to help them discover where they have and have not represented themselves as their true best selves. In some cases, students are asked to revise and correct parts of the application. Finally, with an effective complete application in hand, it's time for students to finalize their college applications and list.

HOW TO EVALUATE COLLEGES

Second semester of junior year is the time to begin researching colleges in earnest. Here are some tips for doing a thorough and effective job.

INFORM YOURSELF Read...think...talk...visit...**BUT...**

- Don't...read silly websites and tabloids instead of college websites and catalogues.
- Don't...think about glamour and prestige instead of good matches and programs.
- Don't...talk to college "gossips" instead of knowledgeable people you can trust.
- Don't...visit only the most highly selective colleges instead of a variety.

THINK ABOUT WHO YOU ARE and what works well for you now.

- If you thrive in small classes, don't apply to enormous universities.
- If you are a joiner and a doer, apply to lively campuses with lots going on.
- If you love close campus communities, be careful about applying to urban schools.
- If you want specific research opportunities, do apply to universities that offer them.
- And so on...

INTANGIBLE BUT VERY IMPORTANT Does the atmosphere of this institution appeal to you? Would you enjoy living here, with these people, for four years?

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS ABOUT COLLEGES Some ideas...

Student Enrollment

- How many undergraduates? Graduates? Size of freshman class?
- Retention: % of freshmen who return for sophomore year, and % who graduate in 4 (or 5 or 6) years?
- Other statistics: Male/female ratio, % commuter/resident, geographic origin, % underrepresented minority, % on financial aid?

Location and Environment

- Region of the country, urban/suburban/rural setting, nearest city, transportation issues, recreational opportunities?
- Facilities: library, labs, study and practice rooms, fitness center, athletic facilities, art studios, theater?

College Mission and Philosophy

- Religious, public, private, Historically Black, college, university?
- Mission: Liberal arts, engineering, conservatory, fine arts, degrees awarded?
- Philosophy: traditional/progressive, scholarly/pre-professional?
- Calendar: semester, trimester, quarter, block. Inter-term? Co-op?

Curriculum

- Academic requirements: core, distribution, open course selection?
- Departmental style: disciplines, inter-disciplinary, majors, minors?

-
- Independent Study: individual tutorials, seminars, research opportunities?
 - Special study programs: field work, internships, exchange programs, study abroad, joint degree programs, cooperative work, pre-professional programs or advising?
 - Standards: accreditation, degree requirements, grading system, honor system?

Admissions

- Deadlines: application, financial aid, special scholarships, decision notification?
- Application requirements: fee, information forms, specific high school courses, recommendations, interview, supplements?
- SAT/ACT/SAT Subject Tests: requirements and deadlines?
- Admission selectivity: % of applicants offered admission, Belmont Hill admissions history (see Naviance), average scores and GPAs of admitted students, % of admitted students in top 10% of class (top 25%)?
- Financial aid: Need-blind or need-sensitive, merit scholarships?
- Legacies: does legacy status affect admission?

Academic Environment

- Faculty: % of full professors who teach, teaching course-load for professors, expectations for teaching/scholarship/advising and other college service, emphasis on undergraduate teaching?
- Faculty-student relationships: faculty-student ratio, advising system, committees with student representatives, accessibility of faculty to students, class size, % of classes with fewer than 20 students/over 50 students, opportunities for discussion/student presentation/exchange of ideas?
- Academic demands: workload, course expectations, types of assignments, academic pressure, competitive or collaborative student style?
- Intellectual vitality: students' attitudes toward learning, interest in intellectual, cultural, political, world issues?
- Career preparation: pre-professional programs, career advising and information programs, % of students who go on to graduate school, graduate and job placement success rate?

Campus and Student Life

- Student culture: balance of mainstream and counter-culture, responses to diversity and differences, importance of money and social standing?
- Student community: homogeneous or pluralistic, cohesive or fragmented, school spirit, support of athletic and artistic events, controversial campus issues, political and social climate, campus regulations?
- Living arrangements: residence halls, availability of singles/doubles/suites/ apartment-style housing, roommate selection, dining facilities, single sex/coed dorms, guaranteed housing?
- Campus activities: fraternities and sororities (and their dominance or not), club and intramural sports, clubs, religious and ethnic social groups?

Costs And Financial Aid

- Costs: look at the "student budget" (the comprehensive cost for a year) and the average total debt upon graduation; use the Net Price Calculator if you seek financial aid.
- Financial aid: awards, grants, loans, job expectations, work opportunities, forms required and deadlines?

HOW COLLEGES EVALUATE YOU

An admission officer's first impression of you comes from the look and content of your application. Does it show that you care about this college? That you know how to put together a correct and effective application? That you can write well? That you took time to proof-read carefully? If your application is sloppy or incomplete, you won't make it to the next stage of the process, which involves the college's evaluation of the factors listed below in descending order of importance.

1. **Most important factor: your secondary school record.** This evaluation involves course selection (How rigorous is the curriculum selected by the student?) and grades earned in ninth through first quarter of twelfth grade (for Early Decision/Early Action candidates) or in ninth through first semester of twelfth grade (for Regular Admission candidates). Colleges have various ways of evaluating grades: some calculate a student's GPA according to their own methods, others count the numbers of each letter grade earned, and some employ numerical systems unique to their institutions. Some colleges "weight" grades in advanced or honors academic classes in this calculation; others do not. The school profile includes information about Belmont Hill grading and several charts designed to illustrate the more traditional philosophy of grading at our school, and the college counselor's statement addresses this issue in each student's specific context.
2. **Standardized test scores.** Despite the debates and disclaimers, many colleges continue to rely on standardized test scores to predict student performance in college. The larger public universities may be bound to widely publicized admissions formulas that weigh SAT or ACT scores relatively heavily, giving them less flexibility in their use of these tests. Private colleges and universities are less likely to be tied to formulas and may be able to take more time to weigh multiple factors of a student's high school record. As a general rule, private colleges are less likely to eliminate a student on test scores alone. Over 700 colleges now are "test-optional"; they either require no test scores at all or offer an alternative option to scores, such as an application portfolio. Please note: very strong standardized test scores do not compensate for mediocre grades; if you have high scores and low grades, put all of your time and energy into your schoolwork instead of testing and test-preparation.
3. **College Counselor Secondary School Report and statement.** Your college counselor, speaking on behalf of Belmont Hill School, writes a positive, comprehensive statement for each senior. The statement tells a student's high school story, focusing on the student's records, personality, and activities, and making the best case for the student without ignoring difficulties as they appear in the application materials. Though this statement cannot fully compensate for weaknesses in a student's transcript, it can bring the student to life for the admissions committee, interpret Belmont Hill's academic culture and grading system, and explain extenuating circumstances in a student's record. The counselors are careful to observe confidentiality in their statements.
4. **Teacher recommendations & depth of student's excellence in activities.**
Belmont Hill's teachers write thorough, convincing recommendations for students they have taught and worked with outside of class. Like the college counselor's statements, these recommendations cannot compensate for weaknesses but can focus on the positive attributes and accomplishments of students in their classrooms. Do not request more than two recommendations unless you and your college counselor agree that an extra one would strengthen your application.

Colleges are more interested in the quality than the quantity of your extracurricular activities. Two or three substantive clubs, sports, or other activities are enough if you have taken leadership roles, gained expertise, or worked hard on projects. Do not try to put together a long list of inactive clubs in order to seem to be a school leader.

5. **The essay.** Though the essay rarely gets a student into college or keeps a student out, it is your chance to distinguish yourself in the committee's eyes. You have an opportunity to make a good impression with your writing skills and your appealing story. Find one or two knowledgeable advisors for this project (ignore all the others who are eager to tell you what to write), and use a good proof-reader! Take advantage of the essay writing workshop that will take place at BH in the spring of junior year.
6. **Employment, summer experiences, community service, exchange programs, and more** may get you some attention, depending on their various merits and your achievements in them.
7. **Demonstrate interest.** At many schools, a campus visit, or lack thereof, will be a factor in a student's overall evaluation. Be sure to visit a wide range of schools, but especially your "likely" and "target" schools.

Of varying weight and value:

"Hooks." If you are lucky enough to have a quality or ability that has been designated one of a college's top institutional needs or priorities – athletic ability, legacy status, geographical and other kinds of diversity, financial significance to the college, and more – you may have a "hook" that gets you extra attention and even admission. Beware of taking a hook for granted, however, and note that ineffectual attempts to put pressure or pull strings can backfire and actually hurt your candidacy.

Interviews. The interview may count heavily or not at all; read your colleges' materials carefully. Some colleges require evaluative interviews for all serious applicants; at the other end of the spectrum are colleges that do not interview any applicants at all. Some interviews are evaluative (having importance to the college in evaluating you as a candidate) and some are informative (having importance to the college as a marketing tool). Most colleges are candid about the ways they use interviews; check the websites and college materials. Colleges hold interviews at different times of the year and the application process; check with admissions offices about the procedures and the timing. Take advantage of the interview workshop in the fall of senior year at BH.

Supplemental essays (for Common Application colleges). Many, but not all, Common Application colleges require one or more extra essays that are institution-specific. These essays are very important: admissions committees will use them to evaluate your level of interest in their college and your ability to write and think well about a variety of topics. Take care to be very specific about your reasons for applying to the college; if one of your reasons could be applied to many colleges (you like cities, you want a liberal arts college, you want a lively campus), you have not looked closely enough at the college's website. Mention one or more specific academic programs and extracurricular programs and groups by name, and link them to interests you have highlighted in the rest of your application.

Disciplinary offenses. If your application asks a question about disciplinary and criminal offenses, you must answer it honestly. Look carefully at the wording of the question, and if you are not certain whether or not it applies to you, check with your college counselor. If it does, you should not only answer "yes," but also write a letter explaining the details of the offense, the punishment assigned to you, and the lessons you learned from the incident. Go over the letter with your counselor and give a copy to Mr. Bradley for his files. Belmont Hill will write a letter about the incident as well. A disciplinary incident may or may not play a significant role in the college's evaluation of you, but if you lie about the incident, that could disqualify you altogether.

A graded academic essay from one of your high school classes. Some colleges require you to submit an analytical essay *with the grade and your teacher's comments on it*. For this reason, it's good to save an appropriate one from one of your junior year academic classes.

Additional recommendations. Only rarely does an extra recommendation help your cause, and it can actually weaken your application file.

Art, music, and creative writing portfolios. Some colleges require them, others don't require them but enjoy seeing them, and others ignore them altogether. Some applicants are now using Youtube, Slide Room, and other sites to house their portfolio. An effective portfolio is unlikely to have a negative effect on your candidacy, but ask your college counselor and/or the admissions offices for advice.

COLLEGE RESEARCH ONLINE

*The web's resources are constantly changing;
we hope you will let us know when sites are out of service and
when you find good new sites and tools.*

Websites: General College Admissions Resources

CollegeNet: <http://collegenet.com>

Database of colleges, scholarships, and other academic resources. Online applications, scholarship and financial aid search engines. Link to Barnes and Noble for discount purchase of books, software, and CDs.

College Express: <http://www.collegexpress.com>

Categories: College Search, Admissions, Financial Aid, Student Center, Sports' Source, Parents' Corner. College homepage and financial aid links.

The College Board: www.collegeboard.org

NACAC: <http://www.nacacnet.org>

National Association of College Admissions Counselors' website contains information about college fair calendars, Statement of Principles of Good Practice (code of ethical conduct governing students and colleges in the admissions process), general advice, and a regularly updated list of useful web resources.

Naviance: <http://connection.naviance.com/belmonthill>

Belmont Hill's software for college counseling offers a number of helpful search tools, including *College Search*, *College Lookup*, *College Match*, and *College Compare*. With your college counselor, you can also look at the scattergrams, or graphs, reflecting anonymous admissions history statistics for Belmont Hill and a variety of colleges.

SCOIR: <https://www.scoir.com>

This year, Belmont Hill will introduce Form V students to SCOIR to assist them in their college searches. SCOIR allows students to watch videos of college campuses, hear directly from students at those colleges and explore historical admissions data.

College Board: <http://www.collegeboard.com>

Kaplan Educational Center: <http://www.kaptest.com>

Peterson's Education: <http://www.petersons.com>

Princeton Review: <http://www.princetonreview.com>

Websites: College Views and Tours

Campus Tours: <http://www.campustours.com>

Great source for virtual college tours, webcams, campus maps, college videos, movies, and pictures. The college finder allows you to sort through over 3200 colleges and universities to find schools that are right for you by having you answer questions in a survey in order to narrow down your search. Online applications available as well.

College Visits: <http://www.college-visits.com>

Explore Robert Rummerfield's tour schedule to colleges in various geographic areas. Affordable and helpful. You can call 800-944-2798 or e-mail info@college-visits.com.

<https://www.youvisit.com>

YouVisit offers virtual tours of campuses that you are unable to visit in person.

Websites: Testing

College Board Online: <http://www.collegeboard.com>

Many services and many links.

ACT Online: <http://www.actstudent.org>

Educational Testing Service: <http://www.ets.org>

Mostly information about the SAT, but helpful and interesting.

FairTest: <http://fairtest.org>

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing is an advocacy organization working to end the abuses and flaws of standardized testing and to ensure that the evaluations of students are fair and educationally sound. Also offers a list of the 730+ colleges that have eliminated or minimized the importance of the SAT as an admissions requirement.

Kaplan SAT Review: <http://www.kaptest.com>

Excellent site with many offerings, from an interactive \$350 test prep program to less expensive programs and products.

The Princeton Review: <http://www.princetonreview.com>

Many good products and services—but not associated with Princeton University.

Website: Athletics

NCAA: <http://eligibilitycenter.org>; <https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/>

The National College Athletics Association's information site includes rules and eligibility for the NCAA, comprehensive information about scholarships, recruiting, the clearinghouse, records and statistics of college-level sports, and links to schools by conference, division, and NCAA region. Go to the second address to register as a future Division I or Division II college varsity athlete.

Websites: Financial Aid and Scholarships

Financial Aid: <http://www.finaid.org>

Excellent homepage of links to many financial aid-related sites. The EFC (confidential self-test to estimate your eligibility for financial aid) is a highlight, but there are many other helpful resources, such as a calculator for loan repayment (which can be found at collegeboard.com as well).

<http://www.fastweb.com>

Lots of help, including auto-e-mails that alert you to new scholarship opportunities.

<http://asa.org/plan> - American Student Assistance provides help for Massachusetts residents completing financial aid process.

Nellie Mae: <http://www.nmefoundation.org>

Sallie Mae: <http://www.salliemae.com>

Information on Nellie Mae and Sallie Mae college loans.

Not quite ready?

- (1) Take a post-grad year at a prep school. You may or may not improve your college admissions possibilities with this strategy, but you have a great year in the meantime. Most prep school application deadlines are January 15. This requires visits to campus (often required) and testing be complete and received by the deadline.
- (2) Get into college, then defer matriculation for a year. Most colleges will allow this. During the interim, take a "gap year": go to www.gapyear.com, www.nationalservice.gov, www.cityyear.org, www.dynamy.org, or www.studyabroad.com for ideas.

Plans for gap years should not be communicated to colleges during the college application process, but after a student enrolls in May.

*Many gap year programs require applications during the senior year, so your gap year research and application process should proceed simultaneously with your college research and application process.

CAMPUS VISITS

Campus visits are a crucial component of your college research. A visit gives you important first-hand experience of a particular campus, and as you may not be able to visit every college that interests you, a visit to any one campus can serve as a point of comparison when you read or hear about other campuses. If you decide to apply binding Early Decision to a college, make a special effort to visit the campus before applying.

WHEN TO VISIT

Ideally, you should visit a college when it is in session, so that you can get a feel for campus life and the students who attend. But many high school students must visit colleges in the summer, as the demands of school, sports, and other activities simply do not allow opportunities for many visits during the academic year. Though a summer college visitor loses the opportunity to observe and meet large groups of current students on campus, he gains the opportunity to be more visible to admissions counselors. He may get a chance for an informal chat with a counselor that becomes almost a casual interview, and he will certainly be more memorable from the small summer groups than from the crush of visitors in spring and fall. If you visit during the summer or a college holiday, at least a few current college students will be on campus; talk with admissions people about locating them for a conversation, if you wish (“Are there any science majors on campus today?”). Your campus tour guide will almost certainly be a current student.

Belmont Hill students are expected to complete much of their college visiting before the beginning of the Sixth Form school year, though one or two long fall weekends offer visit opportunities.

HOW TO ARRANGE A VISIT

Most colleges post an electronic RSVP for regular information sessions (group meetings with admissions counselors), campus tours (usually led by current students), other daily or weekly activities, as well as directions to campus, and suggestions for local accommodations. Many of the admissions events do not require or request a reservation, but some do: the internet site usually offers an online registration form for prospective students. Information and reservations are available by telephone as well. Info Session reservations, when needed, can be made a week or ten days ahead of your visit, but allow at least four weeks’ notice for interview appointments (if appropriate), class visits, and overnight stays. Make separate arrangements to meet with coaches or scholarship coordinators or others of interest.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR VISIT

Try not to visit more than two colleges in one day; blur and burn-out can set in.

- ✓ Attend an info session and take a student-led tour at some colleges; feel free to ask about social as well as academic issues. When burn-out threatens, skip the tours and sessions.
- ✓ Visit the dining hall and student center; listen to conversations around you.
- ✓ Wander away from the designated admissions paths and buildings to get a feel for the college’s setting and facilities.
- ✓ Read some bulletin boards, and pick up a recent edition of the college newspaper.
- ✓ If college is in session, visit a class, and consider participating in a hosted overnight program. (Call well in advance to make these arrangements.)
- ✓ Write down some notes immediately after your visit; campuses often blur into each other.

MOST IMPORTANT	Since many schools pay significant attention to demonstrated interest, make sure there is a record of your visit.
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College Research Worksheet

Name of college: _____

Location: _____

Names (if any) of contact persons: _____

Tuition: _____ Room and board: _____

Application fee: _____ Deadlines _____

Size: undergraduates _____ graduates _____

Tests required for admission (and their deadlines): _____

Mid-50% SAT range of accepted students: _____

Accepted students' GPA: _____% in top 10% of class _____% in top 25%

Recommendations _____ Interviews _____ local _____ campus _____

Essays/Supplements _____

Other: _____

Male/female ratio _____ % out-of-state _____

% minority students _____ % international students: _____

Retention: What % of freshmen return for sophomore year? _____

What % of entering freshmen graduate w/in 4 years? _____ 5? _____ 6? _____

Housing/food: _____

Cars on campus? _____ Parking? _____

Financial aid deadline: _____ % receiving aid: _____

FAFSA needed? _____ CSS PROFILE needed? _____ Deadlines? _____

Academic requirements (core courses? Course distribution?) _____

Social organizations: _____

**YOUR SECRET WEAPON:
NOTES FROM THE COLLEGE VISITS**

Most of your colleges will require you to complete a Supplement to the Common Application, and it will be specific to the college that requires it. Most often, you will have to write one more essay on the topic, **“Why are you applying to Our College?”**

Answering this question well can make the difference in a college’s admissions decision.

Get a head start on your answer by filling out this form during or immediately after your campus visit, because colleges begin to blur together in your mind as time and visits go by. Enlist your parent or other companion(s) to help you ask and listen.

Name of college: _____

Names of people:

An admissions person you met/who spoke _____

Your tour guide _____

A student or prof who unlocked a room for you (etc.) _____

Other _____

Names of academic majors or programs:

An appealing major _____

An intriguing program (Ethics & Biology, etc.) _____

An especially popular course _____

An unusual study-abroad program _____

Other _____

Extracurricular activities (sports, singing groups, etc.):

An activity that extends one you’re doing _____

A new activity you’d love to try _____

Other _____

The campus:

A striking facility _____

An ingenious design (inviting library, freshman commons, theme house, etc.) _____

An appealing tradition _____

Your fun favorites (the statue of the Donnie Darko rabbit on Wash U’s campus, or an outdoor classroom, or a huge tree that dominates the front lawn, or the “scream” tradition at Columbia, or Trinity’s community service in town, or the Freshman Seminar courses, etc.)

THE COLLEGE LIST

CREATING A WELL-ROUNDED LIST

The key word in creating a final college list of colleges is BALANCE. Balance the selectivity of your colleges, the locations, and – to a certain extent – the sizes and styles. When you arrive on your chosen college campus, you will be almost two years older than you were when you began looking at colleges: build in room for growth and change. Your test scores may go up – or not – and your grades may rise or fall. Your desire to stay close to home may change into a wish for adventure. Coach support may wax or wane. Your parents’ financial situation could change. Your favorite “likely” college might experience a hot streak because of a *New York Times* article, making admission suddenly next to impossible. For all these reasons, and more, you should have a variety of colleges on your final list.

Let’s start with some definitions. References below to Belmont Hill admissions history point to ten years of data collected on our Naviance software. We assign Likely, Target, and Reach categories without reference to such “hooks” as coach support and legacy status. Hooks can change your category, but it’s best not to count on that when making your list.

LIKELY: Belmont Hill students with comparable test scores and grades are usually offered admission. Because the admissions picture is constantly changing, students should apply to at least three “Likely” colleges.

TARGET: Belmont Hill students with comparable test scores and grades are sometimes admitted, sometimes waitlisted, and occasionally denied.

REACH: Belmont Hill students with comparable test scores and grades are rarely admitted. We recommend that you have no more than three “Reach” colleges on your list. It’s important to note that Ivy League colleges and such highly selective colleges as Stanford, Duke, and Williams are “Reach” colleges for every Belmont Hill student who applies, no matter how strong his record.

We generally do not recommend applying to colleges where no Belmont Hill student with your scores and grades has been admitted (unless you have special circumstances). Alas, that kind of miracle does not happen in the college admissions world.

IMPORTANT: Demonstrating interest at your likely and target schools is as important as it has ever been. We strongly recommend actively doing this early and often. Ways to demonstrate interest include: (1) Visit school – best way!; (2) Sign up on websites; (3) Pursue interviews; (4) Attend a school visit to Belmont Hill in Fall of senior year.

AN EARLY DECISION MYTH

MYTH: Students should apply early to a “Reach” school because it is their best shot at admission.

FACT: Applying ED to a “Target” school (where a student’s chance of admission in the regular pool is about 50%) usually offers the most advantage. The student who has only a 10-20% chance of admission to a “Reach” college rarely rises to the top of an Early Decision pool. In most cases, athletes are urged by recruiting coaches to apply ED; in such a case, discuss the situation with your counselor.

WORKING WITH YOUR LIST

At Belmont Hill, we don't believe in finding one "right" college for each student. We believe in finding seven to twelve good college matches, of several sizes, styles, and levels of selectivity. After your college counselor gives you preliminary ideas in April or May, add to and change them as you wish for several months. Beginning with your second (April or May) college conference and continuing through your third (September) conference with your college counselor, try to narrow your list as early in senior fall as possible, so that you can concentrate on your senior year school work along with your work on applications. You should have a final list ready by the October Non-Negotiable deadline in senior fall, though you can make changes in it until the December Non-Negotiable deadline.

Vary the selectivity of your college choices as follows:

- Apply to at least three "likely" schools, colleges to which you are likely to be admitted and where you believe you'll be happy.
- Apply to a wide range of "target" schools, colleges where you have a 50-50 chance of being admitted.
- We recommend limiting your "reach" colleges: these are places you love but where you have only a small chance of being admitted.

Vary the size and style of your college choices as follows:

- If you're almost certain that you want a large public university, consider applying to one smaller one, perhaps a liberal arts college with a lively campus.
- If you're applying to engineering schools, consider applying to one liberal arts school with a good engineering department.
- If you're applying to small liberal arts colleges in New England, consider trying a medium-sized university in the mid-west.
- If you're worried about leaving home, try applying to one school in Chicago, just in case you feel braver in August! And so on. . .

How to define your categories of "likely," "target," and "reach":

- Talk to your college counselor.
- Look at Belmont Hill's admissions history with each college, using the SCOIR software.
- Remember that college admission is no longer a predictable process, and make the best decisions you can.

SCOIR

Belmont Hill's college counseling program: website address <http://scoir.com/belmonthill>. Mid-way through Form V, students are assigned their own family password for use in accessing a number of helpful aspects of SCOIR:

- College Search: search colleges by such factors as size, location, major.
- College Look Up: profiles of colleges with links to their websites.
- Scattergrams: charts showing anonymous Belmont Hill admissions data from recent years.

ADMISSIONS OPTIONS: ROLLING, ED, EA, REA, REGULAR, CRD

Rolling Decision

Rolling Admissions: Colleges notify applicants about admission as soon as they receive and review all the candidate's application materials. Apply early! The college's class fills up as the year goes on.

Early Decision I and II

Most colleges use this term to signify a binding early decision program. A student applies by an early date (November for EDI, January for EDII) and agrees to enroll in the college if admitted in December or February. The committee makes a decision based on your record through junior year (and often asks to see first quarter senior year grades). If admitted through Early Decision I or II, a student must withdraw all other applications and is bound to attend that school.

Early Action

Most colleges use this term to signify a non-binding early action program. A student applies by an early date (usually in November) but does not have to commit to enroll in the college if admitted. Students will hear decisions back on these applications either in December or January depending on the school. Admission is based on your record through junior year (and, if requested, first quarter senior year grades). Rules about multiple EA applications vary.

Restrictive Early Action / Single Choice Early Action

A few colleges have a Restrictive Early Admission rule: for most of them, applicants may not apply to another college's binding Early Decision program as well as these colleges' non-binding Early Action programs. Other restrictions may apply.

Regular Decision

Regular Decision applicants apply by the "Regular Deadline," often in January. Notification dates vary by college; see each college's website.

Common Reply Date / Enrollment Deadline

Almost all colleges require students to accept or refuse admissions invitations by the Candidates' Reply Date of May 1. Enrolling at more than one institution ("double-depositing") is considered a serious ethical breach, and accordingly, Belmont Hill sends only one final transcript per graduate to one college. (Exception: students may ethically retain a place on a waiting list as well as enrolling/depositing at another college.)

NOTE: COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OFFICES MAKE CHANGES IN THEIR EARLY DECISION/ACTION POLICIES FROM TIME TO TIME; THEY OFTEN DO THIS DURING THE EARLY SUMMER. TO BE SURE THAT YOU ARE ABIDING BY A COLLEGE'S ADMISSIONS RULES, READ THE COLLEGE'S WEBSITE IN SEPTEMBER OF THE FALL WHEN YOU PLAN TO APPLY.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

MYTHS AND TRUTHS: THE SAT/ACT

TRUTHS:

- The new SAT was intended to reflect more closely the work that students are doing in high school.
- The ACT describes itself as an achievement test in reading, math, and science.
- Many colleges still use standardized test scores in determining admission.
- Students should always take the SAT and ACT with the optional writing section.

MYTH: A high score on the SAT/ACT guarantees me a spot in a top college.

TRUTH: There are no guarantees in college admissions. Your transcript is more important than your SAT/ACT score. The SAT/ACT score is part of a larger picture in which all pieces of your application fit together. A high SAT/ACT score combined with lower grades, for example, can be a negative factor, as it indicates underachievement.

MYTH: A straight-A student should have no trouble getting a high SAT/ACT score.

TRUTH: Your classroom ability does not necessarily correlate to your standardized test-taking ability.

MYTH: I should keep preparing for and taking the SAT/ACT until I am happy with my scores.

TRUTH: Studies have shown that a student's SAT scores tend to peak during three tries, so your chances of improving your score begin to go down after that. But if you have good reasons to think you'll improve, or you are trying to hit a certain score for a scholarship, try it a fourth time. Please note that some colleges will require you to submit all your scores.

MYTH: Even if a school does not require more than two SAT Subject Tests, I should take at least three to show that I am committed to learning.

TRUTH: Take more tests than required only if you believe you will do quite well, and send your extra scores only if they are better than the grades on your transcript would predict.

MYTH: I should take as many SAT Subject Tests as possible; it's the quantity of the test results that counts.

TRUTH: Take only tests in subjects in which you excel, and take the exams at the end of a year of study of the subject.

BELMONT HILL UPPER SCHOOL
STANDARDIZED TESTING SCHEDULE

FORM IV

May AP Exams, as appropriate. Preparation and registration by BHS.

June SAT Subject Test(s) in selected subjects. Many students take one or two tests at this one sitting; select test(s) that coordinate with your preparation through class work and/or for AP Exams. See your teachers and the college counselors and chart in this book. Registration handled by students through the College Board website, www.collegeboard.com (registration deadlines in April and May). Be sure to note the exact version of your name that you use for this first registration, as you will need to use it each time (Belmont B. Hilly each time, not B. B. Hilly sometimes). Note also any Personal Identification Numbers and passwords assigned, as you will need them each time you register for an SAT or Subject Test.

June Diagnostic Tests: Belmont Hill will offer two distinctive dates for administration of a full-length ACT and/or SAT so students can determine which test is most appropriate for them.

FORM V

October PSAT at Belmont Hill – no registration necessary. Colleges do not see your score, and National Merit Scholar status results in significant scholarship money in only a few specific circumstances. As a line item on your résumé, “National Merit Semifinalist” or “National Merit Commended Scholar” is usually redundant with the high SAT scores that such students usually go on to post.

October to March: Test preparation program offered at Belmont Hill through Advantage Testing on select Sunday evenings.

February through June: ACT and SAT test administrations. You should consider taking whichever test is most appropriate two times. Registration is done online at www.act.org – www.collegeboard.org. Once you register, your account will be used to send your scores as part of the application process. Please remember that some colleges/universities require all scores.

June SAT Subject Test(s): one or two tests in one sitting if appropriate per course preparation. Try to select tests for which you have been prepared through Form V classes.

FORM VI

October SAT or September/October ACT administration if needed. (Review test prep in September)

October or November: SAT Subject Test(s) opportunities if needed. Send SAT and/or ACT scores to colleges.

June AP Exams as appropriate; preparation and registration by BHS.

SAT SUBJECT TEST RECOMMENDATIONS: WHICH AND WHEN?

Should you take SAT Subject Tests?

You should take subject tests according to the course recommendations below. Our recommendations are based on which courses align with the material tested on the subject tests. Subject test results support these recommendations. Certainly, if a student feels inclined to take any subject test, whether they have taken the recommended course or not, they should do so with preparation.

When should you take the SAT Subject Tests?

At the end of Form IV and Form V depending on your curriculum and, if necessary, during the fall of Form VI.* Exception: Languages with Listening Tests are available only in November. You can take up to three subject tests in one sitting (one morning administration), but we recommend taking no more than two at a time if possible.

Which SAT Subject Tests should you take?

Look over the chart below then confer with your teachers and college counselor. Some tests are recommended only with departmental approval.

SAT SUBJECT TEST	MOST EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT TIME TO TAKE IT (and senior year addition if needed or desired)
Biology	May or June after a year of study of AP Biology . Talk to your Biology teacher about choosing E or M.
Chemistry	May or June after a year of study of AP Chemistry . This test may be required by engineering schools/programs.
Chinese with Listening	November Chinese with Listening when enrolled in Chinese 5 or above .
French Language	May or June after French 3 or above .
French with Listening	November French with Listening when enrolled in French 4 or above .
Latin	May or June after a year of study of at least Level 3 or 4.
Math Level 1	All Algebra 2A students. Alg 2 students should consult with their teachers; most are advised to take it during their junior year. Intro to Pre-Cal students should take it in June at the end of a year's course of study.
Math Level 2	Pre-Calculus A or Pre-Calculus should take it in June at the end of a year's course of study.
Spanish Language	May or June after Spanish 3A or above .
Spanish with Listening	November Spanish with Listening when enrolled in Spanish 4 or above .
US History	After a year of study of US History, AP or non-AP.

*Sometimes students wish to try one more time to strengthen their Subject scores.

REGISTERING FOR THE SAT OR ACT: FAQs

Students and their families are responsible for registering for standardized tests and having their scores sent to colleges, scholarship committees, and the NCAA. Register for the SAT or the ACT online: go to www.collegeboard.com or www.actstudent.org. Potential Division I or II athletes should register at the NCAA Eligibility Center no later than May 1 of senior year.

Test scores must be reported to the NCAA directly from ACT or SAT using code 9999.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- **What is Belmont Hill's CEEB code?**
220120
- **Does Belmont Hill send my/my son's standardized test scores?**
No! Your/your son's account and scores are private. SAT/ACT will send us certain batches of scores but not all testing dates. You/your son will choose which scores to send and will pay for them to be sent through his College Board (SAT) or ACT Account.
- **In the registration questionnaire (required for first registration only), how do I know what to answer to some of the questions (What is your cumulative GPA? and others)?**
Just estimate and guess on these questions. The College Board uses them for research, but information need not be exactly correct.
- **Should I take both the ACT and the SAT?**
About 30% of students perform significantly better on one test or the other. We believe that students who have stronger quantitative abilities and/or science achievement may be candidates to perform better on the ACT. To see the differences between the two tests, go to www.princetonreview.com/sat-act.aspx
- **I am / my child is a junior. To what colleges should we send these scores?**
Don't send them anywhere. You will send scores only when you apply to college(s). You can send them with a later test (you get four free), order them by phone, or send them online.
- **I am / my child is a senior. We've already sent scores to colleges, but this new score is higher. Will it automatically go to the colleges where we've sent scores before?**
Unfortunately, no. You will need to send the new ones.
- **Can we select certain scores (the higher ones) to send to colleges?**
Check each college's testing policy on the admissions page of its website. Some schools allow Score Choice, which gives students the option to choose which scores (by test date for the SAT and ACT and by individual test for SAT Subject Tests) to send to colleges. Schools that do not participate in Score Choice require applicants to submit their entire testing history. For some of these schools, applicants who have taken both the SAT and the ACT must submit their testing history from both exams, while other schools want only the testing history from the SAT or the ACT. Score-Optional colleges do not require standardized testing. A student should research the testing policy for each college to which they plan to apply.
- **Why didn't we get a score report?**
If you have trouble getting one report but not another, chances are that you used slightly different names (Bill Q. Belmont and William Q. Belmont, for example) or that you registered with a social security number one time, a date of birth the other. Be consistent, and you won't have any trouble. Occasionally the College Board gets behind with a few scores, and you simply have to wait for them.

TIPS ON COLLEGE ESSAYS

(We will offer an interactive essay writing workshop for Form V students in the spring.)

1. Write in informal, personal language.
2. Remember: the best essays are imaginative and descriptive, but tell the reader about you as a student and/or a transformative experience.
3. Approaching an essay in a very unusual way is a high-risk project; if you can't do it well, be more conventional.
4. Writing correctly is essential, but it isn't enough. Write effectively as well. Consider your audience.
5. Don't feel that you must write about a big event; write about a subject that genuinely means something to you, and that shows some of your best qualities in action.
6. Use the personal pronouns *I, me, we, us*.
7. Use contractions.
8. Read your essay aloud. Does it sound natural? Does it sound like something you would want to read?
9. Read your first sentence. Is it a hook?
10. Read the first sentence of each paragraph. Does each relate to the previous idea and continue to pique the reader's interest?
11. Your conclusion should add to your essay, not merely rehash what has already been said. Leave your reader with a strong image.
12. As always, show, don't tell.

DO write about. . .

1. Something that interests you academically/intellectually.
2. How you have been affected by a person, group, or place very different from your familiar haunts.
3. How you handled a tense, demanding, exhilarating, or frightening situation.
4. How a particular relative, employer, neighbor, or friend has influenced you.
5. How an ironic turn of events worked out in your favor - or didn't!
6. How specific, carefully chosen details of a day or week in your life reveal important things about you.
7. How your experience of witnessing an act of cruelty, a crime, or a charitable act influenced you.
8. Your pet peeve or complaint: how does it reveal something(s) about you?

DON'T write about. . .

1. Football as the Game of Life. It's a cliché. Find a fresher approach to athletics.
2. The Travelogue Essay. Adventures on a massively expensive trip to Europe.
3. First Encounter with Death Essay. This subject is very hard to handle well.
4. The College Essay Essay. Tells of the trials of writing this essay. A cliché.
5. My Room is an Extension of Myself. Too many writers have been there, done that.
6. The Metaphysical Essay. All abstraction, too pretentious.
7. How I Learned from My Mistake. Unless the mistake is very minor, it's dangerous.
8. The Mission Trip to [fill in the blank]: colleges have gotten cynical about this topic.

SPECIAL APPLICANTS

FINE ARTS SUPPLEMENT

If you have developed a body of work in music, theater, dance, film, or the visual arts, you might want to submit a portfolio, CD, or Arts Supplement. Before doing so, discuss the idea with your college counselor. You must research whether the schools to which you are applying will accept arts supplements and in what form. By submitting an Arts Supplement, you are placing yourself in a group of applicants with significant achievement in an arts field. If you have simply experimented with some art and found that you have talent, you may not have accumulated enough experience and production or performance to compete at that level. If that is the case, better to include a few photos or a separate résumé in the “Additional Information” section of your main application. To determine how best to present your art talent to a college, talk to your college counselor and your art teacher, advisor, director, or some other mentor in your work. Each school asks for submissions in a certain format or electronic medium. Check admissions website.

THE STUDENT-ATHLETE APPLICANT

College athletics are big business; coaches are hired and fired on the basis of winning and losing records. For that reason, you should always remember that a college coach cannot (or will not) always be completely straightforward in their messaging. Coaches’ influence and inside knowledge vary from college to college, but no coach can guarantee a student’s acceptance or playing time once enrolled.

WHERE AND WHEN DO I START?

You almost certainly started years ago, as you put time and energy into building your athletic skills. And you may have played in games and summer camps where college coaches trained and/or observed you. During your sophomore or junior year, depending on the sport, it’s time to start having evaluative conversations with your Belmont Hill coach(es). They can do you the favor of speaking frankly about your chances of playing sports in college, they can suggest the level (Division I, II, or III) that suits you best, and they can sometimes even suggest college programs to which you could contribute. If your coach tells you that you may be a candidate for college athletics, you must then look to the next step: taking cues from college coaches.

You’ll know during sophomore or junior year or the summer before senior year that you are a college recruit. If you have not been identified as a recruited athlete, you will have to try to stir up college coaches’ interest in you. You can do that by sending e-mails and highlight videos, by registering on college team websites, or by following other advice that your Belmont Hill coaches offer. If, after you have made a number of contacts, college coaches are not showing interest, it’s time to wonder if you are likely to be recruited. Your Belmont Hill coaches can help you decide whether to stop pursuing that option, shift to a less competitive division, or change your strategy. If you are not going to be recruited, your athletic participation will be considered similarly to your other extra-curricular commitments.

ADMISSIONS OR COACHES: WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Whether you are recruited or not, in all but Division 1 scholarship sports, the college's admissions office, not the athletic department or the coach, will make the final decision about whether to admit you. A college will not accept a student on athletic ability alone if it does not think the applicant can be academically successful at the college, so your high school academic performance and test scores will have a significant impact on your candidacy.

RULES OF RECRUITMENT

College coaches and high school athletes must follow NCAA rules about recruitment; it is your responsibility to learn them (at www.ncaa.org) and to observe them. A student should not make an official visit to a college unless he is registered with the NCAA (see below) and has sent an unofficial transcript with SAT scores to the coach's office.

ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS

In Division I and some Division II colleges, scholarship money can be awarded to a student who has athletic talent and/or meets certain criteria, regardless of financial need. That's the good news; now here's the bad: it can be taken away if the student ceases to meet those criteria. And very few athletic scholarships offer a "full ride" to a Division I college; unless you are a top athlete in a revenue generating sport, the offers are more likely to be partial. Moreover, only certain conferences – such as the Big Ten, SEC and the ACC – have athletic scholarships, and then only in certain sports. Division III colleges offer no athletic scholarships, nor do the eight Ivy League colleges.

THE NCAA ELIGIBILITY CENTER

The NCAA EC (formerly the NCAA Clearinghouse) was established to determine academic eligibility for student-athletes in Division I and Division II. All students with an interest in Division I or II programs, and especially those interested in making official visits to colleges, are required to register online with the EC by spring of junior year. To do so, go to <http://eligibilitycenter.org>, register, and be sure to check the box in "My Tasks" that authorizes us to send an electronic copy of your transcript to the NCAA EC. If you have attended another high school besides Belmont Hill, you will need to follow directions for submitting a special form. In turn, the EC will use a formula to determine if your test scores and grades qualify you to play college athletics.

The Ivy League has established a formula similar to that of the NCAA, known as the Academic Index, which takes GPA, SAT or ACT and Subject Tests into account in determining eligibility and recruitability to play sports in those two leagues.

HOW TO BE A SELF ADVOCATE

- Fill out questionnaires on colleges' websites; promptly return questionnaires that you receive in the mail.
- Create an effective athletic résumé and cover letter to send to coaches.
- Email and/or call coaches; don't wait to be called.
- Create a highlight video.
- Attend appropriate camps, tournaments, and other events.
- Send college coaches game schedules for your varsity and club teams.
- You can gauge a coach's interest in you by the intensity of his recruiting through form letters, handwritten letters, many phone calls, scouting (coach attends a game), and invitations to official visits.

COLLEGE VISIT GUIDELINES FOR ATHLETES

	Division I	Division III
Visits per year	5 official	Unlimited
Meet w/coach?	Yes	Yes
Attend practice?	Yes	Yes
Attend classes?	Yes	Yes
Meet players?	Yes	Yes
Expenses paid by	College	Student
Overnight stay?	Usually (48 hrs. max)	Sometimes

For all questions about recruiting timetable, see calendar:

www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/resources

TASKS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

JUNIOR YEAR	SENIOR YEAR
Get an honest evaluation of talent and college level projection from coach or coaches	Continue to visit campuses as unofficial visits
Ensure academic eligibility (ncaa clearinghouse)	Narrow your list to colleges at which you have a realistic chance of being recruited based on conversations you or the coaches have initiated. <u>If you haven't heard from DI coaches, reach out to DII, DIII or NAIA programs.</u>
Identify and contact coaches and assistant coaches from the schools' athletic website (e-mail addresses often not on team page but in staff directory)*	Develop your "broken leg" list: a list of colleges that are interesting to you even if you would not be a member of a intercollegiate team. Consider schools that have competitive club programs.
Build a highlight video (Hudl, YouTube)	Be developing opinions about whether to agree to apply Early Action or Early Decision at the schools on your list. Most coaches who ask for a commitment will require you to apply early.
Submit online questionnaires	
Email head coaches and all assistant coaches expressing interest, including a link to your Youtube highlight film, and include your contact info, college counselor's contact info and that of your coach (or coaches if colleges will be communicating with a club coach)	
Visit campuses	
Attend ID camps	
Keep a file/designate a new label in your Inbox for schools with whom you have communicated	
Send updated transcripts and testing to coaches as available and requested	

GOOD PEOPLE, BAD MOVES

- Overly optimistic or aggressive parents.
- Athletes who ignore the academic prerequisites.
- Optimists who hang on too long.
- Athletes who don't promote themselves.
- Coaches who do not communicate effectively and athletes who misinterpret their communication.
- Pessimists who give up too soon.
- Athletes who ignore the NCAA rules.
- Athletes who are unrealistic

TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Most colleges ask for two teacher recommendations for each applicant. You will discuss teachers and recommendations in your 2nd meeting with your college counselor, but here are some guidelines and advice.

- Select 11th grade teachers who know you well.
- Select teachers who seem to appreciate you. You need not be an A student in the teacher's class.
- Talk to your college counselors before asking. Your chosen teacher(s) may be so buried in recommendation requests that you would do better to ask a different teacher. Or if a teacher seems unsure about writing for you, consider selecting a different teacher.
- Ask early; teachers' lists get full. Remember that the deadline for asking a teacher to write for you is in early May.
- No later than the May deadline, give your teacher a copy of your résumé, and fill out any forms the teacher requires.
- The teacher and Mrs. Patton will take responsibility from then on. Because recommendations are now transmitted electronically to colleges, you will not need to supply envelopes or addresses to your recommenders.
- The teacher is not allowed, by school policy, to show you the recommendation. This policy builds Belmont Hill's credibility with colleges. Because colleges know our teachers are speaking candidly, a letter's praise carries more clout.
- Write each teacher a brief thank-you note in November, and remember to tell him or her when you get good admissions news from a college. Writing recommendations is hard work!
- If a college informs you that a teacher's recommendation has not arrived or is missing, inform your college counselor and Mrs. Patton. Almost always, the letter has been received but hasn't yet been documented in the admissions office, but we like to monitor the situation. Each year, colleges lose many, many documents and Belmont Hill emails many, many replacements. A lost document does not reflect badly on anyone, nor does it have a negative impact on admissions – but we need your help to know that the document is missing.

COLLEGE INTERVIEWS

Some colleges do not give individual interviews; others rely heavily on them. If a college stresses interviews, it is certainly to your advantage to arrange one. The interview offers you an opportunity demonstrate your interest but also to learn more about the college.

Remember, whether it's a visit to campus or an interview, the first time a college hears from you should not be your application. Colleges offer several kinds of interviews: on-campus individual interview with an admissions officer, off-campus individual interview with an alumna or alumnus, and (usually in competitive scholarship programs) on- or off-campus interview with a group of interviewers. You should prepare in the same ways for all of these. We will offer an interactive interview workshop for all students in September of their senior year.

AT THE INTERVIEW

- Dress neatly. You do not need to dress formally, but some students do.
- Be prompt!
- Be friendly, relaxed, and courteous.
- Do not bring your parent(s) into the interview room.
- Don't ask questions that you could answer by looking superficially at the college's website.
- Be sure to ask some questions with academic content.
- Try not to be too nervous, especially with alumni interviews. Many colleges do not weigh alum interview reports too heavily; in most cases, the interview is a neutral to positive proposition

MOST IMPORTANT RULE

The interview should be a conversation between two people. Do not answer questions with monosyllabic answers ("Yes" or "no" or "sometimes.") Offer more information; speak your opinions; talk about the things that are important to you. Be honest and open. Don't try to be all things (student, artist, athlete, philosopher, etc.) to all colleges. Be who you are. Be interested in the interviewer's school.

WHAT TO KNOW AHEAD OF TIME

Read the college's materials so that you do not ask questions clearly answered in the viewbooks. Be prepared to talk about your intellect, values, activities, and concerns, and to ask questions.

QUESTIONS TO EXPECT

Practice talking about yourself with confidence but without arrogance. Take the sample interviewer's questions below to an adult friend, and practice answering them gracefully.

- What have you liked about Belmont Hill? What would you change about BHS?
- What is your role and/or identity at your school? Among your peers?
- Talk about a contribution you have made to Belmont Hill.
- What are some of your goals for college and beyond?
- Tell me about a teacher, class, and/or activity that you have especially enjoyed.
- What books or authors have made a lasting impression on your thinking?
- What are some critical events in your life thus far? What do you care most about?
- How do you spend your free time? How have you spent your recent summers?
- How would you describe yourself as a student? As a person? As a musician, etc.?
- What are you looking for in a college? Does this college seem to be a good match?
- Many students apply to this college; what characteristics distinguish you from others?
- What other colleges interest you? Where else might you apply?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Is it difficult to get into desired classes? Is course registration easy?
- What are the popular places for people to study? To eat or hang out?
- Would you describe this campus as more competitive or collaborative?
- Would you describe this campus as liberal, conservative, or mixed? Why?
- Who are some of the most popular professors? What are some popular courses?
- Is this a college with lots of school spirit?
- What is a big campus issue right now? What things are important to students?
- Are there any interesting programs or activities that don't appear in your materials?
- What words describe the pace of life here – rushed, relaxed, lively, slow, intense?

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Paying for college can hurt the pocketbook and confuse the mind. College comprehensive fees (tuition, room and board, fees, books, travel, and incidentals) now vary between \$35,000 and \$75,000, depending on whether you attend a public or private college. Families should talk together frankly about their ability and desire to pay college costs, and about whether students will assume some of the financial responsibility. Below find some references, definitions, and suggestions, but every family's financial situation is unique.

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.fafsa.ed.gov (Go to this site to file the FAFSA form; see below.)

www.collegeboard.org (Go to this site to file the CSS Profile form; see below.)

www.finaid.org (Many resources available at this site.) See "No Loans for Low Income Students."

MEFA (Massachusetts Education Finance Authority) especially the booklet, "Paying for College."

<http://institutionnpc.collegeboard.org/> (Netprice calculator.)

www.fastweb.com (free matching service for college scholarships)

www.asa.org (nonprofit consumer advocacy group aimed at helping families plan, finance, and repay cost of college)

www.goingmerry.com (one application for many scholarshipss)

FINANCIAL AID

*These processes must be handled by families,
though your college counselors are happy to answer questions.*

Financial aid is awarded according a student's demonstrated need. Students demonstrate need by filing one or more of the following forms: the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (which is required by every college and university and determines your eligibility for federal financial aid funds), the CSS Profile (which is required by only the colleges listed on its registration form, and which requires registration and reporting fees), and in some cases institutional financial aid forms (which are available only from the college and returned directly to its financial aid office). Colleges requiring the CSS Profile and/or institutional forms also require the FAFSA form.

SHOULD I APPLY FOR NEED-BASED FINANCIAL AID?

It's important to decide carefully whether you will apply for need-based financial aid. If you don't qualify for aid, you should not apply for aid, **as that could affect your chance of admission** at need-aware institutions. To evaluate your chances of qualifying for need-based aid, use the confidential net price calculator at finaid.org and/or on every college's financial aid webpage.

Dates and details:

The FAFSA: You can apply between October 1 and June 30. It is best to apply as early as possible. Many schools require you to apply by specific application deadlines.

The CSS Profile should be completed by each college's designated ED or Regular deadlines.

Because college deadlines and requirements vary, it is your responsibility to obtain **institutional forms** from colleges and return them by the appropriate deadlines.

SHORT-FORM FINANCIAL AID TIMELINE AND CHECKLIST

SPRING, FORM V:

- _____ Take the confidential net price calculator at college board.com to estimate how much need-based aid you and your family will qualify to get.
- Make sure that at least some colleges on your list offer good financial aid with more grant money than loan money, if possible.
(Look for this language: "Meets full need," "Need-blind admissions," "Grant/gift money," "does not package loans." Study the websites. Check with your college counselor.
- Evaluate your chances of getting scholarship money on top of your need-based money (scholarship \$ is less important). See your college counselor.
- We also encourage students who will qualify for a high % of need-based financial aid to actively consider one or more state school options.

FALL, FORM VI:

- _____ September: Finalize a college list that considers financial need.
- September: *If you are applying binding early decision or are making a commitment to a college in the fall, check your college's webpages to find out all financial aid deadlines.
- October: *If you are applying binding early decision or are making a commitment to a college in the fall, fill out the FAFSA and CSS profile forms, available online.
- _____ October: *If you are applying binding or are making a commitment to a college in the fall, check to see if your college has institutional financial aid forms. If so, fill them out and submit them by deadline.
- October: Attend MEFA Fair at Noble & Greenough School.
- *October or November: Meet all college financial aid deadlines.
- _____ *For ED and other fall commitments, be sure that you receive a financial aid package before enrolling/depositing at a college!

JANUARY, FORM VI:

- _____ *All financial aid applicants: Fill out FAFSA form at www.fafsa.ed.gov
- *Regular round applicants: Fill out FAFSA (www.fafsa.ed.gov) and/or the CSS profile forms at the college board website if you did not do so in October.
- *Update your CSS profile and institutional forms information if you filled out estimated forms in October.
- *Monitor the receipt of your materials at the colleges' financial aid offices; be sure your file is complete as early as possible.

SEEKING MERIT MONEY OR NEED-BASED AID?

If you are Family A, B, or C, it's important to know the differences between merit and need-based money early in the college process and before you complete your college list.

A. Low-income families: for a family that qualifies for significant aid (which you can know because you receive significant aid from Belmont Hill, or you can determine by using the Net Price Calculator at the College Board website), the single most important element of the college search is the college list. The very best money available will come from a college that has accepted you and gives good financial aid. Therefore, your list should be carefully chosen, with help from your counselor, to include colleges that (1) are likely and possible colleges for you, (2) meet students' full need, (3) are mostly need-blind, and (4) package the fewest possible loans, as opposed to grants. Look for that language in the colleges' financial aid webpages, and check the list of No Loans for Low-Income Students at finaid.org. Applying Early Decision or Early Action is helpful, as well as pursuing one or more in-state public school options.

B. Families qualifying for *some* financial aid: First, determine whether you will qualify for aid by taking the confidential self-test at College Board Net Price Calculator AND by running your numbers at several colleges' Net Price Calculators; every college is by law required to have one somewhere on its website. If you do not qualify for aid, turn your attention to merit-based scholarships (see below). People who do not qualify do not need to consider need-based financial aid in making their college list. For families that qualify for *some* financial aid, the list should be carefully chosen, with help from your counselor, to include the first three requirements above: Include colleges that (1) are likely and possible colleges for you, (2) meet students' full need, and (3) are mostly need-blind. (4) may also be relevant. Applying EA or ED is helpful.

C. Families seeking Merit Scholarships to supplement their need-based financial aid or who don't qualify for any need-based aid: See information below from finaid.org. Important: if you get a need-based financial aid award from a college, know that most outside merit scholarships are subtracted from (not added onto) the amount of need-based aid you receive, though on rare occasions a college will add merit money to its need-based aid. **Families are responsible for doing this research, though counselors are available for consultation:** Check the websites of colleges where you will be desirable for academic or other reasons. Use Fastweb.org to search for scholarships that meet your specific criteria; it's the best scholarship search site. Do not expect to win large amounts of merit money unless you are a HIGHLY desirable applicant in terms of academic achievement (you would be in the top 5%-10% of the applicant pool) or have some other highly desirable attribute.

FINAID.ORG: HOW TO WIN A MERIT SCHOLARSHIP

Merit scholarships are typically awarded on the basis of academic, athletic, or artistic merit, in addition to special interests. Some merit scholarships also consider financial need, but rewarding talent is the primary objective. In most cases the scholarship sponsor has a set of criteria they use to select the winners from among the qualified applicants. Sponsors can have a variety of goals in offering a scholarship. Some companies offer scholarships as a form of community development, to invest in the future of the communities where they are based. Others offer scholarships to help retain current employees and recruit future employees.

Colleges may offer scholarships to recruit a talented and diverse student body. They may also offer scholarships in specific majors to encourage students to enroll in underrepresented majors (e.g., scholarships for women and minorities in science and engineering). Membership organizations tend to offer scholarships to promote their field or the mission of the organization. Other scholarships may be established to honor the memory of someone who has passed away, to provide a legacy that perpetuates his or her values. The first step is to make sure you qualify for the scholarship. If the application requirements specify that you must have a 3.7 or higher GPA and you have a 3.6 GPA, don't bother applying. Most scholarship sponsors receive so many qualified applications that they do not have the time to consider applications that fail to satisfy the requirements. You may be a wonderful and talented person, but if your application is not qualified, the selection committee is not going to look at it.

The [Fastweb scholarship search](#) will show you only the awards that match your profile. FastWeb has the tightest match of any scholarship database, so you're less likely to waste time on awards for which you aren't qualified.

You can help your odds of winning by applying for less competitive scholarships, such as local awards. For example, college juniors and seniors have a better chance of winning a scholarship, since fewer upperclassmen apply for scholarships. But don't neglect the more competitive national scholarships, since these also tend to be more lucrative.

SEARCHING FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Searching for scholarships is just the beginning of the scholarship application process. But it's also the most important. If you don't know where to search or how to search, the results can be overwhelming. A smart scholarship search involves strategy, and with these tips, you'll be able to effectively find scholarships that you qualify for as well as have a chance of winning.

- **Start Searching for Scholarships ASAP.** It pays to start your search for scholarships as soon as possible. Many scholarships have early deadlines, even as early as August or September. Start searching for scholarships at an earlier age. Most students don't start searching for scholarships until their senior year in high school. But there are many awards available for students in earlier grades, even junior high school

When completing a profile on an online scholarship search, be thorough, answering every question. Some of the questions may have a long laundry list of attributes and activities, but it is worthwhile to read through them carefully. A complete profile will often match twice as many awards as a minimal profile. If you have a more complete profile, you will match more awards.

- **Apply to a number of awards for which you meet the criteria.** You can't win if you don't apply. Even if you are extremely talented, your chances of winning any particular scholarship are low, since you are competing with many other equally talented applicants. To improve your odds of winning a scholarship, apply to more scholarship competitions. Do not, however, apply for awards for which you do not qualify. It is a waste of your time.
- **Seek out less competitive scholarships.** Seek out small local awards that are not listed in most of the national databases and scholarship books – your chances of winning are greater because they are less competitive. Examples include the local PTA scholarship, Dollars for Scholars scholarship, local cultural and religious organizations, local businesses, and your parent's employer.

Mrs. Patton is happy to sit down with any student to help them search for scholarships for which they might be a good candidate.

EARLY DECISION APPLICANTS

Because Early Decision candidates will not have the opportunity to compare financial aid offers, it is important for ED applicants and their parents to estimate as accurately as possible their projected finances for the following year, when the student will enter college. They do this on the CSS Profile form (on the College Board website) and in some cases on the college's own form as well. ED applicants are informed of their financial aid package at the time they are admitted, if a family has completed their forms in a timely fashion.

DIVORCED AND SEPARATED PARENTS

In the case of divorce or separation, the non-custodial parent is usually asked to file a supplementary form in addition to the CSS profile. Since colleges view financing a college education as a family affair, both parents need to provide as complete a financial picture as possible. A parent who refuses to file the supplementary form will jeopardize his or her son's chances for financial aid. Financial aid officers do have some leeway in difficult situations, however, and may use professional judgment in making awards. Your college counselors will be happy to discuss individual circumstances and may be able to intercede with colleges if appropriate.

MERIT OR "INSTITUTIONAL" SCHOLARSHIPS

Institutional scholarships are given by colleges to students who meet certain predetermined criteria, such as academic achievement, athletic ability, or artistic talent. Demonstrated financial need may or may not be a factor. Given by colleges as a means of attracting desirable students, they essentially amount to tuition discounts. Some of these scholarships are awarded through an automatic screening process, and some require special applications. If a college does not mention merit scholarships in its literature, ask about them when you visit, or when a representative is on the Belmont Hill campus, or call the financial aid office. Not every college offers merit scholarships.

CORPORATE AND ORGANIZATION SCHOLARSHIPS

Groups such as the Rotary Club and some corporations offer scholarships as well, but you should be wary of private scholarships like these if you have financial need. No college will award you more money than the system says you need. For example, if you win a \$5,000 scholarship from a local club, colleges that meet students' full need will deduct that amount from the grant money they have awarded you. Some colleges will deduct the amount from the loan portion of your package, which would be useful, but others will take it off your grant portion.

ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS

Lucky - and rare - the athlete who wins a full athletic scholarship at a Division I college (occasionally at Division II, never at Division III, as athletic scholarships are not offered at Division III colleges). These awards are given for athletic ability regardless of financial need. Your coaches, parents, and college counselors will help you navigate the sometimes confusing process of college athletic recruitment. Future Division I or II athletes must register with the NCAA Eligibility Center no later than the winter of senior year.

INTERPRETING YOUR FINANCIAL AID AWARD

Financial aid letters may accompany your letters of acceptance, or they may be sent separately. When letters are sent early in the year, some colleges may not specify the exact amount of private and federal aid they are offering, but an estimated amount instead. You will receive the exact amount in a later letter. Most colleges try to present their awards in a flattering light, so read the document with care.

- Look at the combination of awards in the “package.” It will probably consist of two types of aid: “gift aid” (such as *grants* that do not have to be repaid) and “self-help” (usually a combination of *work* and *student loans*).
- In comparing financial aid packages, pay attention to your *net cost* to attend each institution after financial aid, and to the *proportion of grants to loans*. Do not be dazzled by the total amount of money a college offers you; focus on how much you will have to pay out of pocket, both as tuition expenses during your college years and as loan repayments in the years afterwards.
- Look for special conditions or requirements attached to your awards. For example, some institutions require financial aid recipients to maintain a certain GPA in order to continue receiving merit awards. Sometimes awards are renewable for three more years, sometimes not.
- If you have questions or concerns about your financial aid award – if, for example, you feel that it does not meet your needs – call the college’s financial aid office. Be polite, not panicky or angry; most financial aid officers are helpful and understanding. We have seen some colleges adjust financial aid awards as they have come to understand a family’s situation more clearly, but this is not always possible.
- If you are considering more than one college, wait to receive a financial aid letter from each college before making a decision. Though every college will ask you to accept or decline their offer of aid by a specific deadline, they will usually extend the deadline upon your request if you are still waiting to hear from other colleges.
- Once you make a final decision, do not miss the reply deadline (or the extended deadline you have negotiated); if you do, your money could go to someone else! The widespread rumor that every year thousands of dollars of financial aid goes unclaimed could not be further from the truth. Don’t jeopardize your precious award by failing to follow instructions or return forms in timely fashion. Then be sure to notify your other colleges that you are declining their offer of admission and financial aid, so that another student can be a lucky recipient of your funds.

Financial aid deadlines and forms are as important as application deadlines, and they vary widely from college to college. Read your materials carefully, and meet your deadlines!

AFTER YOU AND THE COLLEGES HAVE DECIDED

Once a college has notified you of its decision, please enter that information in Naviance and inform your college counselor so that the school's records will be accurate.

As soon as you are certain of which college you will attend, you **MUST** email all other colleges to which you applied, withdrawing your candidacy to make room for other applicants. Do so in a courteous email; see sample below.

You are ethically bound to respond to all the colleges where you are admitted by the Candidates' Reply Date of May 1. It is unethical to pay enrollment deposits and make promises to attend two colleges. If you have been placed on a waiting list, you may retain that place after making an enrollment deposit elsewhere, but be honest if the college asks you.

Admissions Office
College/University
Address

Dear Admissions Officer:

Thank you for the consideration shown me, but I have decided to attend _____ College/University. Therefore, I am withdrawing my application to your institution.

Sincerely,

Name, Date of Birth, Address

WAITLISTS

Colleges use wait lists in a number of ways; usually they explain their uses in the letter you get placing you on the list. If you are wait-listed at a college, here are a few tips.

- Do not stay on a wait list just to see if you get in. Stay only if you know you will attend the college if admitted.
- Write a letter to the college after receiving word that you have been wait-listed. Make your commitment to the college very clear; promise to attend if you can do so honestly: "I will attend if admitted." Include any new honors, awards, or activities that might strengthen your candidacy.
- If you're really, really enthusiastic about the college, write another letter in a week or two.
- Be in touch with your college advisor, who may get a telephone call asking about your continued commitment to the college where you have been wait-listed. The advisor's answer could influence the college's decision.
- Do not count on admission from a wait list! Get on with your plans.

RECOMMENDED REFERENCES

Comprehensive College Reference Books

The College Handbook, College Board
Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges
Scholarship Handbook, The College Board
Barron's Profiles of American Colleges

Narrative, Subjective College Guidebooks

The Fiske Guide to Colleges
The Best 379 Colleges, Princeton Review
The Insider's Guide to the Colleges, Yale Daily News
Colleges that Change Lives, Loren Pope (profiles of 40 small colleges)
Looking Beyond the Ivy League, Loren Pope
The Public Ivys, Richard Moll
Hillel Guide to Jewish Life on Campus (also available at www.hillel.org)

Advice and Insider Information Books

100 Successful College Application Essays, The Harvard Independent
Admissions Confidential, Rachel Toor
College Match: A Blueprint for Choosing the Best School for You, Antonoff & Friedemann
Campus Visits and College Interviews, College Board
The Fiske Guide to Getting Into the Right College, Fiske & Hammond
The Gatekeepers, Jacques Steinberg
Harvard, Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College that Is Right for You, Jay Matthews.

Eccentric or Special-Interest Books

Cool Colleges: for the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late-Blooming, and Just Plain Different, Asher
Barron's Best Buys in College Education, Lucia Solorzano
Guide to Performing Arts Programs, Everett & Topaz, Princeton Review
Ivy League Programs at State School Prices, Sullivan & Randolph, Arco (out of print; try to get it!)
The K & W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled, Kravets and Wax
The Multicultural Student's Guide to Colleges, Robert Mitchell
Professional Degree Programs in the Visual and Performing Arts, Peterson's Guides
Making a Difference: College and Graduate Guide, Miriam Weinstein (for the idealistic)
Top Colleges for Science, Peterson's Guides
Peterson's Guide to Honors Programs, Joan Digby
The Complete Guide to American Film Schools, Ernest Pintoff
The Rolling Stone Guide to Colleges that Rock

NOTES



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