



WHAT TO EXPECT: THE COLLEGE PROCESS

OVERVIEW

At Germantown Friends School, we view the college process as a reflective, critical journey toward self-actualization. It is comprised of research, campus visits, the identification of best-fit schools, and completing and submitting applications. Though overwhelming at times, it can also be exciting, enlightening, and, ultimately, deeply rewarding.

This road map is designed to give you a sense of what to expect at each phase of the process and an understanding of how the College Counseling Office will partner with you along the way.

COLLEGE COUNSELORS

We have developed a holistic approach that allows our college counselors and teachers to know each student in a deep and nuanced way, partnering with families throughout the journey. Each student is paired with one of our three full-time college counselors, but also has the support and resources of all members of the College Counseling Office. We are fortunate to count on a committed administrative assistant, who helps ensure that we are timely and thorough in all aspects of the process. Our college counseling staff represents diverse areas of experience and expertise, and is invested in the academic success, co-curricular achievements, and personal growth of our students.

COUNSELOR-STUDENT CONNECTION

GFS college counselors get to know students in the classroom, on the playing field, on the stage, and through communication with faculty members. In the freshman and sophomore years, they assist students with course selection, standardized testing plans, and summer opportunities, as needed, and answer any general questions they may have about college. Midway through sophomore year, students are assigned to a



counselor and will have an introductory meet-and-greet with them before spring break. In addition, they will receive login information for Cialfo, an online platform utilized by students, parents/guardians, and counselors in the college search and application process. That process officially kicks off junior year, when counselors transition to providing increased one-on-one support. Once students reach their senior year, counselors provide additional hands-on assistance and guidance throughout the college application process.

A LEARNING PROCESS

Applying to college is not only about finding a school that is the right fit; it is about self-discovery. The process of inquiry and transition challenges students to think creatively and explore options they may not have previously considered. Throughout their junior and senior years, students will become increasingly responsible for managing their college search. As they take ownership of this process, they continue to learn how to think critically, communicate effectively, self-advocate, and build relationships—the very skills that will help them make a successful transition from high school to college and beyond.

NINTH GRADE

We assist students with course selection and exploring summer opportunities as needed—and encourage them to relax and not worry about college at this point.

Objective: To emphasize the importance of academic record and achievement.

Student Tasks:

- Conduct informal college visits over breaks to better understand the various types of schools (large, small, urban, rural, state, private, etc.)
- Attend College Conversations to learn about the application process, extracurricular involvement, and testing options
- Summer:** Engage in meaningful and skill-building opportunities

TENTH GRADE

During winter of sophomore year, students are assigned a college counselor and given access to Cialfo, an online student management platform specifically designed for the college process.

Objective: To introduce and reinforce the essential elements used by colleges to measure a student’s record.

- Encourage students to further develop strengths, interests, and passions through commitment to academics and extracurricular activities
- Advise students about standardized testing options
- Introduce students and parents/guardians to summer program opportunities, as well as different types of colleges and admissions processes

Student Tasks:

- Begin visiting colleges during breaks to better understand the various types of schools (large, small, urban, rural, state, private, etc.)
- Add extracurricular information to Cialfo
- Attend College Conversations to learn about the application process, extracurricular involvement, and testing options
- October:** Take the PSAT at GFS (results are available online in December; student will need to create a College Board account)
- Winter:** Receive college counselor assignment and Cialfo login; research colleges and universities
- Summer:** Engage in meaningful and skill-building activities

ELEVENTH GRADE

Our goal is to meet with students three times prior to spring break (two one-on-one meetings, one family meeting).* Juniors take a Navigation course (beginning before winter break), which educates them about the skills needed for a successful college search process: organization and planning, interviewing, essay writing, and decision making.

Objective: To help students better define a sense of self and direction, and create an approach to the college search rooted in fit.

- Help students manage academic pressures and stress
- Educate families on the college process and what colleges are looking for in applicants
- Discuss how to embark on formal college visits to schools students are interested in attending
- Reinforce the importance of academic record
- Offer suggestions for how students can best use their last high-school summer
- Help students develop a standardized testing plan
- Support students in refining their leadership role at school and in the community
- Communicate with families who are eligible for standardized testing and college application fee waivers

Student Tasks:

- Visit colleges throughout the year with increased focus. Complete an excused absence form if missing school for a college visit
- Beginning in the fall, meet with college representatives visiting GFS. Must have teacher permission to attend session if it involves missing class
- Discuss standardized testing strategy with college counselor and register for the SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and/or ACT (note dates and deadlines)
- October**
 - Take the PSAT at GFS. Some students may qualify for National Merit consideration
 - Attend Junior College Night (parents and students), which features an admissions panel discussion
- November**
 - Complete and submit the Junior Jot Down (JJD) Questionnaire in Cialfo; begin meeting with college counselor once questionnaire is complete* (see Meeting Goals box)
 - Remind parents/guardians to complete questionnaire in Cialfo
- December**
 - Meet with college counselor*
- January**
 - If Junior Project schedule permits, meet with college counselor*
 - Begin researching scholarships and financial aid

- February–March**
 - Continue meeting with college counselor
 - Discuss senior year class schedule with college counselor
 - Discuss SAT Subject Tests as needed
 - Build list of schools in Cialfo
- May**
 - Ask two teachers for college recommendations. Discuss options with college counselor
- Summer**
 - Research scholarship opportunities
 - Outline/write at least one draft of college essay

MEETING GOALS



Juniors will ideally meet with their college counselor three times before spring break.*

- **Meeting #1:** This is a one-on-one meeting between college counselor and student. Review the Junior Jot Down together, and begin developing a relationship/partnership as it relates to the college search process so that the counselor can gain insight into the student’s school preferences (size, geographic location, urban vs. rural, etc.). The main goal is to create a prospective college list, which the counselor will share—along with a summary of the meeting—with the student’s family.
- **Meeting #2:** This is another one-on-one meeting between college counselor and student to continue to build trust and strengthen the relationship, and to engage in deeper discussion regarding the process (teacher recommendations, standardized testing, essays, plans to visit colleges, etc.), as well as discuss likes/dislikes on the prospective list and rate colleges as Likely, Target, or Reach.
- **Meeting #3:** This is a family meeting that includes the student, at least one parent or guardian, and the college counselor. The goal is to ensure that everyone involved is in agreement as to the direction of the student’s process and progress.

* Counselors are also meeting regularly with seniors and writing recommendations at this time, but will be as flexible as they can about scheduling juniors for their first meetings. Some students may not be able to meet with their counselors until February.



TWELFTH GRADE

College counselors provide additional hands-on support and guidance to seniors as they actively engage in the college application process.

Objective: To assist students in successfully completing their college search and application process while preparing them for the transition to college.

- Support student efforts to maintain a rigorous academic program
- Guide students step-by-step through the college application process, and support them and their families through the pressures of senior year

Student Tasks:

- September–December**
 - Attend College Counseling Senior Supper in September (parents/guardians and seniors)
 - Continue to meet with college representatives visiting GFS. Must have teacher permission to attend session if it involves missing class
 - Take SAT, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT, as needed
 - Check email several times a day for important messages from college counselor and colleges
 - Continue regular meetings with college counselor:
 - Refine and finalize college list in Cialfo
 - Complete required orange transcript request form
 - Submit college essays for review and editing
 - Review application deadlines and requirements for all schools to which applying
 - Contact College Board to submit SAT scores to final list of schools
 - Contact ACT to submit scores to final list of schools
- May (or earlier):** Thank teachers for recommendations and inform them of final college choice



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Cialfo: An online student management platform for college counselors to work and collaborate with students and their families. *Cialfo has replaced Naviance in our College Counseling Office for the Class of 2021 and beyond.*

Common Application: An online application many colleges use to streamline the application process (students complete one application and use it for multiple colleges).

Early Action (EA): Refers to the early submission of applications as well as early notification of admission decisions. However, it is not binding: Students do not have to commit to attending an institution if accepted EA. (See also Restrictive Early Action.)

Early Decision (ED): A binding application in which a student applies to just one college and agrees, if accepted, to attend that school and withdraw any other applications. Requires early submission of all application materials and yields earlier decision from the college. Some schools offer two early decision deadlines (November, January).

FERPA Waiver: A form to indicate that a student will waive their right to access their recommendation letters. Waiving one's right reassures colleges that the recommendation is candid and truthful. There is a paper version in the College Counseling Office and an online version on the Common App for colleges. Consult with your counselor for more information.

Junior Jot Down: A survey that students complete during fall of junior year before scheduling their first appointment with their assigned college counselor.

Orange Sheet: An application checklist and transcript request students must complete before teacher recommendations and transcripts can be sent to schools.

Parent Survey: A survey made available through Cialfo during junior year so parents/guardians can provide information about their child to the College Counseling Office.

Regular Decision: The typical process by which students apply to college, with the promise of receiving an admission decision no later than April 1 of senior year.

Restrictive Early Action: This is a non-binding, early application option for students who are confident of their first college choice. Colleges may have restrictions regarding submitting early applications to other schools. Check the college's admission website for specific information about that school's REA policy. (See also Early Action.)

Rolling Admission: Colleges evaluate applications as they are received versus waiting to evaluate all applications after a hard deadline. Schools will continue to evaluate applicants until they have filled all slots for their incoming class.

Senior Brag Sheet: A survey that students complete before meeting with their college counselor for the first time when they come back to school in the fall of senior year.



NOTES

RESOURCES



- Cialfo
cialfo.co
- The Common Application
commonapp.org
- CollegeBoard / SAT
collegeboard.org
- The ACT Test
act.org
- FinAid – The SmartStudent™ Guide to Financial Aid
finaid.org
- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)
ncaa.org