

Selective College Admissions

Are you sure you want to go to college, and, if so, why?

- To prepare for specialized careers
- To develop general problem-solving, higher-order thinking, & intellectual skills
- To improve judgment & acquire knowledge concerning subjective values & cultural activities
- To make friends & live with peers in a proximity unlikely to be duplicated in any other setting
- To enjoy a transition between living at home & complete independence
- To increase the probability of higher lifetime income
- To increase the probability of enjoying more challenging & interesting work
- To make a particular choice for engaging in the growth process which occurs during the formative years 18-22 (i.e., intense intellectual activity, heavy workload, partial independence, particular kinds of personal interactions)
- To establish personal work habits & expectations
- To have fun

How to prepare during high school

- Take a broad program of academically challenging courses—work to your best personal level.
- Do your best in each course you take—best preparation for SAT/ACT & college.
- Take as much English/Humanities as possible—taught to develop communications & writing skills; knowledge of culture, tradition, & values; understanding & subjective/critical thinking.
- Take as much Math/Science as possible, too.
 - M/S perfect complement to E/H (E/H provides breadth, while M/S provides rigor, analytical thinking, logic, problem solving, goal orientation, organization, discipline, competence)
 - M/S necessary preparation for engineering, science, medicine, law, & business
 - Keeps your options open
 - Image of M/S people being narrow nerds & liberal arts people being broad-gauged leaders is propaganda, myth.
- Realize the major differences between HS academics & college academics.
 - Proportion of time spent on academics—HS: 20-30 hrs/wk in class w/ 5-15 hrs/wk preparation; college: 15-20 hrs/wk w/ up to 2 hrs/1 hr of class spent to prepare
 - Pace—cover lots of material in a short period of time
 - Transition to understanding concepts, not memorizing trivia; textbook, lecture, assignments, exams—all progressive learning
 - Frequency of evaluation—not weekly like in HS; typically, one or two midterm exams, plus one final, perhaps one term paper
 - Peer group—larger proportion of very fine students; measure against class average, not necessarily, top of class

Looking for a college—your goal is to find the best match

- Evaluate personal strength/weaknesses, likes/dislikes & how you want to integrate them with your college experience—both academic & non-academic areas of interest.

- Review/define personal objectives, qualities, etc., to form an idea of the benefits of college—consider in the context of a unique, four-year experience, cultural, psychological, emotional, social growth, friendships, professional training, chance to live with peers for four years, fun.

--DON'T

- Just look at the price tag

- Apply because it's close to home or far away

- Go where all your friends go

- Apply just because it's the "best" or it gained a particular rating

- Believe second or third hand information

- Narrow your options too quickly

--DO

- Get as much reliable information as possible

- Look at a broad range of schools—at least, initially

- Think carefully about yourself & your expectations. What do you want from college? with what kinds of people do you want to spend the next four years? How do you want to grow & spend your time—work & play?

- Then try to find the school (or small group of schools) that seems to offer the best match. Which schools really seem to offer what you are seeking?

- Invest considerable time & effort in exploring schools.

- Attend central meetings or high school visits; do not be afraid to ask questions.

- Talk with alumni &, especially, current students.

- Visit campus.

- Ideally, do not go on weekend, holiday, or summer.

- Do not simply take the tour.

- Call in advance & stay overnight with a student living group, if possible. Meet students & go to classes with them.

- Arrange to meet with admissions officers, faculty friends, others you might know on campus, making arrangements in advance.

- Look into other sources.

- High school guidance counselor

- Information colleges send & their websites

- Current undergraduates

- Friends, teachers, coaches, parents, etc.

- For a particular college, find out about major fields offered, special programs, academic strengths & weaknesses, the freshman year, athletics, music, special interest groups, living groups.

College entrance examinations

- Determine which exams are required by your schools & how they count multiple sittings.
- Realize that test scores are very important, despite what a college may say.
- ACT required by most state & Midwestern colleges; sections in English, Math, Reading, Science Reasoning, & Writing (optional); score range is 5 to 36
- SAT required by most private schools, especially those in the East, West, & South; sections in Math, Verbal, & Writing; score range is 600 to 2400
- SAT measures aptitude (ability to learn); ACT measures knowledge gained; ACT throws fast balls; SAT throws curve balls.
- SAT II Subject Tests required by the most highly-competitive colleges & service academies; designed to measure competence in specific disciplines; take them immediately upon completion of relevant course when you still have the best command of the material; score range is 200 to 800
- Take all tests by the end of your junior year; you'll know where you stand & you have plenty of opportunities to retake, if necessary.
- Four factors will determine your score: genetics, rigor of & performance in school course work, outside reading, & test preparation.
- Prepare strategically for these exams; know what to expect before you walk in on test day.

How to apply to college

- Write to admissions office/respond on website for information & application—do it early.
- Know whether your colleges offer early action, early decision, regular admission, or rolling admissions & application due dates.
- Realize that people do not apply to college, folders do! It is your responsibility to make sure that your application is a complete, accurate, & positive picture of you. The folder & application are your single opportunity to influence the process. Approach each application as an opportunity & devote time & thought to its various segments.
 - Take time with the application—make it neat & complete. Application should not look like you filled it out at the eleventh hour.
 - Be sure to include any academic honors & awards
 - Essays
 - Essays are designed to show depth & breadth of thought, creativity, reveal personality, writing, skills, & mechanics.
 - Essays should be thoughtful, logical, organized, & conform to requested.
 - Be yourself—don't give us what you think we want to hear. Don't overreach. Use comfortable vocabulary.
 - No excuse for misspellings, punctuation errors, sentence run-ons & fragments
 - Admissions reader is interested in: Can you state an idea? Can you express it clearly & concisely? How do you support it?
 - Realize that there is no one correct answer—so, not interested in specific opinion, but rather the support for that opinion.

- Three helpful essay subjects: how you overcame adversity, how you helped someone less fortunate than yourself, how your personal attributes make you a good match for that college
- Extra-curricular activities. Activities should be more than just a list. If it is not in the folder, committee does not know about it.
 - Explain involvement, benefits, specific achievements (i.e., varsity letters, captain, all-conference, squad leader, first chair, offices held).
 - List should designate activity, years participated (9, 10, 11, 12), amount of time, honors/awards/recognitions (individual & group) & leadership positions held.
 - Be sure to include part-time job(s)—duties, number of hours, duration—somewhere in the application.
 - The type or nature of the activity is not as relevant as the degree of achievement, commitment, involvement, depth.
 - Extra-curriculars are evaluated by how you have developed yourself & how you have impacted others.
- Interview
 - Be yourself.
 - Relax—it's little more than a conversation.
 - Be prepared to talk—about yourself, your interests, accomplishments, etc. Make sure you mention everything important about yourself.
 - Come prepared. Review your interests, accomplishments, etc.
 - Ask questions about the college—programs, living arrangements, the freshman year, etc.
 - There are two purposes for an interview:
 - For you to find out about the school
 - For the interviewer to find out about you
 - How important is the interview?
 - Varies from school to school
 - Depends on interviewer, quality of report
 - Depends on your total qualifications
 - In any case, it's one more piece of information in the folder that you'll want to be a positive one.
- Recommendations
 - Ask people who know you well, who will not only write the superlatives, but also the "why's" behind them (i.e., a long, thoughtful rec from a coach is far superior to a one-liner from the principal).
 - Ask teacher early for one rec—ask him/her to copy it & attach to each school's form; providing stamps & addressed envelopes is a thoughtful courtesy.
 - Sign the confidentiality waiver.

Criteria colleges use in offering admission

- It varies from school to school.
- Generally, high school record is at least as important as college entrance exam scores. To be sure, grades & test scores are the major consideration.
- Activities & accomplishments, particularly outstanding achievements, are very important.
- Admissions officers try to identify personal attributes from folder: leadership (probably the most important characteristic that will set you apart), commitment, creativity, ingenuity, determination, drive, resiliency, personal force, energy, enthusiasm. Is the applicant interesting, exciting?
- More of the best students are applying to more of the best colleges. Therefore, the competition is stiffer.
- All these factors, as well as the judgment of individual admissions professionals, introduce a degree of randomness into the process.

Financial aid

- Many opportunities for financial assistance
 - To apply for aid through a particular college, you must complete both the universal Financial Aid Form & that college's aid application. Save copies of all completed forms for future reference.
 - Government aid—college will qualify you for the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant through the federal government & Ohio Instructional Grant (state government—only for Ohioans attending college in Ohio).
 - Loans available through the federal government (Perkins & Stafford loans) & special bank offerings
 - Investigate all sources of independent, outside scholarships (companies, foundations, civic organizations, etc.).
- If you need assistance, apply for it. Even if your parents' income seems high, a college education is an expensive investment. Especially if siblings are in college, too, your family situation may have unique characteristics that would warrant substantial aid.
- Don't let apparent lack of financial resources keep you from applying to any college that you might otherwise seriously consider.
- Realize that you must put forth a genuine effort to obtain college funding. Colleges expect a contribution from you—personal resources, summer jobs, part-time campus employment, and/or low-interest government loans.

Final selection

- After learning admissions & financial aid decisions from every college to which you have applied, weigh all the factors involved, including, among others:
 - Academic challenge & offerings
 - Extra-curricular/social considerations
 - Financial concerns
- Make visits, if possible, to top two or three "finalists". Attend a campus preview weekend, if offered. Seek advice wherever feasible, but you make the final decision.
- Consider your decision thoughtfully, carefully, & deliberately.
- Remember, your goal is to find the best match.