

**Burke Mountain Academy**  
College Counseling Handbook 2022-2023



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## **The Nuts and Bolts of College Planning**

In this guide, parents will find a wide range of guidance on planning for college as well as details on the support Burke Mountain Academy offers. This guide is not meant to be exhaustive nor is it a substitute for open-minded conversation nor research of your own. Instead, the purpose of this document is to begin demystifying the basics, reduce stress, and help our community feel confident enough to tune out the overwhelming amount of noise and manipulation that the college admissions generates online and in peer groups.

### **I. Overview – What Happens – and When?**

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#### **Grades 9 - 11**

Generally speaking, there is no reason ninth grade students should think much, if at all, about college. If they happen to have an elder sibling beginning the process sure, they can learn from the periphery but under no circumstances will they benefit from the anxiety an older sibling or relative is feeling regarding college applications. Instead, it is essential that students in ninth grade develop the discipline and planning skills to thrive in BMA's intensive environment, particularly during the race season. They should concentrate on learning the content of their courses, developing good study habits, adapting to the demands of their training and travel, making positive, healthy relationships and, crucially, becoming valuable citizens of our community while internalizing the life-long value of hard work. They should also take seriously the learning opportunities inherent in narrative assessments.

In Grade 10, students should continue focusing their attention on the skills they began developing in Grade 9—Rome wasn't built in a day, after all. By Grade 10 there will be variation among our students—some will be better at time management than others, for instance, and the areas in which they need to improve as individuals will become clearer. It is essential that our students and their parents agree to face their challenges before entering the eleventh grade as admissions offices regard this as a high school student's most important year. In the spring of the junior year, students will attend a multi-day college counseling workshop (more on this in Addendum III).

#### **Grade 12**

College advising is directly integrated into the schedules of all 12<sup>th</sup> graders during Trimester 1 of the English 12 class. We will devote a significant portion of class each week to college essays, applications and other matters related to college. The Director of College Counseling attends the October training camp in Europe to ensure that students have completed high-quality applications for the Early Decision/Early Action deadlines.

#### **A Note on the Timeline**

At most private high schools not driven by ski racing, most students will begin some form of college counseling in the middle of their junior year, if not sooner. The case is obviously quite different at BMA. When students at other high schools are fretting over their options, our students are intensively focused on the racing season and we don't want them getting stressed out about college since it would put counter-productive pressure on their performance and

development as well as their overall emotional welfare. For this and other reasons we begin formal college advising in the spring of the junior year.

You might wonder if this timing puts students at a disadvantage in college admissions—are students at other high schools getting ahead of them? Based on the quality of their applications and our admissions results, there is certainly no reason to believe this is the case. In fact, it is tempting to suggest that by starting college counseling earlier in the junior year—to say nothing of in the lower grades—other schools simply prolong the process and, doing so, confer extra stress and no advantage on their students.

## **II. The College List**

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The college list is, of course, the list of colleges a student will apply to. In most high schools, this list is divided among **reach schools**, **target schools**, and **reserve schools**. The latter is a rather misleading term assigned to those colleges that a student would be unlikely to be rejected from; in the past, this category was referred to as “safety schools”.

At BMA, these neat categorizations don’t exist. The college list at BMA is very different from at other schools because the core of the list for most students will be defined by athletics. By their senior year, students will have distinguished themselves in different ways, which means there will be some variation in their top choices—but these top choices will still be driven largely by athletic opportunity. More on this in the section on in Section IV.

### Opportunities at the USCSA Level

It is also a fact that not everyone will ski for a Division 1 team. With this in mind, we want students to create other options and this, naturally, influences the college list. However, this requires some nuance, good timing, and a lot of talking with students because we don't want them to feel that by suggesting a couple of USCSA colleges we do not believe in their potential to ski at a higher level.

### Methodology

Still, how does a student assemble a college list? While this is best done on a case-by-case basis, there is some general advice that applies to all:

- If a college coach is committed to supporting an individual’s application, this will determine their top option. It’s entirely possible that more than one coach will offer support, which complicates the situation somewhat—but this is a challenge we welcome
- If a student is in conversation with college coaches and the feedback is, “Let’s keep in touch”, it sounds like a post-grad year is in order. Advising on the college list in this situation must be done on a case-by-case basis but, basically, the applicant should apply, at minimum, to a couple of “reserve” schools in the event of a catastrophic change to their athletic trajectory
- If a student wishes to select colleges based on considerations other than athletics they must make an honest assessment of their academic ability and performance and what they offer a college community beyond their ski racing background

- In the great majority of cases, the college list will remain at least somewhat in flux until all the applications have been submitted. This is natural and should cause no anxiety

### III. Visiting Colleges

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Most of our students have at least some understanding of at least a few colleges based on who is on the ski racing team or what they have heard from a friend or relative who attended or is attending the college. This can help the student understand certain aspects of a particular college's culture and whether a given student might feel at home there, *but we do not recommend making decisions based on the experiences or opinions of others*. Equally important, *avoid being attracted to or repelled by a college simply because so-and-so goes there*.

Visiting a college is helpful to understand if a person will fit in there and thrive overall. Ideally, our students will visit campuses when classes are in session—Parent's Weekend is often an ideal time, as is April vacation. Summer visits are better than nothing but, really, life on campus just isn't the same when school is not in full swing.

A visit to *any* college campus can be valuable because it helps students feel what life on campus is like in general, which helps them begin developing a framework for what they want in their college experience. If a person comes away from, say, a campus in an urban jungle and feels overwhelmed, that's a sign that they should visit suburban or rural campuses. However, they might also find that this urban college has certain attributes that are attractive—perhaps it's the way the clubs are organized, or the college has a particularly intelligent approach to residential life—and by keeping these attractive points in mind rather than tossing the baby with the bathwater the student will be better able to develop a more rigorous framework for what they want. After a college visit, we would like more nuanced feedback than, "I love it" or, "It sucked."

A final point: BMA does not offer college tours. We simply do not have the staffing for it and, moreover, in making visits to colleges we would by necessity need to choose certain ones over others and in doing so would inadvertently suggest to students that we prefer those colleges over others. In fact, we don't and strongly believe that the concept of a "good college" is entirely subjective and based on the needs of individuals.

### IV. Athletic Recruiting

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Let's take apart recruiting step by step, starting with the pre-read.

#### **What is a Pre-Read?**

If you haven't already heard this term, a pre-read is the process by which a college coach runs the athlete's academic profile past the admissions office with the goal of discovering if this individual meets the admissions office's basic standards for an applicant receiving special athletic consideration. Simply put, a coach can obtain some flexibility from the admissions office regarding the academic standards that would otherwise apply. As part of this process, the coach will supply the admissions office with the prospect's transcript and *full* set of narratives. This is not an actual

application and admissions officers are not admitting anyone during the pre-read—they are simply vetting *potential* applicants and letting coaches know who would be admissible given special athletic consideration. Once vetted by the admissions office, the coach assembles his prospects into a pool of admissible athletes.

### **What is Pull?**

Landing in this pool is good news, of course, but this does not mean that the coach can get all these athletes through the admissions office—there is a limit to how many athletes needing special consideration they will agree to. Once a coach selects the athletes he or she wants from the pool, the coach will commit to them by offering to “pull” for them. What does this mean? The coach will tell the athlete to apply to the college and, basically, he will attach a note to the application requesting that the admissions office give this applicant special consideration—in other words, the coach will *pull* the application through the process. Sounds great, right? Sort of. Pull spots are very limited. Complicating matters further, no coach has a fixed number of pull spots from one year to the next—maybe it’s four this year and two next. Maybe one. Furthermore, admissions offices differ in just how much they’ll flex their standards to admit an athlete.

### **More on the Pool of Contenders**

When a coach considers who among his pool of admissible athletes he wants to commit a pull spot to, the coach knows that each athlete is very likely in the pool of at least one other college coach. This creates some dissonance in communication and as the coaches scramble for advantage they ask themselves, *Who is going to be the best athlete for my team? Who is going to be a really good fit for this college? And will they actually come?* Because latecomers can be added to the pool, coaches often like to keep their options open, which can delay their decisions about who to pull for. This is maddening for the athletes because, of course, they crave certainty and really just want to get on with their lives. They inevitably find themselves asking, *Who is actually going to pull for me? What do I do if Coach X wants to pull for me but I really want to ski for Coach Y? Why do I have to wait so long for an answer?*

Unfortunately, there is no clear way to make this process smoother and the circumstances of recruiting will vary athlete by athlete and team by team. That said, one fact applies to all: strong narratives open more doors. Because pull spots are so valuable, no coach wants to get tangled up with an athlete who doesn’t have at least a fighting chance of getting through the pre-read.

### **Below are a few of the most common questions regarding athletic recruiting:**

*Will a coach recruit a student whose FIS points are higher than would be expected for a particular team?*

This is unlikely but it can happen depending on the broader circumstances. However, this does not mean that a coach will always and only choose the athletes with the lowest points within their pool. Points only tell part of the story.

*Do college coaches rank the prospects in their pools of admissible athletes?*

Some might but if they do the ranking will likely change over time. A coach might also make a surprise move that contradicts their own ranking. Rather than being distracted by what someone may or may not be doing and speculating on how this might affect one’s athletes opportunities, we

recommend looking beyond this area of concern to matters that are actually knowable and within your control.

*Should a student apply to college even if he or she will be doing a PG year?*

Yes. The student should secure an offer of admission and defer for a year as a hedge against major changes in their ski racing trajectory (i.e., injury or some other diversion).

*In this case, should a student apply to their top-choice colleges even if it's unlikely the coach will use pull to have the student admitted?*

Yes. Even if the applicant is denied, there is no stigma against applying again the following year assuming the applicant is more attractive this time around.

*Does it matter to a coach if a student really wants to go their college?*

Yes. Coaches like certainty and applicants who are committed to their college are more reliable recruits. Coaches also want athletes who are content with their college environment.

A final point to keep in mind is that admissions offices, not coaches, ultimately decide who is admitted to a college.

## **V. Narrative Assessments and Owning One's Success**

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With every college application, BMA submits several supporting documents, among them the school profile, the student's transcript, two academic letters of recommendation, one comprehensive recommendation from the college counselor, and a summary of the narrative assessments from Grade 11. If a college requests them, we will send the full narratives from Grade 9 onward.

Narratives reveal so much more than a letter grade and if a student has utilized the resources at BMA to full advantage the comprehensive nature of the narrative assessments will work in the student's favor. Yes, many of our students struggle and, if they struggle during Grade 11, this will likely appear in the summary of their narratives that we send to colleges. However, such narratives will also emphasize the student's attempts to overcome their difficulties and, therefore, a struggling student has every opportunity to give a positive impression to an admissions office.

Of course, the power of the narratives can cut both ways. Teachers should always write narratives that are encouraging and provide a pathway to future growth, but that does not mean they are uniformly positive or flattering. While the teachers do the manual work of writing the narratives, in a broader sense they have already been written by the actions of the students themselves. If a student has persistently refused to address shortcomings or ignored areas of growth this will be clear to admissions officers. Because BMA relies on open and honest communication with admissions offices, we are uniformly transparent in how we summarize the assessments that we send to all colleges. But again, positive narratives are entirely within the control of the student.

On a somewhat related note, BMA does not report disciplinary infractions to colleges. Given the school's desire to create the space for failure and the learning that should accompany it, our

position is that disciplinary infractions are a part of learning and are no more relevant to a college application than a single bad test score in one class or a weak performance on an essay.

## **VI. Academic Advising in the Age of Ambiguity**

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A version of the following was distributed in May 2022 by email but is worth including here.

### The Confusion

A couple weeks ago, I spent about 20 minutes on Williams' website in search of their admissions requirements—how many years of science or foreign language or math do they require of applicants? My search was in vain so I gave them a ring and discovered that, amazingly, Williams no longer has formal admission requirements. In subsequent phone calls I learned that the same goes for Dartmouth. And Bates, whose new tagline is *Come as You Are*. There are many others, of course, who have adopted this new method of ambiguous guidance.

Meanwhile, other colleges appear to be stuck on the fence. For instance, while Middlebury does not have specific requirements for admission, they do state the following: “Generally, we like to see two things: 1) that students are challenging themselves by taking advantage of the most rigorous courses available to them, and 2) that students take five “solids” (English, math, social studies, a lab science, and a language) every year for four years.” On their website, Dartmouth also forgoes specific requirements but states that they expect applicants will have taken “the most challenging curriculum available to them”.

Others are just confusing. For instance, as of this writing, Colby has clearly delineated requirements on their website but in conversations with their admissions office it turns out that these are, in fact, guidelines, not requirements.

Harvard is an especially interesting case. They had an acceptance rate of 3.19% (!) this year and their website states: “There is no “one size fits all” rule about which curriculum to study during secondary school years. Students should challenge themselves by taking courses deemed appropriate by their teachers and counselors.” On the surface, this guidance might appear to be as ambiguous as some of the others but, upon deeper consideration, I find it to be the most reasonable of them all. Here and elsewhere, Harvard is telling prospective applicants to do what’s best for them rather than looking to an institution to tell them what they should do and be.

### The Big Picture

At BMA, we fully believe that students should follow the pathway through high school that best suits their interests and abilities, as well as a full night’s sleep. However, we also wonder how high school students are supposed to choose courses given the lack of specific guidance from college admissions offices taken as a group, a challenge compounded by the limited options for applicants who want to ski Division 1 in college. Confusion over which courses to take in high school is especially acute in the area of foreign language requirements. In moments of conflicting information—or outright vacuums thereof—it often helps to pull the lens back.

While some of the most selective colleges will state that they are open to seriously considering any application that washes up on their shores, the profiles of their incoming classes strongly suggest otherwise. When announcing their acceptances this year, Williams published the following: “The admitted students represent 877 high schools, and their academic profile is exceptional.” The announcement goes on to detail just how academically exceptional these young people are—it’s a class of academic outliers. Similarly, in his announcement of the newest class at Harvard, the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid referred to “the world’s greatest students”. In conversations with Dartmouth’s admissions office, I hear, repeatedly, that they are faced with selecting a sliver of an applicant pool that is chock full of young people who are “the best in their context”.

While some admissions offices still want to split hairs over what full academic engagement means (three sequential years of a foreign language rather than two, for instance), a better way of approaching the vagueness is to agree that if you want to have a shot at attending a very selective college, you need to take full advantage of the academic opportunities at BMA. Let’s face it, it’s not just Williams and Harvard and Dartmouth: *every* college that is very selective wants applicants who, as a baseline for consideration, are not just academically engaged as vigorously as their circumstances allow but are in some way intellectually distinguished even among other outliers. Otherwise, the college takes the risk of admitting an applicant who can’t hack it, or who will sully the tidy summaries they publish to announce their incoming classes, or who will cheapen the value of the degree and annoy the alumni donor base, or who is competent but lackluster compared with their cohort. at the college. Colleges are many things but, at their root, they are institutions of learning.

Since part of every college application comes with an explanation of BMA’s academic context, admissions offices can easily deduce when someone is or is not fully engaged academically. Mind you, not every student at BMA—or at any high school—should be taking the maximum load of the most challenging courses. Not everyone is built for that—but nor is everyone built to attend any of the most selective colleges. Instead, we want all our graduates to land in an environment—academic and otherwise—that is a good fit and which they are prepared to handle.

### Our Advice

- If you want to be considered by any of the most selective colleges, take a full academic load every year. It’s that simple. Many students at BMA will be tempted to take neither a foreign language nor an additional elective in the senior year, which leaves them with a light load. The admissions offices at very selective colleges will look upon this unfavorably as it falls short of full academic engagement.
- Understand that college is not a prize nor a status symbol. If anything, it is a privilege and a luxury—a period of several years in which young people devote themselves to preparing for subsequent stages of adulthood. One need not attend a very selective college to gain this preparation nor to find fulfillment and success in life.

- Athletic pull spots are very limited so we do not advise you to use this as your primary avenue to acceptance or to assume college coaches can override academic requirements, stated or implied. Yes, many of our students benefit from athletic pull every year but there simply are not enough recruiting spots available to college coaches to justify an academic strategy that assumes special consideration.

### Coursework outside BMA

BMA's curricular offerings are, by necessity, limited and very structured. With such a small student body our teaching faculty is, by necessity, correspondingly small and, therefore, we are unable to offer the expansive academic options that larger schools can. However, when a student exceeds the curriculum, the faculty can help arrange for suitably advanced coursework provided it fits within the overall daily and calendar schedule at BMA.

**Please bear in mind that we will not issue transfer credit to students who wish to replace core courses at BMA with online or summer options while they are enrolled at BMA.** Doing so would depreciate the value of our own curriculum, which weakens the integrity of the school more broadly.

## **VII. Randomness**

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No matter how wisely we manage our lives, we must accept that admission to selective colleges has become far more difficult than in years past. The reason is simply that applicant pools nowadays are so much deeper and admissions offices have become attuned to the value of admitting an increasingly wide range of applicants. At the most selective colleges, *randomness* plays a role in who gets the thumbs up and admissions officers will readily confess that there are many cases in which they cannot in good faith explain why one student was admitted and another denied. However, it is worth remembering that applicants are most vulnerable to randomness and variables beyond their control when they follow a narrow plan. In other words, we do not recommend an approach that amounts to “Dartmouth or bust”.

In any given year, a significant portion of BMA's graduates and post-grads will go on to race at Division 1 colleges. However, others will not follow the D1 pathway—and this is a perfectly acceptable. We consider athletics to be a lifelong pursuit and are very supportive of students who wish to pursue sport on a recreational level in college. Therefore, as a mental exercise, we encourage students to ponder the pathways that might reveal themselves if they were to remove D1 ski racing from their list of qualifications for a prospective college. The USCSA includes so many fantastic colleges with ski teams that range from student-run, self-funded to university-funded with paid coaches. We encourage you to keep an open mind about the wonderful [range of USCSA colleges](#).

### Individual versus Overall Acceptance Rates

One way of obtaining a stronger appreciation for randomness in college admissions is to make a rough calculation of the acceptance rate for individuals as opposed to the overall acceptance rate—after all, applicants are individuals, not the overall applicant pool. Since Harvard provides a reasonably robust [profile](#) of its incoming classes, let's make an approximate acceptance rate for an

individual. **A caveat: this is an exercise for demonstration purposes and while the statistical breakdown that follows is not perfect it is realistic as an approximation.**

In our case, the individual will be a Caucasian female from New England. For the Class of 2025, there were 57,786 applicants and 2,320 were admitted, which makes an overall acceptance rate of 4%.

A few stats to digest:

16.6% of admitted students were from New England

44% were Caucasian

And a couple of assumptions:

50% of admitted students were female

10% of admitted students were recruited to fulfill special institutional objectives (i.e., athletes, development cases, etc.)

So...starting with 4%, we'll immediately cut that in half (based on gender), which gives us 2%. We'll then take another 10% off (institutional objectives), which leaves us with an overall acceptance rate of 1.8%. Of that group, 44% were Caucasian, which brings us down to 0.79%, and of that 16.6% were from New England, leaving us with a final, approximate acceptance rate of 0.12%. Put another way, our sample student is looking at a 99.88% chance of rejection.

Obviously, Harvard is absurdly difficult to be admitted to but if you do a similar breakdown of acceptance rates for other colleges—even the ones that don't appear to be all that selective—you will begin to understand the significance of randomness in college admissions. If your blood pressure has just doubled, I recommend that you turn immediately to Addendum 1 for some comfort.

## **VIII. Standardized Testing**

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Before diving into this topic, it's worth reiterating that standardized testing is, once again, optional for 2022-2023 admissions (except for MIT).

### **PSAT**

The first test the students encounter is the [PSAT](#). While many view this test as a predictor for how well a student will score on the SAT, we prefer not to get too excited or anxious depending on the score. Admissions offices do not base their decisions on these tests nor is a student predestined to failure or excellence based on their PSAT score. Nonetheless, it can be handy as a diagnostic and sitting for the PSAT offers a good opportunity to understand what it feels like to take a long, physically uncomfortable examination. BMA therefore requires all 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students to take this test on campus in the spring.

### **SAT/ACT**

The tests that admissions offices will consider are the [SAT](#) and the [ACT](#). Admissions offices have no preference for one or the other. While some applicants stick with one test, others will attempt

both before deciding which they prefer. The tests are [different](#) so it's a good idea to play around with both before committing to one. Options for doing so are [here](#) and [here](#).

### **To Test or Not to Test**

The short answer is, *Why not?* A more considered answer requires a bit of background information.

**Seniors:** We will be offering an in-school SAT on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022 and we recommend taking the test. Since it is likely that many seniors will take a post-grad year and reapply to colleges in 2023-2024, this test can be used as a diagnostic that will help them decide if they should invest more time and energy into test prep and retaking the test.

**Juniors:** We recommend that all juniors take the SAT in the spring at BMA. (Unfortunately, the College Board will not allow juniors to take the SAT during our October on-campus test.) Use this test as a diagnostic and, based on the results, decide if the test may be helpful to your application based on your preliminary college aspirations and/or if you should invest more time and energy into test prep and retaking the test. We are, of course, available to help make this decision.

**Sophomores & Freshman:** Students in these grades will sit for the PSAT at BMA in the spring of 2023; it is not recommended that students in these grades bother with the SAT (or ACT).

### **A few items to keep in mind**

- The SAT and ACT are often referred to as "high stakes" tests; we wish to de-emphasize this concept and remind you that **applicants are entirely in control of how test scores are used**. For instance, a score that might not be suitable for Dartmouth might be valuable in an application to Utah or Colorado. Or an applicant can just ignore the test score entirely and get on with their day.
- When colleges went test-optional during the darkest days of the pandemic, their goal was to collect data and experience for a couple of years, and, upon digesting that information, make a more permanent determination about their use of test scores. For that reason, the 2023-2024 admissions cycle *might* be very different from the past couple of years.
- If colleges make any changes to their test-optional policy there is no reason to expect that they will all go in the same direction. While the Ivy League tends to move in lockstep on admissions and recruiting policies, the [NESCAC](#) schools are not obligated in the same way. If a few of the leading institutions within this group go one way, yes, this could influence the others, but this is not nearly as likely as it is with the Ivy League. In other words, testing requirements across the US could become quite variable as each college decides for itself what is the best approach.
- I suspect that most of us agree that the SAT or ACT score offers superficial, if any, insight into an applicant's abilities that is not otherwise characterized in the many other pieces of a college application. However, from an admissions office's perspective there are cases in which this number, when combined with [Landscape](#) data, can help them

achieve their admissions objectives, particularly their desire to ferret out high-functioning students in very large, underperforming high schools, or high schools that are unknown to them. Of course, this data is *entirely irrelevant* for admissions officers assessing students from a well-known, specialized academy such as BMA but it is possible that we will be forced to return to mandatory standardized testing, nonetheless. Yes, this is frustrating—but it hasn't happened yet.

- Standardized testing—along with the enormous amount of time and effort (and money) that goes into test prep—runs counter to BMA's mission of providing an environment where young people have enormous opportunity to achieve athletic excellence as well as develop a love of learning, a love that we hope they carry with them throughout their lives. Taking a standardized test itself or grinding through hours of test prep does not in any way further any aspect of our mission and, in fact, we worry that it turns young people off to learning; certainly it deprives them of time that could be spent much, much more productively--reading a book, making something, or just having a spare moment to relax.
- In my communications with admissions offices, I make all these points very clear. I also emphasize the enormous *daily* commitment our students make to their own betterment and that of their peers. If standardized testing is once again required, we believe it is essential for admissions offices to understand where on our list of priorities it lands as this will allow them to contextualize test scores from our students every bit as much as they desire contextualization for applicants in other types of environments.

## **IX. Financial Aid**

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It's no mystery that a college education in the United States is ludicrously expensive and more people than ever require assistance of some type to cover the cost.

### **Domestic Students**

The two main documents that facilitate a financial aid award are the FAFSA and the CSS profile. By submitting the [FAFSA](#), a family learns how much aid they can receive from the federal government in the form of subsidized loans. This option is not available to international students. The [CSS](#), by contrast, is the application for non-federal aid and helps colleges decide the amount of money a family should be able to contribute toward the cost of a college education, while the college itself subsidizes the balance. The deadlines for these documents vary according to state and institution but, as a general rule, it's better to submit them as soon as possible after they become available in the fall each year. This is a fairly good [article](#) if you wish to read more about applying for financial aid through the FAFSA; [this one](#) elaborates a bit on the CSS Profile.

### **International Students**

For international students who seek aid, the CSS Profile is essential but there might be other options available depending on the college. Moreover, not all colleges offer aid to international students. While you can do a Web search for “colleges that offer financial aid to international students” I don't recommend it as you'll just end up mired in clickbait. A better method is to look

up this information for each college you are interested in. Rather than trying to navigate a series of confusing websites, a quick keyword search will save you time and frustration—i.e., “Bates College financial aid international students.” Still, websites are not always all they are cracked up to be. If you can’t quickly find the information you need, just pick up the phone and call the admissions office.

### **Athletic Scholarships**

Many families are surprised to learn that the [Ivy League](#) and the [NESCAC](#) schools are restricted from offering athletic scholarships. By contrast, most state universities and many colleges outside the East are able to entice athletes with scholarships. If you have ever wondered why the powerhouse ski colleges out West have so many older Europeans on their teams, it is simply because these retired professional racers are able to attend college in the US for free or at a greatly reduced cost.

## **X. Next Steps**

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Let’s talk! Please feel free to email questions to Tom Bojko, BMA’s Director of College Counseling: [tbojko@burkemountainacademy.org](mailto:tbojko@burkemountainacademy.org).

## **Addendum I – College Acceptances for the Classes of 2022 & 2021**

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Below, you will find the college admissions results for the Classes of 2022 and 2021.

While we hope you agree that what matters most is that young people find the best fit for their abilities and ambitions, we would also like to point out that an unusually high percentage of students at BMA have been admitted to very selective colleges and universities. This is clear evidence that the BMA process—academic, athletic, and community—is working even against historic headwinds in college admissions as well as athletic recruiting.

### **Class of 2022 Acceptances (plus post grads who applied in 2021)**

Babson College  
Boston College  
Colby College  
Dartmouth College  
Middlebury College  
Montana State University  
New York University  
Saint Michael's College  
St. Lawrence University  
University of Colorado, Boulder  
University of Colorado, Denver  
University of Connecticut  
University of Denver  
University of New Hampshire  
University of Vermont  
Williams College

### **Class of 2021 Acceptances (plus post grads who applied in 2020)**

Bates College  
Boston College  
Colby College  
Colorado College  
Colorado State University (Ft. Collins)  
Dartmouth College  
Lehigh University  
Middlebury College  
Montana State University (Bozeman)  
Northern Michigan University  
Oregon State University  
Penn State University  
Reed College  
St. Lawrence University  
Saint Michael's College

Santa Clara University  
Universidad de Navarra  
University of Colorado, Boulder  
University of Hawaii, Manoa  
University of New Hampshire  
University of Utah  
University of Vermont  
University of WA, Seattle  
Villanova University  
Williams College

## **Addendum II. Post-grad Year(s) & Deferring Enrollment to College**

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Historically, the deadline for making a final decision about which college to enroll in is May 1<sup>st</sup>.

What if you will be taking a year off before actually attending college? For starters, you must still enroll in your college by May 1<sup>st</sup>. The way to defer will vary from college to college so check with the admissions office of the college you are deferring from. Keep the following in mind:

- You will have to commit to attending that college (this includes paying a deposit) before you can defer
- You will have to apply for the deferral—it doesn't happen automatically
- If you end up choosing another college down the road, the college you deferred from will keep your deposit
- If you were admitted under an Early Decision contract, you cannot apply to additional colleges during your post-grad year as you are bound by contract to attend the college that admitted you

## **Addendum III – What happens in the college counseling workshop?**

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The workshop runs in the spring in the week leading up to graduation. Ideally, it lasts for four days and we will meet for a couple hours each day. There is some minimal homework each night but, overall, the workshop is designed to be as fun as possible while giving rising seniors a head start on their work.

During the workshop, we'll discuss college lists and how to formulate a sensible one, think about college essays, get the letters of recommendation sorted out, learn how admissions offices go about the difficult work of admitting and denying students and spent a lot of time on Q & A. On the last day of the workshop, we'll have a few guest speakers in the form of seniors who, by then, are able to view their experience of applying to college with a rational, analytical eye and are, therefore, in a great position to offer advice to their younger peers.

## **Addendum IV – How to earn great letters of recommendation**

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Applying to college is very straightforward—in a sense, it's easy. You just answer some questions, bang out a few essays, pay some money, and then click "submit".

Of course, an awful lot goes into the years preceding the filling out of those applications. In fact, in many ways a college application is largely an accounting of the past. An applicant's academic performance is the cornerstone of any application (colleges and universities are, *first and foremost*, places of learning...), but athletics can also be key, and so is one's contribution to the community—particularly the community at BMA. A strong academic record and a respectable character cannot suddenly be invented or fudged once a student starts applying to college any more than low FIS points can be.

This being the case, I like to remind younger students that *their actions now* will become the content of their college applications *in the future*. A very concrete demonstration of this is the fact that, at the end of every year, the current juniors will have to ask two of their junior year teachers for letters of recommendation. In addition, I will write an all-encompassing letter of recommendation for all applicants. What we say in these letters directly relies upon what each student has given us to write about.

When I write my counselor's letter of recommendation for college applicants, some of my favorite sources to draw from are a student's performance on dining hall duty, or their civility in the RBC, or how much fun they are on a mountain bike ride, or their attitude on hay bales, or the way they conduct themselves in airports, hotels or restaurants when on the road, or when interacting with service workers. Other interactions to consider: do they spend their idle time chatting with friends or staring at their phones? Are they welcoming to newcomers? *All of this matters*. In fact, given that colleges are inundated with applicants who demonstrate academic mastery, one might argue that contribution to one's community matters more now than it ever has, as does general civility.

How should you talk about all this with your junior (or sophomore, or freshman)? Well, the first thing I would encourage is that you take an oblique approach. Instead of talking directly about college, just talk to them about their lives in general. Ask about their relationships and the ways in which they approach being human beings in a world where other human beings rely on them. If starting on more concrete terms would help, I suppose having an open-minded discussion about their most recent academic and athletic narratives would be a good place to start. However, I also encourage you to find ways to learn about their work on dining hall duty, about their lives in the dorm, about the ways in which they make life better for those around them. Ask them what they learn while training and how they help others grow as athletes. Ask them what role they play in the classroom—are they active participants? Do they encourage their peers? How do they make others feel more confident or better about themselves?

In short, if you would like to begin talking about college with your child, have a discussion about how they are making the most of the many opportunities afforded them, as well as how they are making their little slice of the world a better place. Good letters of recommendation will follow.

### **Addendum V – General guidance for Canadian families**

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The experience of Canadian students at BMA should be no different from that of anyone else's. However, where their lives will diverge is in their options for college. While some Canadian students might attend college in the US regardless of their athletic options, it is more likely that Canadians will return to Canada if they are unable to manifest ski racing options at a high level. This, of course, is up to each family to decide and we understand that the enormous disparity in the cost of a college education in the US will influence many families.

For this reason, the college list for a Canadian applicant might look very different from that of an American. Whereas most Americans will have some degree of "safety schools" on their lists, for a Canadian those schools will likely be back home. Fortunately, the applications for most Canadian colleges and universities is much more straightforward than those in the US so straddling the two

systems needn't be a burden.

Something else that is different for applicants to Canadian colleges is the transcript. As such, we create a separate transcript that fulfills all the requirements of the Canadian system. Please bear in mind that under no circumstances will this transcript be revealed to anyone but admissions offices or, as needed, other formal institutions.

If you will be applying to Canadian colleges, we encourage you to do some research on your own. While we can help students with the actual applications, there can be wrinkles in the process related to applying for scholarships, or off-kilter deadlines, and we recommend that families themselves take responsibility for understanding any special requirements that admissions to Canadian colleges might require.

### **Addendum VI – School Profile**

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Parents often ask how an admissions office gets to know our school, particularly the unique aspects of it. Aside from the school's half-a-century-long relationship with admissions offices, we are also in contact with them throughout the year. There is also the school profile, a document that accompanies every college application. This year's school profile is on the following page:



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## **PROFILE:**

### **Overview**

[Burke Mountain Academy](#) prides itself on its unique environment that has been carefully nurtured for over 50 years. A **focus on community has been paramount since the school's founding in 1970**. This is evidenced in our students' connections with one another across grades and with the teaching faculty, coaches, and staff. As an example of this, we are likely the only boarding school in New England whose dining hall staff has advisees; surely, we are the only school with co-ed dorms. **We are also noteworthy for the immense amount of agency we grant our students and the corresponding attention we pay to turning failure into teachable moments.** While we are rightly known as a top-tier ski racing academy, we pay particular attention to instilling in our students a respect for the value of a community based on trust as well as the enormous amount of work that such a community requires.

**As part of our overall philosophy, our students share equal responsibility for maintaining the quality of life on campus.** For instance, every Burke student participates in the general maintenance of school property, takes regular turns at kitchen and dining hall duties, dorm cleanings, and helps set up and break down our venue for training and the staging of ski races. This requires an enormous amount of physical exertion and often takes place in extreme weather conditions. Our students also plan and participate in community meetings, dances, talent shows, and a general atmosphere of good fellowship. Off-campus, Burke students **commit to annual service projects** serving the wider community of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. A recent example of this was their fundraising project that yielded a \$28,000 donation to the Vermont Food Bank to help offset the sudden demand in services due to COVID-19. Beyond this, our students are much-cherished partners at [HOPE](#) Vermont and are much sought after by [Kingdom Trails](#) and the [Northwoods Stewardship Center](#) for their trail building skills and unflagging energy.

**Burke Mountain Academy has no class elections, dorm proctors, student council, or the like.** One of our goals is for all students to take significant ownership in creating and sustaining the values of their community. This goal cannot be reached by having a few students on a committee that meets occasionally with a group of parents or staff who do the actual running of the school. The tightness of our community fosters natural communication among students, faculty and staff, and the administration. Through this closeness and their many responsibilities on campus, our students naturally develop **strong teamwork and leadership skills and the ability to form mature relationships** that will allow them to thrive in college and beyond.

Each year, the approximate size of the graduating class is 15 students. Female/male enrollment is roughly equal. Since 2020, Burke Mountain Academy has used Scoir to facilitate applications to college.

**Student-Athletes** **Burke Mountain Academy is not for everyone.** Daily life is very demanding, and our community recognizes we cannot achieve our objectives without **a love of hard work**. Our students prepare for the highest level of athletic competition in the world while also completing a rigorous academic cohort. In doing so, they develop a solid work ethic and learn to endure pressure with grace.

**Being unusually small and highly selective affords our students opportunities not available at larger, more athletically diverse schools.** Training and racing are strategically managed to maximize each athlete's potential for success. In addition to on-snow training, our students also receive dryland training that includes Olympic weightlifting, field circuits, timed hikes up Burke Mountain, mountain biking, dirt road and trail runs, and core and balance routines. **Workouts before and after a full day of academic classes total between three and six hours of focused physical activity daily.** While ski racing is the primary focus of our students, nearly all enjoy mountain biking and a season of soccer.

In 2017 Burke Mountain Academy was designated a [U.S. Ski Team High-Performance Center](#). With this honor comes opportunities to collaborate with the U.S. Ski & Snowboard's (USSA) Park City [Center of Excellence](#) and other high-performance centers to share best practices in sport science and sports medicine; we also serve as a site to host training and education sessions for USSA clubs in the region. As an official training site of the U.S. Ski Team, Burke provides training days on its mountain for regional and national development projects, as well as access to U.S. Ski Team athletes and Division I college teams.

**Graduation** Students must earn a total of **20 credits**, including: **Requirements**  
4 credits: **English**  
3 credits: **Math**  
2 credits: **Social Science (U.S. History req)**  
2 credits: **Foreign Language (waived for non-native English speakers)**  
2 credits: **Science**  
3 credits: **Academic Electives (5 credits for non-native English speakers)**  
4 credits: **Art and/or Physical Education**

**Curriculum** To maintain academic rigor, students are strongly recommended to take five classes per year over three trimesters along with summer assignments across all subjects. Each class meets three days per week in fifty-minute periods along with one eighty-minute period per week. Adjustments are made to the schedule during the winter to account for ski training and racing. **BMA does not offer Advanced Placement or Honors Courses.** However, when a student exceeds the curriculum, the faculty arranges for suitably advanced coursework either on campus or through an online provider. Only under exceptional circumstances will we award credit for a core class taken by an outside provider.

To help foster a lifelong passion for learning, **the entire school holds at least one reading period each week.** During these periods, students gather with their faculty advisors and other staff to enjoy non-assigned readings of their choosing.

Since our students spend long stretches of time at training camps in Europe and Colorado during the school year, we have adapted our academic program to take advantage of this. Instead of trying to shoehorn the standard curriculum into improvised classrooms at the training venues or wrangling with Zoom, our teachers and Head of School deploy concise academic modules that lie outside the regular curriculum. These modules take a wide variety of forms and will vary depending on the year but a sampling includes the following: The Great Myths and Legends of North America; Ski Industry Product Development and Marketing; Leadership Development Seminar; Pushing Mental Limits in Performance; Olympic History and Politics; CAD and 3D Printing; Bike Pedal Design.

**Assessment** **Since its founding, Burke Mountain Academy has provided every student with narrative assessments.** We are in no way a “pass/fail” institution and we are reminded often by the lifelong success of our alumnae/i that our evaluations incentivize a wider range of desirable characteristics than grades do. While the narrative assessments ultimately form a part of our students’ college applications, college admissions is not under consideration when the teachers write these assessments. Therefore, these assessments will often appear quite critical, and **in exchange for our transparency, we ask admissions officers to focus not on the bumps along the way but on a student’s overall development, mastery, intellectual curiosity, and decency in the classroom.** As part of every college application, we will provide a summary, rather than the full set, of the junior year narratives as per the historical preferences of admissions offices. However, the full set of narratives is always readily available by request. **Burke Mountain Academy does not issue academic, athletic, or character awards nor do we rank our students.**

**Honor Code** **We believe a community that promotes trust, respect, and responsibility rather than simply enforcing a set of rules provides the best environment for young people to flourish.** All Burke Mountain Academy community members commit to living by the standards and expectations of our Honor Code, whether on campus, at a BMA-sponsored activity, on trips or in competitions. **This strong sense of community and its values sets us apart from other institutions** and it is present in everything we do.

To allow our students to fully embrace the potential of developing themselves within an atmosphere of such freedom requires unusual amounts of trust as well as the reassurance that, on the rare occasions when this trust is breached, our students can learn from their missteps without the fear of impeding their futures. For this reason, Burke Mountain Academy **does not report academic or behavioral infractions to colleges.** In the very rare cases in which the nature of the infractions exceeds the opportunity to learn from them, students are expelled.

**College Acceptances** In any given year, **100% of graduates from Burke Mountain Academy will be admitted to a wide range of colleges and universities.** Many will be admitted to the most selective schools in the country but what matters most to us is that they find a place that will be conducive to continuing the considerable growth they

experienced at Burke Mountain Academy. **Because success in college placement ultimately comes down to what is right for an individual, we no longer list college acceptances in the school profile.** Please contact us if you have any questions.