

2023-2024 College Counseling Manual



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College Counseling at Vail Mountain School

The College Counseling Program at VMS is designed around the student and his/her/their aspirations with regard to the college search and selection process. This journey is more personal than most realize, yet it is hard to detach oneself from one's peers' experiences, parental expectations, and the global view of what it means to go to college and to go to a certain "type" of college. The pressures can be immense and can only be fully appreciated until one is fully engrossed in the process.

Our goal as the school's Co-Directors of College Counseling is to guide you through the process and to help you and your parents avoid as many of the pitfalls as possible. Along the way, we trust you will learn much more about yourself than what you know now. Self-knowledge also comes by taking ownership of your future directions. This is an exciting time in your life and the college search should add to your experiences, not detract from them. It is imperative that we all develop trust and strong communication skills as you venture forward toward college. So as you travel down this path, keep an open mind, put things in perspective, open lines of communication, and trust in yourself that you can make good decisions.

This manual is designed to be a quick reference guide for you and your family. It basically has two parts – Approach/Philosophy and Logistics. It is not a definitive answer book but rather a general guide as you delve into the college search and form questions. We invite you to utilize our open door policy and engage in helpful discussion. There are so many great resources available for you. We are here to support, advise, guide and be your advocates!

We are so excited to learn more about you. It will be a rewarding experience for all of us.

Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann

Vail Mountain School College Counseling Philosophy

The college counseling program at Vail Mountain School is based firmly on the principle that discovering “good matches” between students and post-secondary institutions is fundamental to the college admission process. The program’s foundation is the concept that students are most likely to succeed at colleges most closely aligned with his/her/their individual capabilities and interests. Working in concert with both students and their families, a primary goal of the college counseling office is to help identify a number of appropriate matches for each student and to provide support and assistance in the application and decision-making processes. It is Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann’s driving philosophy that the colleges best suited for each of our students are the ones that will nurture their academic and social maturation.

Adhering to the multiple deadlines inherent in the college admission process is a significant responsibility that we expect our students to manage, with the college counseling office providing the necessary support. The counseling office will inform, guide, advise, suggest, facilitate, recommend, and refer. In the end, it is the student’s decision where to apply, what to write in essays, and who to ask for recommendations. Students are responsible for submitting applications, registering for tests on time, requesting teacher recommendations, and completing their portion of application forms. The school will be diligent about keeping students informed of deadlines and reminding them of important dates, but we will not assume responsibility for completion of our students’ applications—nor should parents. Remember seniors, you are young adults!

Consistent, open, and honest communication between counselors, students, and parents is crucial to a rewarding and ultimately successful college search.

VMS College Counselor’s Vision and Promise

The VMS College Counseling Office is committed to providing an equity-centered, developmentally appropriate, and exploratory program in which all students can unequivocally acknowledge that their identity is valued, their voice is heard, and work in a self-directed journey is supported. This ethical and empowering education of self-knowledge should consist of not only discovering good fits that meet individual

needs, goals, and values, but also at its culmination, a sense of promise and curiosity for what’s ahead. There is an overarching understanding that success is defined by how thoughtfully, genuinely, and gracefully one engages in the college search as opposed to merely the end result. The decision of where to apply and enroll is a personal one that is made for myriad reasons and is just as varied and authentic as a personal essay. The College Counseling Office uniformly celebrates all student growth plans after graduation and expects students and families to respect and celebrate equally the successes of their peers.

College Counselor’s Responsibilities

- To develop a rapport with each student and to understand and value each student’s strengths, dreams, talents, and concerns.
- To aid each student in constructing an appropriate list of colleges to consider.
- To write a positive, honest, and vivid letter of recommendation for each senior.
- To present students’ transcripts (after each semester) and confidential school recommendations, Secondary School Report, VMS School Profile, etc. to the colleges so that applicants have the strongest chance of being given favorable consideration for admission.
- To meet individually and in seminar with juniors and seniors throughout the college admission process for discussion of, understanding of, and assistance with process components and logistics – college application, college essay, college lists, college interviews, and college research and resources.
- To maintain open communication with parents and to organize formal parent meetings annually.

Student Responsibilities

- Complete college office recommendations or college search tasks and meet deadlines.
- Utilize the expertise of Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann. They have close to 50 years of experience!
- Inform themselves of all their colleges’ deadlines and requirements.
- Request submission of school materials at least two weeks ahead of the colleges’ application deadlines.
- Organize a final college list in SCOIR – Schools I’m Applying To – by published deadline on senior year timeline.

- Register for standardized tests (SAT, ACT) and request scores to be sent to colleges.
- Keep Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann aware of developments in his/her/their college plans.
- Apply to at least two “likely” colleges where he/she/they is nearly certain of admission and where he/she/they would be happy as a student.
- Keep in mind your ethical responsibilities as you describe and promote your high school accomplishments. Do not overly exaggerate or inflate your record.

Parent Responsibilities

- Partner with Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann in support of your child throughout this process.
- Have a chat with your child about college and what you believe your role to be in the process. Talk about your concerns and listen to their concerns. Talk about location, fit, money, etc.
- Meet all financial aid deadlines, if you are applying for aid.
- Check in with your child about the status of his/her/their search and the application process.
- Keep an open mind. Colleges have changed dramatically over the years. Don’t rely on impressions based on old stereotypes. Realize that there are some great schools which might be unfamiliar.
- Move away from a pecking order mentality. The best college for your child may not be the most competitive to get into or the highest on some college ranking list(s).
- Foster your child’s strengths and goals. Allow his/her/their authentic qualities to come through in the application process. The bottom line is that the goal of college admission is to find a match between what the student needs and what the college offers.
- Don’t attend cocktail parties. Seriously. Minimizing college discussion with other parents, particularly about where your child is, and is not, applying is a wise but difficult thing to do. But trust us on this one!
- Help us keep your child in the present. We want students to enjoy all their time at VMS!

VMS College Counseling Policies

- No teacher, administrator, or staff member is to show any student a recommendation written about him/her/ them, or about any other student. This policy gives Vail Mountain School significant credibility with colleges. A college trusts VMS to be candid in our reflections on

students. Students can trust the college counselor and teachers to be positive in their recommendations.

- As part of VMS’s honor code and adhering to ethical best practices as a member of NACAC, NAIS and ACCIS, but mostly for students’ development of autonomy and confidence, their complete application including essays must be their own work – evident of their authentic, voice, personal in nature, for which they will individually shine. Students are encouraged, of course, to ask the college counselor, parents, peers, or a teacher to help proofread an application.
- Vail Mountain School will not support students in any unethical dealing with colleges such as: failing to comply with an Early Decision commitment, getting unethical help with an application, misrepresenting any aspect of the high school record (including the student’s disciplinary history), double-depositing in May (officially enrolling in more than one college).

Ethics in the College Search Process

Students and parents will hear the word “ethics” quite a bit in this process. Having a strong ethical code is a foundational practice at VMS. The college admissions world has seen actions in the last couple of years that challenge many ethical principles. This being the case, Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann believe in guiding students and families in a very ethical and principled approach. We also understand that along with the fact that the college admissions can bring many to question the path one takes in trying to reach his/her college aspirations, pressure can be immense at times. Learning how to handle novel situations is part of the process and part of our role as guides is to walk beside students. When questions arise, we ask that you look to Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann for guidance and advice.

Private Consultants

Some VMS families inquire if they should hire the services of an independent college consultant. While we understand the unfortunate external pressures of the college search process and are sympathetic to special needs perhaps appropriate for some students, we believe that most VMS students do not need such services for a successful college search journey. Remember that VMS has two professional and experienced college counselors—Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann. As mentioned earlier, utilize them. Remember that

independent/private college counselors really can't advocate for your child like VMS can during the process—writing recs, sending emails, making phone calls. Please keep this in mind. Before making any decision on this route, please chat with Ms. Ferrara and/or Mr. Heinemann so that you feel confident about such a choice.

College Counseling Logistics

The following information is a starting point and brief overview of the college search nuts and bolts. The points that follow should create questions, which is a good thing!

College Counseling Reference Calendar:

Junior Year

August

- The college counseling office's August welcome email will set the pace for college counseling activity this fall and highlight the college search programming that will set you up for success.
- **August 4:** Registration deadline for September 9 ACT. This is considered a very early date for Juniors to take this exam. Please speak with the CC office regarding your situation.

September

- Attend college representative visits (in-person and virtual) to VMS — schedule posted on SCOIR and VMS College Counseling (Google) Calendar. Juniors should expect to attend some presentations to practice asking questions, gain information, and form preferences. Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann will be visiting homebases to help prepare for college visits and college fairs in September/October.
- **September 7:** Registration deadline for October 7 SAT.
- **September 9:** ACT - not given at VMS.
- **September 13:** Fall Junior and Parent Program: Launching the College Search with Why?, 6:00-7:00 pm. This is an opportunity to discuss the "process" as well as to officially launch the college search with college knowledge and confidence.
- Read the companion guide (and keep handy): The Truth About College Admission (provided for each junior)
- **September 22:** LAST DAY TO REGISTER FOR ACT TEST ON OCTOBER 28, if applicable.
- **September 27:** SMARTTRACK College Funding virtual presentation: What You Need To Know Now To Pay Less For College.

- **September 27:** CC Coffee w/11th grade parents — come chat with the VMS co-directors of college counseling.
- During September, October and November, take time to complete YouScience and College Preferences in SCOIR. This will prepare you for our work together in January, developing an initial list of colleges, and exploring potential major/career paths based on strengths. Make connections with your YouScience, VIA Character Strengths, and Clifton Strengths (superpowers).

October

- **October 1:** Western Slope/Aspen College Fair and Sessions, 10:00 am-2:00 pm. More than 200 colleges will be in attendance at Aspen High School. For more information and to register, go to www.cwscollegefair.org.
- **October 1:** Ask the Experts College Admission Panel & Reception at VMS, 5:00-6:15 pm. A panel of select admission counselors will offer advice, share success stories, and put you in the know with confidence. Hear directly from the horses' mouths!
- Continue to attend any college representative visits to VMS — schedule posted on SCOIR and the VMS College Counseling Calendar.
- **October 5:** Registration deadline for November 4 SAT.
- **October 16:** PSAT/NMSQT at VMS at 8:00 am. The PSAT is the preliminary SAT and the qualifier for the National Merit Competition. Students do NOT need to register for this.
- **October 28:** ACT at VMS.
- During September, October and November, take time to complete YouScience and College Preferences in SCOIR. This will prepare you for our work together in January, developing an initial list of colleges, and exploring potential major/career paths based on strengths. Make connections with your YouScience, VIA Character Strengths, and Clifton Strengths (superpowers).

November

- **November 2:** Registration deadline for December 2 SAT.
- **November 3:** Registration deadline for December 9 ACT.
- **November 4:** SAT - not given at VMS.
- Take inventory of where you are in your classes and make any necessary adjustments to ensure a strong finish to semester 1.
- Use Thanksgiving break to visit any nearby colleges – wherever your travels may take you! Virtual exploration is also encouraged.

December

- **December 9:** ACT test.
- Upper School exams – you can do it!
- Use winter break to visit any nearby colleges– wherever your travels may take you! Virtual exploration is also encouraged.

January

- Juniors will participate in a college counseling seminar weekly throughout 2nd semester. This class provides an overview of the college admission process and initiates a thorough college search and acquisition of college knowledge.
- **January 5:** REGISTER FOR ACT ON FEBRUARY 10 at VMS.
- **January 11:** Recommended deadline to schedule a 1:1 with Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann.
- Consider planning now for campus visits over February break – February 26-March 1. Colleges will be in the thick of application review as they assemble their incoming fall class and may not be scheduling interviews at this time. However, most will conduct tours regularly throughout the spring. Schedule an information session and a campus tour at the schools you plan to visit.

February

- **February 10:** ACT at VMS
- **February 23:** Registration deadline for March 9 SAT.
- Finalize any February break plans to visit colleges or plan and register for virtual programming and tours.

March

- **March 8:** REGISTRATION DEADLINE FOR ACT ON APRIL 13 at VMS.
- **March 9:** SAT at VMS.

- Consider planning now for campus visits over April break–April 22-26. Schedule an information session and a campus tour at the schools you plan to visit or plan and register for virtual programming and tours. Interviews may or may not be offered.
- Think about what you'd like to do over the summer months, ask questions, learn about different opportunities: travel, internships, job, service program, career exploration, and be sure to build in some down time too.

April

- **April 5:** Make sure to submit senior year course selection form (with any necessary signatures)
- **April 13:** ACT at VMS.
- **April 17:** Spring Junior & Parent College Program & Case Studies Discussion, 5:30-7:30 pm.
- **April 19:** College Essay Writing Retreat for Juniors: Cultivating Your Authentic Story-Telling Voice.
- **April 19:** Registration deadline for May 4 SAT.
- Finalize any April break plans to visit colleges or research colleges online.

May

- **May 3:** Registration deadline for June 8 ACT.
- **May 4:** SAT – not at VMS.
- **May 17:** Registration deadline for SAT on June 1.
- AP Exams – go for it!
- Finalize summer plans – jobs, passion projects, college visitation trips, college interviews, etc.
- Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center for athletes, if applicable.
- A final year-end meeting with Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann is recommended to develop an individualized summer action steps list.
- US exams – finish the year on a note of which you can be proud!

June-August

- **June 1:** SAT at VMS.
- **June 6 or 7:** Attend Common Application Workshop and Essay Hour at VMS, 9:00 am-2:00 pm and 1:00-2:30 pm.
- **June 7:** Registration deadline for July 13 ACT - not held at VMS
- **June 8:** ACT at VMS.
- Register for the August SAT and/or September and/or October ACT at VMS, if applicable.

- Visit campuses; interview, if applicable.
- Develop a college essay(s) – due at Common Application Workshop in June/August.
- Complete any other summer action steps as indicated on summer action steps list.

Senior Year

August

- **August 4: LAST DAY TO REGISTER FOR ACT TEST ON SEPTEMBER 9 at VMS, if applicable.**
- **August 16 or 17:** Attend Common Application Workshop and Essay Hour at VMS, 9:00 am-12:00 pm and 1:00-2:30 pm.
- **August 26:** SAT at VMS.
- Register for October 28 ACT. Early registration is highly recommended to ensure a seat at Vail Mountain School.
- Consider registering with the NCAA eligibility center at www.eligibilitycenter.org, if an athlete.
- Continue completing applications (essays); prioritize by deadline any college application supplements via College KickStart and Common Application.

September

- **September 1:** Deadline to ask two teachers for a recommendation; once agreed, indicate their intention to write a recommendation in SCOIR.
- Attend college representative visits (in-person and virtual) to VMS – schedule posted on SCOIR.
- Visit college campuses (or virtually) throughout the month. Students should plan to interview in conjunction with their research and program attendance. Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann are available to conduct mock interviews to prepare students for the real thing.
- **September 6:** CC Coffee w/12th Grade Parents – come chat with the VMS co-directors of college counseling.
- **September 7:** Registration deadline for October 7 SAT.
- **September 8:** Deadline to run College KickStart, if you haven't done so already.
- **September 9:** Deadline to read, digest, and sign the College Counseling Statement of Understanding.
- **September 9:** ACT at VMS.
- **September 16:** Deadline for 1:1 back-to-school meeting with Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann.
- **September 18:** College Essay Night at VMS, 5:30-9:00 p.m. Dinner provided.

- **September 22: LAST DAY TO REGISTER FOR ACT TEST ON OCTOBER 28, if applicable.**

- **September 27:** SMARTTRACK College Funding virtual presentation: What You Need To Know Now To Pay Less For College

October

- Continue to attend any college representative visits to VMS – schedule posted on SCOIR and the VMS College Counseling Calendar.
- Visit college campuses virtually or in-person throughout the month. Students should plan to interview in conjunction with research and program attendance. Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann is available to conduct mock interviews to prepare students for the real thing.
- **October 1:** The FAFSA becomes available online; it's required by colleges if applying for federal and institutional need-based financial-aid and parent(s) should complete and file for ED and EA applications by the college's published priority deadline(s).
- **October 1:** The CSS Profile becomes available online; if required by the colleges for institutional financial-aid, parent(s) should complete and submit for ED and EA applications by the college's published priority deadline(s).
- **October 1:** Western Slope/Aspen College Fair, 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. More than 200 colleges will be in attendance at Aspen High School. For more information and to register, go to www.cwscollegefair.org.
- **October 1:** Ask the Experts College Admission Panel & Reception at VMS, 5:00-6:15 pm. A panel of select admission counselors will offer advice, share success stories, and put you in the know with confidence. Hear directly from the horses' mouths!
- **October 7:** SAT at VMS.
- **October 18, 19, 20:** Colorado Free Application Days! Submit your Colorado college/university application(s) for free before their early November deadlines.
- Log in to your SAT/ACT portal to order score reports to be sent to your final list colleges – particularly early applications with Nov/Dec deadlines, if applicable.
- **October 27:** Deadline ED/EA applications should be completed (reviewed by Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann) and submitted for November 1. All other applications with November due dates should be nearing final form for submission. Don't forget to meet any financial-aid deadline for any early applications.
- **October 28:** ACT at VMS.

November

- December is often a Regular Decision deadline for interviews. Schedule no later than November!
- **November 1:** Major deadline for ED and EA applications.
- **November 6:** Attend the Univ. of California system application workshop at 3:15 pm in the College Counseling Office, if applicable.
- **November 7:** Attend the California State Univ. system application workshop at 3:15 pm in the College Counseling Office, if applicable.
- **November 11:** Deadline ED/EA applications should be completed (reviewed by Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann) and submitted for November 15/December 1. Don't forget to meet any financial-aid deadline for any early application.
- **November 15:** Major deadline for ED and EA applications.
- **November 30:** Deadline to complete and submit U of California CSU application, if applicable.
- Log in to your SAT/ACT portal to order score reports to be sent to final list colleges for regular applications with January and February deadlines, if applicable.
- Students applying to any school(s) with a December 1/15 EA deadline (including CSU) should complete and submit their application(s) before Thanksgiving break.
- Check ED/EA college admission portal(s) that all of your application materials have been received and your application(s) are marked complete. Read and attend to all emails from any ED/EA college(s).
- Attend an outside scholarship information meeting organized by the VMS College Counseling Office.
- As a Thanksgiving gesture, hand-write thank you notes to your recommenders.

December

- **December 1:** Deadline to submit a priority application to any rolling admission schools.
- **December 2:** Deadline to double-check/confirm that a FINAL balanced college list is reflected in SCOIR – Colleges I'm Applying To. All supporting credentials and documents (including senior grades) will be submitted to any regular decision colleges according to student's final list (deadlines) in SCOIR.
- **December 8:** Deadline January 1 or Regular Decision applications should be in final form and ready for submission. Please note that we "assign" this deadline as exams and winter break should be time to "free"

yourself from the college process.

- Mid to late December, students will learn the status (admit, defer, deny, in a rare occasion – waitlist) from ED I and some EA applications. ED admission will require a deposit as specified and the expectations of the ED agreement honored.

January

- Check your final list colleges' admission portals to confirm all of your application materials have been received and your applications are marked complete. Read and attend to all emails from any of your final list colleges.
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form should be completed and submitted, accompanied by a copy of the 2022 tax return by the priority deadlines for each school.
- If applicable, complete and file the CSS Profile (eDocs too, if applicable) for Regular Decision applications according to institutional priority deadlines.

February

- Check on your final list colleges' admission portals that all of your application materials have been received and your applications are marked complete. Read and attend to all emails from any of your final list colleges.
- Respond to any financial-aid requests for new, additional information.
- By mid-February, students will have learned the status (admit, defer, deny) from ED II or EA applications. ED II admission will require a deposit.

March

- March will begin the "parade of (virtual) envelopes" with decisions being rendered by April 1.
- Continue to keep Ms. Ferrara/Mr. Heinemann informed as you hear from colleges about admission decisions and/or update SCOIR.

April

- Many students will plan to visit top choice colleges they are considering to attend and spend a night, eat in the dining hall, and attend classes before depositing. Accepted Student/Candidate Days on campuses are recommended.
- Reply and/or remain on waitlist(s) of college(s) only if you are seriously interested; most final admission decisions are made in May and June.

- Write a letter of thanks, send an email or reply via portal to colleges, which offered you admission, but you need to politely decline their offer.

May

- **May 1:** Deadline “Designated” National Decision/ Enrollment Day – or at VMS, we say, May Day. A final decision must be made and the enrollment deposit paid via admission portal no later than end of day to enroll/ matriculate.
- Request a one-year deferment, if interested in taking a Gap Year and if a college will accept deferral requests. Please do so as close to May 1st as possible or adhere to college’s deadline and instructions for doing so.
- Once enrollment is confirmed, contact any other colleges to which the student will decline acceptance so that the school may perhaps offer admission to a candidate on the waitlist. VMS does not permit students to double deposit.
- Pay attention to college course registration, housing deadlines and submit any other requested documents.

June

- Final transcripts are submitted to the college to which the student has enrolled. NCAA will have also received a final transcript, if applicable.

Making Choices

When aiding students in creating a college list, the college counseling office will be straightforward and honest in our assessment of their chances for admission, as anything else would be a disservice. We want our students to have accurate information when making decisions. Likewise, parents should serve as voices of reason and reality in their expectations and financial capability to afford college. Students who are most comfortable with the college process are those who comprehend their abilities and needs, and subsequently, are able to find schools that fit those needs. These students have researched their lists well, asked tough questions, and, as a result, have found schools they can truly embrace. Students who listen to their hearts and their heads, and let insight guide them, not college rankings, will be happiest.

Two Important Resources: SCOIR and College Kickstart

Throughout the course of the college search process, you will hear Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann reference two web-based college search networks—SCOIR (pronounced just like “score”) and College Kickstart. Both are complements, not replacements, to the personalized individual and group work offered by the college counseling office.

SCOIR is a dynamic college search, planning, and application platform that allows the office to counsel students by making suggestions and having students take part in research used to aid the search process. SCOIR is also used by the college counseling office as a communication tool that includes submitting student credentials to college admissions.

College Kickstart is a program that students use to create and evolve their college lists in a way that can bring statistical insight into the process for a student’s chances of being admitted to particular colleges and universities. It is also a tool the office uses to help advise students and their families throughout the process.

A Balanced List

Ideally, when creating a “balanced” list of schools, we recommend that students include one to two solid (likely), one to two target, one to two reach and, sometimes, one super reach, and that he/she/they individually discuss super reach schools that are reasonable for his/her/their time, energy, and financial situation.

At VMS, we try to avoid the current trend of the scattergun approach, where students blanket admission offices with as many as 15-20 applications. Some colleges prefer to invite students who they believe will actually attend, as this will increase their yield, and which subsequently makes them appear more attractive. Because of this scattergun trend, admission offices are finding it more difficult to identify the ‘sure bets.’ Increasingly, admission offices are likely to take into account a student’s demonstrated interest.

Keep in mind that every college or university to which a student applies will expect his/her/their most careful effort. If the student doesn’t show sincere interest, knowledge, and personalization on his/her/their application, he/she/they will appear as just another

person sending out an electronic application. Applying to 6-8 schools generally is ideal, and particularly no more than 10. In fact, the average number of schools that VMS seniors apply to is 7.

Initially, before whittling down a proposed list of colleges to apply to, the list may be quite long. There will be many more places to learn about and discover, than places to which a student will actually apply. The goal is to construct a list that is both broad and deep. In our office, we use the terms super reach (unlikely), reach, target, and solid (likely) to rate the difficulty of admission based upon a student's academic profile, selectivity of the respective institution, and any possible historical data from previous students who may have applied from VMS.

Finding Likely (Solid) Schools

Potentially, the most emotionally difficult aspect of creating the college list is choosing and sticking with several schools to which the student is quite likely to gain admission. Every parent understands the rich talents and personality of his/her/their child and has come to view certain schools as excellent and others as adequate or even inadequate. The challenge is finding several schools the student feels are strong (meaning fits the student's needs) and to which the likelihood of admission is high. However, if the search continues too long, it can sidetrack the student from senior fall courses and constructing strong applications to an already established list. Highlighted below are two guiding principles that can make this part of the process easier for parents and students:

- Be open-minded. Over the past several years, admission rates have been the most selective in history, and with more students predicted to apply to colleges this fall, it will likely be another record year. While this has made the more prestigious schools even more competitive, it has also made less well-known schools both more demanding, and composed of a greater number of highly qualified students. Consequently, before students dismiss a school because they have not heard of it or because they know someone who attended several years ago and found it unimpressive, they should do their own research into what that college is like today.
- When visiting schools for the first time, consider visiting schools other than those that are among the most competitive for admission. If anything, visit schools you are least familiar with as a means of broadening your perspective in your search.

Some Factors in Choosing the "Right" College For You:

The number of factors to consider in choosing a college seems endless. However, there are several variables that distinguish themselves as significant, particularly as the search begins.

Size of Institution

- Extra large (over 30,000)
- Large (15,000-30,000)
- Medium (5,000-14,999)
- Small to medium (1,500-4,999)
- Small (under 1,500)

Location and Surroundings

- Rural, suburban, urban
- Coastal, Midwest, Mountain West
- United States or international

Intellectually

- What are the required courses? Are there distribution requirements or is there a core curriculum?
- What is the number of courses required each semester to graduate?
- Is there a strong department in your area of academic interest? Is a thesis required in your major?
- Size of classes
- Availability and interest of the faculty in teaching undergraduates
- What are the other students like? Do they enjoy studying? Do they take their work seriously?
- Intensity; degree of independence expected
- Availability of courses to undergraduates or non-majors
- Pre-professional programs and their access to non-majors
- What computer system is used? Can I access the library (and other significant research information) from my dormitory room?
- What interdisciplinary programs are offered?

The Culture of the School

- Mission statement
- Fraternities/sororities, social atmosphere
- Diversity (diversity of ideas and dialogue as well as race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, socio-economic, talent)
- Activities (extracurricular, both formal and informal)
- Dormitory life/residential life—who gets to live where? With whom? When?

Extracurricular Opportunities for Study Outside the Traditional Curriculum

- College exchanges
- Study abroad, or specialized study within the United States
- Academic calendar. Are there unique qualities to the calendar such as a January term, block scheduling, semesters or quarters?

Placement Programs—Jobs or Graduate School Opportunities at a College

- These services can inform your strategy for choosing classes and leveraging career networking opportunities.

Preconceptions

- Whether intentional or not, you often judge the colleges you visit against some abstract notion of what you believe a college ought to be.
- The college search process is evolutionary. What you believe today may completely change after visiting several colleges. It's okay to be uncertain about some of the questions above, but understand that your thoughts and opinions will develop the more you research and visit schools.

Self-Evaluation and Personal Inventory Questions to Aid the Process (Time to Think):

The college selection process is about making good matches (please note the plural form of match as there is not just one, but rather a multitude). Before a student begins researching specific colleges, and even before considering what college qualities and characteristics he/she/they may want to search for, the student should take a personal inventory. The first step in planning for college is getting to know oneself—strengths, weaknesses, goals, plans, likes, dislikes, hopes, and dreams.

Use the questions that follow to begin an honest and thoughtful self-evaluation. Critically examine your experience at Vail Mountain School. What have you enjoyed or not enjoyed about your education here? Has VMS been a good match for you? Why or why not? Which experiences—academic, personal, extracurricular, social—have been especially valuable for you? Where have you had success and where have you not done as well?

Please keep in mind that completing a personal inventory or self-evaluation is the first step toward planning for college and is probably the most important. Your responses to these questions may change over time, but going through this process will be extremely valuable as you begin planning for college.

Goals and Values Questions

- Which aspects of your years in the upper school have been most meaningful to you? If you could live this period over again, would you do anything differently? If so, what?
- What values are most important to you? What do you care about most? What occupies most of your time, energy, effort, and/or thoughts in and out of school?
- How do you define success? Are you satisfied with your accomplishments to date? What do you most want to achieve in the years ahead?
- What kind of person would you like to become? What are your personal gifts and strengths and which of them would you like to develop? What would you like to change about yourself?
- Is there anything that you have secretly wanted to do or anyone you wanted to be? If you had a year to go anywhere and do anything you wanted, how would you spend that year?
- What experiences have shaped your growth as a person and your way of thinking?

Education Questions

- What are your academic interests? Which courses have you enjoyed the most? Which courses have been the most difficult for you? Why?
- What do you choose to learn when you can learn on your own? Consider the interests you have pursued beyond class assignments, including topics you have chosen for research papers, independent reading, out-of-school projects, school activities, and volunteer work. What do your choices suggest about your interests and the way you like to learn?

- How do you learn best? What methods of teaching and/or style of teacher engage your interest the most? Are you a visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or tactile learner?
- How much do you genuinely like to read, discuss issues, and exchange ideas? What has been your most stimulating intellectual experience in recent years?
- Has the environment at Vail Mountain School encouraged you to develop your interests, talents, and abilities? How have you grown or changed during your upper school years? Have you been sufficiently challenged? Have you felt limited in any way? What would you change about the school if you were able to do so?
- How well do you think Vail Mountain School has prepared you for college? In what skill area or academic subject do you feel most confident or least confident? Why?
- Have you worked to your potential? Is your academic record an accurate measure of your ability and potential? What are your PSAT scores? What do you consider to be the best measure of your potential for college success?
- Are there any outside circumstances in your recent experience or background that have interfered with your academic performance? Consider any home responsibilities or difficulties, illness or emotional stress, parental influences, or other factors.

Interests and Activities

- What activities do you most enjoy outside the daily routine of school, classes, and other responsibilities? Which activities have meant the most to you? Why? Looking back, would you have made different choices?
- Do your activities show a strong pattern of commitment or contribution to other individuals, to your family, to the community, and/or to your school?
- How would others describe your role in the school, at home, or in your community? What do you consider to be your most significant contribution to those settings?
- What do you most enjoy doing to relax? Which experiences or events have been especially fun or relaxing for you?

The World Around You

- How would you describe your family and home environment? How has that setting influenced your way of thinking? How have your interests and abilities been affected by your parents, brothers and sisters, or your family responsibilities?
- What do your parents and friends expect of you? How have their expectations influenced the goals and standards you have set for yourself? To what pressures have you felt the need to conform? Why?
- What is the most controversial issue you have encountered in recent years? Why does the issue concern you? What is your reaction to that controversy? How did you form your opinion on that issue?
- When and where have you encountered people who think and act differently from you? What viewpoints have challenged you the most? How did you respond? What did you learn about yourself and others?
- What concerns you most about the world around you? Presuming that you had the obligation and opportunity to change the world, where would you start?
- Do you have any current or historical heroes or heroines? Who? Why?
- What books have changed your way of thinking? Who are some of your favorite authors? What do you read for pleasure?

Personality and Relationships with Others

- How would someone who knows you well describe you? What would that person say are your best qualities? Your shortcomings? Would you agree with that assessment?
- Which relationships are most important to you and why? Describe, without giving their names, the people who you consider to be your best friends. Similarly, describe your best critics and your best advocates. In what ways are they similar or different from you?
- Describe, without giving names, the students at Vail Mountain School. Which types of students do you feel close to? Which types of students do you admire most?
- How are you influenced by others who are important to you? How important to you are approval, rewards, and recognition? How do you respond to pressure, competition, or challenge? How do you react to failure, disappointment, or criticism?

- How free do you feel to make your own choices and decisions? What are the best decisions you have made in the last few months or years? How much do you rely on direction, advice, or guidance from others?

These questions are courtesy of the College Board publication "Looking Ahead to Your Future." Comparable sets of personal inventory and self-evaluation questions can be found in many college reference books and other resources.

*Additionally, these types of questions could be asked in college interviews, so it would behoove you to think about how you would respond.

The Admission Process: How Does It Work?

Colleges attempt to work in conjunction with the student and the school to assess the student's ability to be successful within his/her/their community. Schools weigh academic preparation, but they also consider a student's social environment. Schools ponder the degree to which they feel a student will contribute to his/her/their new community. This is admission in the "ideal" world. Some large universities use a formula based on grade point average, test scores (your class this will be less so), and course strength. The decision is made purely on the quantitative statistics a student has amassed. However, the majority of schools will base their decision on a variety of factors and may consider these factors according to their particular committee orientation. The following provides a possible distribution in order of importance:

Transcript/Secondary School Record

The transcript is considered by most colleges as the most important factor in the review of applicants.

How successful has the student handled a solid, college-preparatory curriculum? In addition to the course load and distribution, rigor of program, consideration is given to participation in elective offerings, extracurricular activities, and community service involvement.

The Application/Supplements/Portfolio, if applicable

What impact has the student made in high school to add to the quality and substance of the classroom and the community? How well does the student write as reflected in the application essay(s)? What indicates the

academic interests and intellectual depth and breadth of the student? Overall, how does the student's story fit with what the college is looking for?

College Counselor Recommendation & School Report

A positive comprehensive letter is written by the college counselor, highlighting strengths and explaining any difficulties. The purpose is to paint an accurate, yet positive portrait of the student, interpret VMS academic culture and grading, and explain any extenuating circumstances in a student's life.

Personal Essay

The essay provides authentic insight into the student's personality, values, and goals. The essay should be thoughtful and highly personal (a snippet of a memoir). It should demonstrate careful and well-constructed writing.

Recommendations

These are the intellectual portraits colleges get of students from academic instructors. Often schools will ask for one or two recommendations from teachers. Parents frequently ask, "Should we seek outside, supplemental recommendations?" This is a hard question. However, the rule to remember is that if the person (an employer, a minister, a coach) has direct knowledge of the applicant's successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses, and can write a descriptive letter that will support the candidate, we recommend soliciting it. However, if the respondent is a family friend who happens to be important either with the college or with the nation, etc., but does not know much about the student, the letter should be avoided. It can hinder the overall assessment of the applicant.

Standardized Test Scores

Three types of tests are used by colleges to achieve a comparison between prospective applicants. These are the SAT, ACT, and for some, the AP. Despite many debates on standardized testing, and the popularity of the test-optional movement, standardized testing remains an important factor in counseling students. At this time, our office still believes ALL students should take the standardized exams with guidance from the student's college counselor. College KickStart can help to determine if a student's test scores will support their application to each final list school.

The SAT

This test is to measure a student's verbal and mathematical aptitude as a predictor of success with first-year college level course demands. The SAT contains two sections: evidence-based reading and writing, and mathematics. Each section will be scored from 200 to 800 with a possible maximum of 1600.

The ACT

This test measures acquired knowledge in four categories: English usage, mathematics, social science reasoning, and natural science reasoning. The test is scored on a range from 1 to 36. There is an additional writing section that is optional. Your Composite Score is the average of the four category scores.

Which to take:

Colleges give no preference to the ACT or SAT. First, consider your preliminary PreACT and PSAT scores and the experience of taking different exams that vary structurally. In some cases, it may help you to sit for both the SAT and ACT early in junior year to gather more data. The goal is to develop a testing plan for the remainder of the year, that may or may not include formal test preparation. This is a very personal decision and will vary from student to student. Please utilize your college counselors if in need of advice. Also, take a look at Compass's resources for more information:

<https://www.compassprep.com/why-choose-sat/>

<https://www.compassprep.com/concordance-and-conversion-sat-and-act-scores/>

AP Exams

These exams are not required by colleges for admission but many colleges do accept them as a means to further evaluate an applicant. This would only apply to students who took, or are taking, AP courses in the 9th, 10th, or 11th grade. In general, an applicant would only self-report exam scores of 4 or 5 for admissions review.

Campus Visits and Interviews

Campus visits are important. Period. A good look gives students and families perspective. We believe it is vital to the process to get on a campus, tour, explore and question. The best time to visit campus is during February and April break of Junior year. Remember, in the beginning, where and what campus you visit isn't overly important. Carving out time to explore and form preferences is what is key. Colorado Mesa University,

Regis University, Colorado School of Mines, University of Denver, and University of Colorado-Boulder are all within two hours of Vail.

Often, selective colleges will recommend a personal interview as part of holistic admissions. These interviews are best conducted on campus; however, if it isn't feasible to visit campus, an alum interview can be arranged locally or via a Zoom meeting scheduled through the admission office. In fact, some colleges only offer off-campus alumni interviews after an application is submitted. While the interview may be the least important among admission criteria, it could also be the most important. Leaving a favorable impression with an admission interviewer can sway the opinion of the committee.

Admission Decision Plans

When applying to colleges and universities, there are various "plans" or "timelines" that students can choose from when applying as each college approaches the evaluation process differently.

Regular Decision: The vast majority of students in the United States apply to colleges under the Regular Decision program. This is simply a term that generally denotes a particular time of the year. Most, not all, regular decision plans have deadlines around the first of the year – January 1, January 15, February 1.

Rolling: Some colleges have no deadlines but accept applications on a "rolling" basis and read applications as they are entered in their systems. This is usually done throughout the year from September until its freshman class is full. Therefore, the earlier you apply, the earlier you hear back. Notification will depend on when the application is sent. (Sometimes priority is given to early applicants.)

It is important to understand the various policies for students who wish to pursue early action and/or early decision programs.

Early Action: The early action plans are similar to early decision plans in that applicants learn early in the admission cycle (usually in January or February) whether a college has admitted them. But unlike early decision, early action plans are not binding, meaning applicants do NOT have to commit to a college to which they've applied for early action. Under these plans, students may apply to other colleges. Usually, they can notify the college of their decision by May 1. The deadlines for EA are typically November 1, 15 and December 1.

Early Decision I: The Early Decision I plan allows students to apply early (usually in November) and receive an admission decision (late December) well in advance of the usual notification date (April). Early Decision I plans are “binding,” which means if students apply as early decision candidates, they agree to attend the college if admitted and offered an adequate financial aid package. Although students can apply to only one college for early decision, they may apply to other colleges under early action, priority, or regular admission. If they are admitted by their first-choice college early, they must withdraw other applications. Usually, colleges insist on a non-refundable deposit well before May 1. The deadlines for ED are typically November 1, 15.

Early Decision II: Some schools offer a second round of early decision to which a student usually applies in January and is notified of results in late February. The student must simultaneously submit regular decision applications, and, like Early Decision I, withdraw all other applications if admitted. If the student is admitted, he/she/they is/are committed to attend. A student can apply Early Decision II after being denied or deferred Early Decision I by another college. The deadlines for ED II are typically January 1, 15, and February 1.

Single Choice Early Action/Restrictive Early Action: Some colleges offer an admission option called “single-choice early action” or “restrictive early action.” The plans work the same way as other early action plans, but in this case, candidates may not apply early (either early action or early decision) to any other school with the exception of public or international universities. Students will learn of the decision by mid-December, but have until May 1 to make a decision, thus allowing you to compare offers of financial aid in the spring before making a commitment.

Should you apply ED:

Students should apply under an early decision plan only if they are entirely confident that they have already chosen the college they want to attend. These plans make a lot of sense if one college is a student's clear preference and if the student's profile closely matches the students who attend that college.

It may behoove a student not to apply under an early decision plan if they intend to weigh offers and financial aid packages from several colleges later in the spring. Also, students shouldn't apply early if it is to their advantage to show more senior year work. If students plan to impress an admission office with excellent grades senior year, they may want to wait until after the first semester ends to apply.

Accepting Your Offer of Admission & Making Your Enrollment Deposit

If a student is accepted under an Early Decision plan, he/she/they has committed to attend the college unless his/her/their family and the college cannot agree on a financial aid package, thereby releasing the student from the agreement. For Early Decision candidates, colleges typically require the enrollment contract and deposit by February 1. For spring acceptances, colleges require that students make their enrollment decision and submit their deposit typically by May 1. If a student is on the waiting list at another college, he/she/they should accept and deposit with one of the schools to which he/she has been accepted by May 1. If the student is then accepted at a school from the waiting list in May or June, he/she/they can then accept the new offer and inform the other college of this decision. In most cases, the student will have to forfeit his/her/they original deposit. The same would apply for any poaching college making an offer after May 1. Vail Mountain School does not permit students to double deposit—a policy that is guided by the school's commitment to honesty and the National Association of College Admission Counseling's Guide to Ethical Practices in College Admission. Colleges require final transcripts before they officially confirm a student's enrollment, and the counseling office will send a transcript only to the college the student will be attending as well as any waitlist school, if a student makes the request.

Deferring College for a Year

After having been admitted to a four-year college, some students may decide to take a gap year to travel, work, pursue athletics in a more focused way, or join a service program. The VMS college counseling office would endorse such a consideration; in our experience and supported by research (see Gap Year Research Consortium), students who take a gap year often begin college both refreshed and with greater focus. If a college will entertain a deferral request (not all do), it is advised to adhere to petition deadlines for maximum consideration and approval.

Focus on Financial Aid

The Application Process

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid): The first step in applying for federal aid, this detailed form is offered by the U.S. Department of Education. The FAFSA is available electronically beginning October 1st. Only one FAFSA needs to be completed each year even if a student is considering several different colleges. Applicants may be able to use the FAFSA to apply for state and college aid as well. Students and parents should utilize the financial-aid websites at each college to learn about what types of aid may be available and the instructions and deadlines to apply for aid and scholarships. Most colleges use the FAFSA (prior-year taxes) to determine internal scholarship awards and loans. To understand how aid is determined visit <https://studentaid.gov/complete-aid-process/how-calculated>

Applying electronically for federal student aid by using FAFSA on the web is the most common method. Complete the application online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. The site contains useful information about the electronic process and what to expect after completing it.

Students could miss out on aid because of the differing FAFSA deadlines, which everyone must meet to be considered for government grants and subsidized loans. The forms, which are available from colleges and at www.fafsa.ed.gov, are reviewed first by the government and then by the student's prospective school. While the deadline on the form is June 30, many schools' individual aid deadlines—listed in the colleges' materials but not on the FAFSA forms—are as early as the individual college's application deadline. Parents of high school seniors should keep a list of all the schools' deadlines and utilize SCOIR/College KickStart to do so.

If a student fails to complete some key parts of his/her/their FAFSA, the central processor will reject the form sending it back to the student and not to the prospective schools and potentially resulting in a delay. One error that parents often make is putting their income and tax information in the student section or vice versa, a mistake which cannot be fixed by the machine scanning the form. As a safeguard, use the online form at www.fafsa.ed.gov; it will indicate if questions have been left blank and can even recognize some obvious errors, such as household income of \$50,000 combined with a \$5 million mortgage. Of course, there are many circumstances that can't be fully explained on a FAFSA form—for example, if

a family member was recently laid off from work. In that case, officers recommend writing a letter to the aid office stating the family's financial situation and submitting it at the same time as submitting the FAFSA. Just make sure the letter goes directly to the college.

Federal Student Aid Estimator: This online tool will help students and their families financially plan for college before a student's senior year. Users may calculate a student's eligibility for federal student aid including Pell Grants and subsidized loans at <https://studentaid.gov/aid-estimator/>. Families are strongly encouraged to visit this site early in the college search for full transparency.

SMARTTRACK EFC Calculator: This service is offered to VMS families to determine Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) and pathways for making college more affordable.

College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile

This is a supplemental need-analysis document used by some colleges and private scholarship programs to award their non-federal aid funds. Early in a student's senior year, participating colleges may ask him/her/them to file a PROFILE so that a predetermination can be made of his/her/their financial aid eligibility at that school. The PROFILE does NOT replace the FAFSA—students must still file a FAFSA in order to be considered for federal student aid. Students should file a PROFILE only for those colleges and programs that require it. PROFILE registration forms, which are processed by the College Scholarship Service (CSS), as well as a list of colleges that use PROFILE, are available online at <https://profile.collegeboard.org/profile/ppi/participatingInstitutions.aspx>. The CSS Profile goes live each year on October 1st.

Federal Student Aid Programs

Eligibility for federal student aid programs (except the Federal PLUS loan and unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loan, which will be described later) is primarily based on financial need. Families demonstrate need for federal student aid by completing and filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The availability of this form is expected to be in December.

Federal Pell Grant: This is the largest single aid program. Grants are awarded to students demonstrating high financial need and are not required to be repaid. Using FAFSA data, financial need is determined according to the Federal Methodology, a formula established by Congress to assess the family's ability to contribute to the student's educational costs. For each eligible student, the

Department of Education forwards funds to the school, which are then delivered to the student's account at the school, or are paid directly to the student. The maximum award varies annually according to the level of federal funding. For 2023-2024, the maximum Pell Grant award is \$6,495.

Federal Perkins Loan: This is a federally funded, campus-based loan administered by the college aid office. Students do not apply separately for the Federal Perkins Loan—it is awarded to eligible students as part of an aid package at the college. A five percent interest rate is charged annually after completion of studies, and a grace period is specified in the promissory note. The maximum Federal Perkins Loan that most colleges can award to an undergraduate is \$5,500 per year. In order to distribute limited funds to as many students as possible, most schools allocate awards that are less than the maximum.

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG): This is a federal campus-based grant awarded to students who demonstrate significant financial need. Like the Federal Perkins Loan, students do not apply separately for a FSEOG—it is awarded to eligible students as part of the aid package at the college. The maximum FSEOG that most colleges can award is \$4,000 per year. Due to extremely limited funding in this program, awards are frequently smaller than this amount with an average award of less than \$1,000 per year.

Federal Work-Study (FWS): This is a part-time work program awarding on- or off-campus jobs to students who demonstrate financial need. FWS positions are primarily funded by the government, but are also partially funded by the institution. FWS is awarded to eligible students by the college as part of the student's financial aid package. The maximum FWS award is based on the student's financial need, the number of hours the student is able to work, and the amount of FWS funding available at the institution.

Direct Loans: This term encompasses two separate loan programs described below: a student loan known as the Federal Stafford Loan and a parent loan known as a Federal PLUS Loan. A FAFSA must be filed for Federal Stafford Loan consideration.

Federal Stafford Loan: This is a long-term, low interest rate loan administered by the Department of Education through private commercial lending agencies (banks, credit unions, etc.). If you're a dependent undergraduate

student (excluding students whose parents cannot borrow PLUS Loans), each year you can borrow up to:

- \$5,500 (for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2023) if you're a first-year student enrolled in a program of study that is at least a full academic year. No more than \$3,500 of this amount can be in subsidized loans.
- \$6,500 (for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2023) if you've completed your first year of study and the remainder of your program is at least a full academic year. No more than \$4,500 of this amount can be in subsidized loans.
- \$7,500 (for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2023) if you've completed two years of study and the remainder of your program is at least a full academic year. No more than \$5,500 of this amount can be in subsidized loans. Students can borrow Federal Stafford Loan funds regardless of financial need.

Stafford Loans (Two Types)

Subsidized Stafford Loan: If you demonstrate financial need, you may qualify. This need is calculated based on the information provided on the FAFSA. With a subsidized Stafford Loan, the federal government pays the loan interest while you are in school, during deferment, and during grace periods.

Unsubsidized Stafford Loan: If you do not qualify for a subsidized Stafford Loan or need more money than the subsidized program can offer, you may qualify, regardless of your family income. With these loans, you are responsible for all the interest on the loan. You may defer making interest payments until you graduate or leave school, in which case the interest is added to the loan amount, increasing the total repayment amount.

Considering Interest Rates

Subsidized Stafford Loans: On those first disbursed on or after July 1, 2023 the interest rate is fixed at 5.5%. This change from a variable to a fixed interest rate does not affect a borrower's variable interest rate on loans made before July 1, 2024.

Unsubsidized Stafford Loans: The rate will not exceed 5.5%. You'll be notified any time the variable rate changes.

Federal PLUS Loan: This is a long-term, variable interest rate, federal loan that is available to the parents of dependent students. Like Federal Stafford Loans, Federal PLUS Loans are administered by the Department of

Education through private commercial lending agencies. There is no set limit on the amount of Federal PLUS funds that a parent may borrow; however, the maximum loan cannot exceed the student's portion of the cost of education minus any other aid the student receives. Federal PLUS Loans are not subsidized, and eligibility is not based on financial need. Repayment usually begins immediately after the entire loan is disbursed. Federal PLUS Loans, like Federal Stafford Loans, have a maximum three percent origination fee and a one percent insurance premium that are deducted from the loan.

Institutional Aid

Institutional Grants and Scholarships: These are non-federal gift aid programs administered by the college. Institutional grants are generally awarded according to financial need and/or merit and are often the most generous awards. Institutional scholarships are often awarded based on particular abilities or skills in areas such as athletics, music, or academic achievement. These scholarships are often renewable for each college year and are usually contingent on the student continuing to engage in the activity that prompted the award, or, in the case of academic achievement, maintaining a certain grade point average.

Institutional Loans: These are non-federal loan programs administered by the college. These loans usually bear low interest rates and have favorable repayment terms. In many cases, loan payments are deferred while the student is enrolled in school. Colleges have individual application requirements for institutional loans. Applicants should contact the college to learn the types of loans that are available, the criteria that must be met to qualify, and the terms and conditions of the available loans.

Institutional Student Employment: This is an on- or off-campus employment program, similar to the Federal Work-Study program. These positions may be awarded based on financial need, the student's job qualifications, or a combination of the two. In some cases, these positions may be related to the student's field of study. The institution's financial aid office should be contacted to learn what types of student employment are available.

State Aid Programs

Various states have different financial aid programs for residents of their own states. To determine the programs available in Colorado, students should consult the college counseling office or email the Department of Education in their state.

Private Scholarships: These are non-federal scholarships that originate outside of the college and generally require the student to file a separate application. Although academic standing or financial need may be conditions for some private scholarships, these funds may also be awarded based on such qualifiers as field of study, religious affiliation, ethnic background, leadership skills, place of residence, or other criteria. Because these scholarships come from private funding sources, the criteria can reflect whatever qualities their benefactors wish to reward or encourage. Students should seek out and apply for as many of these awards as they can. High schools, Dollars for Scholars, churches, local businesses, and civic service organizations frequently have scholarship programs; so may the company where a parent works. Information about private scholarships is available in the college counseling office.

Private Loans: Like private scholarships, private loans originate outside of the college and usually require a separate application. Some private loans are awarded based on the same factors as private scholarships. Others, particularly those offered through commercial lenders, are approved according to the family's ability to repay the loan. Non-federal loans through commercial lenders are often available only to the student's parents. Amounts, interest rates and repayment terms, and application procedures vary according to the individual loan program. Before considering a private loan, students should be certain they understand their rights and responsibilities under the loan program, including how interest is assessed, when repayment begins, and what repayment options are available. It should be noted that with interest rates relatively high, this may be a daunting route and one that should be thoughtfully considered in a family's ability to repay the loan and interest on that loan.

Financial Aid Resources

Here are recommended sources for outside scholarships – mostly national search databases:

- www.salliemae.com/college-planning/college-scholarships
- www.unigo.com/scholarships/our-scholarships
- www.cappex.com
- www.fastweb.com
- www.studentscholarships.org
- www.nextstudent.com
- www.goingmerry.com

College 101: Glossary of College Admission Terminology

ACT

A standardized college admission test. It features four main sections: English, math, reading and science — and an optional essay section.

Admission/Acceptance

The decision by an admissions officer or committee to offer the opportunity for enrollment at a particular institution.

Advanced Placement (AP)

According to The College Board, AP courses are college level classes taught in high school following guidelines and covering material that will instruct students in AP subject areas, and should prepare them to sit for the AP exams administered on behalf of The College Board.

Applicant

Any student who has completed the college application process and has submitted a complete application to the college.

Application

The college application is a requirement of an applicant, demonstrating that the prospective applicant wishes to be considered for admission. It generally consists of academic records, personal essay, letters of recommendation, and a list of extracurricular activities or resume. Along with your application is often a requirement for college entrance exams. Deadlines to submit a complete application are established and published by each college.

Application Priority Date or Deadline

The date by which your application — whether it's for college admission, student housing or financial aid — must be received to be given the strongest consideration.

Articulation Agreement

An agreement between two-year and four-year colleges that makes it easier to transfer credits between them. It spells out which courses count for degree credit and the grades you need to earn to get credit.

Campus Visit/Tour

A service by the college admission office for prospective students, allowing them to visit campus and get a first-hand look at not only the physical campus, but also student life and academics.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA)/National Enrollment Day

An agreement many colleges follow that gives applicants until May 1 to accept or decline offers of admission. This agreement gives students time to get responses from the colleges they have applied to before deciding on one.

Catalog

It's a comprehensive publication (online version) that provides a detailed overview of an institution, including its mission, codes of conduct, academic programs and departments, requirements for major/minor completion, and faculty and administrative profiles.

Class Rank

A measurement of how your academic achievement compares with that of other students in your grade. This number is usually determined by using a weighted GPA that takes into account both your grades and the difficulty of the courses you've taken. Like many independent schools, VMS does not rank students due to the small class size.

College

An institution of higher education that offers and confers degrees at the undergraduate, bachelor level.

College Credit

What you get when you successfully complete a college-level course. You need a certain number of credits to graduate with a degree. Colleges may also grant credit for scores on exams, such as those offered by College Board's AP Program®.

College Decision

The act of choosing and making a decision to enroll among the schools to which the student was offered admission.

College Entrance Exams

Tests designed to measure students' skills and help colleges evaluate how ready students are for college-level work. The ACT and the College Board's SAT are two standardized admission tests used in the United States. The word "standardized" means that the test measures the same thing in the same way for everyone who takes it.

College Essay/Personal Essay

An essay that a college requires students to write and submit as part of their application. Some colleges offer applicants specific questions to answer, while others simply ask applicants to write about themselves as a way to help determine overall fit. It's often a composition of 500-650 words.

College Fair

An event at which colleges present themselves in an exposition format for the purpose of attracting and identifying potential applicants.

College Interview

This is a personal interaction (face-to-face, Skype, phone) between an applicant and a college representative (admissions officer, alumnus, faculty member, current student).

College Rep Visit

Often in the fall, college admission representatives visit high schools for the purpose of recruiting students and identifying potential applicants by providing a comprehensive presentation and discussion about their institution. In turn, this helps to educate and expose students to potential college fits.

College Search

A process in which steps are taken over a lengthy period of time of college planning in order to identify and research colleges, their academic programs and student culture to determine if they meet your interests, abilities, and needs as a student.

Common Application

A standard application form accepted by all colleges that are members of the Common Application association. You can fill out this application once and submit it to any one—or several—of the 550-plus colleges that accept it.

Counselor Recommendation

A counselor recommendation is part of a student's credential file. It is expected that the college counselor writes on behalf of each student to provide context for a student's overall high school career in and outside of the classroom and comments on any nonstandard or different aspect of a student's story or academic progress. Unlike a teacher recommendation, a counselor recommendation provides a "story" and supports the messages and details of what the student shares in the application.

Credential File

All of the academic profile documents most often required to complete a student's application for admission. A credential file will consist of a counselor recommendation, at least one teacher recommendation, an official transcript, secondary school report, and school profile. Standardized testing is also a part of your overall credentials, but must be issued by the testing agency at the request of the student.

CSS Profile

A supplemental financial aid application to the FAFSA often required by most private colleges.

Deferred Admission

An admission decision by the institution in conjunction with early (action, decision, notification) plans to indicate that a student has not been admitted early, but will remain in the applicant pool for reconsideration during the regular application review with a final decision to be made by April 1.

Deferred Enrollment

Permission from a college that has accepted you to postpone enrolling in the college. The postponement is usually for up to one year.

Demonstrated Interest

This includes a student's expression of his/her/their desire to attend a particular college through campus visits, contact with admissions officers, interviews, and any other actions and contacts that attract attention of college admissions. While not all schools use this as a factor in admitting students, most do consider demonstrated interest in their admission decisions as it helps the institution with enrollment or yield statistics.

Denial

An admission decision by an admissions officer or committee to not offer a student admission to a particular institution. A student cannot reapply until the following admission cycle or year.

Early Action (EA)

An option to submit your applications before the regular deadlines. When you apply early action, you get admission decisions from colleges earlier than usual. Early action plans are not binding, which means that you do not have to enroll in a college if you are accepted early action. Some colleges have an early action option called EA II, which has a later application deadline than their regular EA plan.

Early Decision (ED)

An option to submit an application to your first-choice college before the regular deadline. When you apply early decision, you get an admission decision earlier than usual. Early decision plans are binding. You agree to enroll in the college immediately if admitted and offered a financial aid package that meets your needs. Some colleges have an early decision option called ED II, which has a later application deadline than their regular ED plan.

Enrollment

The action of enrolling or being enrolled. Or, it is also referred to as the number of people enrolled or attending a particular college.

Extracurriculars

Extracurricular activities are anything students do that is not a high school course or paid employment (note: work experience is of interest to colleges and can replace time otherwise spent for extracurricular activities). These activities should be defined in broad terms as anything you spend your time on in and outside of school.

FAFSA

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a universal application required of all colleges for need-based aid consideration.

Financial Aid

Money given or loaned to you to help pay for college. Financial aid can come from federal and state governments, colleges, and private organizations. Financial aid usually refers to need-based financial assistance to help make college affordable.

First Generation Student

A student whose parents or guardians have not earned a college degree.

First-Year Student

A college freshman.

“Fit”

This term/lingo refers to the overarching goal of the college search process: to find the colleges fit for you – not just because it is a big name school. There is no school that is best for all students. Some do best at large public universities; others excel in small liberal arts colleges; still others want to study far from home. Student and college campus culture are great factors to consider when exploring options, as well as in determining how best you will succeed in college and in what environment. In other words, to make the most of your time at college, research schools to find the best fit for you.

Gap Year

It is often the year after high school graduation for students to elect to plan an alternative to a first-year college student experience. Often, the time will include service, work, travel, alternative/experiential learning.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

A quantitative measure that shows overall academic performance. It's computed by assigning a point value to each grade you earn. See also Weighted Grade Point Average.

Holistic Review

This refers to the application review process in that all aspects of the application as well as overall fit are considered in making admission decisions, not just GPA and test scores.

“Hooks”

An applicant or prospective student hook is some aspect of the student that is so compelling that it can't go overlooked in the review of the application. Often, a hook gives the student and applicant an advantage in the applicant pool, but to what degree will be varied among colleges as they set their own institutional goals and priorities.

Instate (Resident) Student

A student whose permanent residence is in the same state as the college he or she will attend and often will pay lower tuition at public colleges and universities than will out-of-state students.

Institutional Priorities

Goals identified by college administrations as a way to define, redefine or enhance the college community that are often reflected in admission decisions. For example, highlighting science research could lead to attracting students with STEM interests and aptitudes.

Legacy Applicant

A college applicant with a relative (usually a parent or grandparent) who graduated from that college. Some colleges give preference to legacy applicants (also called “legacies”).

Major

A student's concentrated field of study for which the academic department determines its requirements for successful completion. Some colleges allow students to double-major.

Matriculation

The payment of deposits, tuition, fees, and other charges to enroll in a program of study at an educational institution to which they will earn credits for pursuing a degree.

Minor

A student's secondary field of study with fewer requirements than that of a major.

NCAA

The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a governing organization that oversees rules regulations and recruiting policies for college sports, applicable to student athletes, coaches, and athletic directors. DI and DII athletes must apply for eligibility: www.eligibilitycenter.org.

Need Aware/Need Sensitive Admission

A policy of making admission decisions while taking into consideration the financial circumstances of applicants. Colleges that use this policy may do so in order to meet a student's full need.

Need-Blind Admission

A policy of making admission decisions without considering the financial circumstances of applicants. Colleges that use this policy may not offer enough financial aid to meet a student's full need.

Notification Date

The date or time frame for which institutions will release an admission decision to the students.

Out-of-State (non-Resident) Student

Student whose permanent residence is in a different state than that of the college or university which he or she attends or hopes to attend. Out-of-state students generally pay higher tuition than do in-state students.

PreACT

This test (preliminary ACT) is usually taken in 10th grade to prepare students for the ACT. Scores are not provided to colleges.

Program Strength

This refers to the academic program in which a student is enrolled in high school and it often measures the degree to which the program is challenging in comparison to their peers at the same high school as well as the degree to which a student is challenging themselves within the context of what the high school offers. Most demanding, very demanding, demanding, less demanding academic program are used most frequently and noted on the secondary school report.

Prospective Student

Any student who is a potential applicant for admission, particularly those who have shown interest in attending the institution or in which the institution has shown interest.

PSAT

This exam (preliminary SAT) prepares students for the SAT and is used to qualify students for the National Merit Scholarship semifinals. Scores are not provided to colleges.

“Reach” School

A college or university that is unlikely for admission as test scores, GPA, and sometimes program strength are below the school's profile. Most selective colleges should always be considered reach schools.

“Recruited” Athlete

A recruited athlete is specifically well-accomplished, and so much so that college level (DI, DII, DIII) coaches actively pursue the prospective student and applicant in hopes of “recruiting” the student for admission as an impact player. True recruited athletes are offered an athletic scholarship for DI or DIII schools, and usually admission leverage.

Registrar

The college official who registers students. The registrar may also be responsible for keeping permanent records and maintaining your student file.

Retention Rate

This is the degree to which students remain enrolled as members of the college community and persist toward graduation. Continuance is often measured between first year and sophomore year.

Restrictive Early Action(REA)

A decision plan used by several highly selective colleges. If applying with Restrictive Early Action, you may not apply to any other private college/university under their Early Action, Restrictive Early Action, Early Decision, or Early Notification plan. Can also be known as Single Choice Early Action.

Rolling Admission

An admission policy of considering each application as soon as all required information (such as high school records and test scores)

has been received, rather than setting an application deadline and reviewing/evaluating applications as a group. Colleges that use a rolling admission policy usually notify applicants of admission decisions within 2-4 weeks.

SAT

The College Board's standardized college admission test. It features three main sections: math, reading and writing, which includes a written essay.

School Profile

This is an overview of your high school's program, grading system, course offerings, and other features that provides context for reviewing properly the student's transcript.

Secondary School Report

As a supplement to the School Profile, this document is also part of the credential file and is prepared by the college counselor specifically for each student as it gives college admissions context and necessary data such as current grade point average, program strength, list of senior coursework, divulging of any disciplinary probation and/or suspension, and a general recommendation.

Selectivity

Selectivity is the degree to which a college admits or denies admission based on the individual student's record of academic achievement. Generally, most selective schools admit 20% or less of applicants, highly selective schools admit 40% or less of applicants, selective schools admit 60% or less of applicants, less selective admit 80% or less, and least selective schools admit students above a 80% rate.

Single Choice Early Action(SCEA)

In applying Single-Choice Early Action at a college, you may not simultaneously apply for Early Action or Early Decision to any other school with a few exceptions. If you apply SCEA to any college, you are indicating that the only Early Action/Early Decision application you intend to file is to that particular college.

“Solid” School

A college or university that is a likely option for admission as student test scores, GPA, overall achievement are above the school's profile. Likely options will give students the best opportunity for merit aid and scholarships.

Sophomore Standing

The status of a second-year college student. A college may grant sophomore standing to an incoming freshman if he or she has earned college credits through courses, exams or other programs.

Student Persistence

This is the act of working, progressing, and earning credits toward graduation in an academic environment.

“Target” School

A college or university that is a target for admission as test scores, GPA, and program strength meet the middle 50% of the admit pool among those who applied for admission. In other words, it is often said that you have 50/50 chance for admission.

Teacher Recommendation

A comprehensive endorsement written on a student's behalf for the purpose of the college application process. Teacher recommendations highlight students' strengths in the classroom as well as shed light on the type of learner the student is. Overall, the teacher evaluates a student's aptitude for academic success in college and overall potential contribution to the academic and social community.

Transcript

The official record of your coursework at a school or college. Your high school transcript is usually required for college admission and for some financial aid packages. In order for a transcript to be official, it must be issued by an authorized school administrator (registrar or college counselor) and it often is signed, dated, and marked with a school seal for authentication.

Transfer Student

A student who enrolls in a college after having attended another college.

Undergraduate

A college student who is working toward an associate or a bachelor's degree.

University

An institution of higher education that offers and confers degrees in a multitude of fields at the bachelor and advanced degree levels.

Virtual Tour

An online feature offered by some colleges to allow prospective students to view aspects of campus life without visiting in person. It is often viewed as a video.

Waitlist

The list of applicants who may be admitted to a college if space becomes available. Colleges wait to hear if all the students they accepted decide to attend. If students don't enroll and there are empty spots, a college may fill them with students who are on the waiting list.

Weighted Grade Point Average (GPA)

A grade point average that's calculated using a system that assigns a higher point value to grades in more-difficult classes. For example, VMS weights AP classes 1.1%.

Yield

Yield refers to the administrative data gathered on the applicant pool, specifically identifying what percentage of the admitted applicant pool enrolls by May 1st for fall matriculation. This is important to colleges because the better they can predict yield (those more likely to enroll), it will help their overall admit rate improve overall selectivity.

Recommended Reading

Resource Books

The Mindful College Applicant: Cultivating Emotional Intelligence for the Admissions Process

Belinda H.Y. Chiu, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2019.

The Truth About College Admission: A Family Guide to Getting In and Staying Together

Brennan Barnard and Rick Clark, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

Don't Stalk the Admissions Officer

Lisa Lewak, Ten Speed Press, 2010.

College Admission: From Application to Acceptance, Step By Step

Robin Mamlet and Christine VanDeVelde, 2011.

College Essay Essentials: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing a Successful College Admissions Essay

Ethan Sawyer, Sourcebooks, 2016.

Looking Beyond the Ivy League: Finding the College That's Right For You

Loren Pope, Penguin Books, 1995.

Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools That Will Change the Way You Think About Colleges

Loren Pope, Penguin Books, 2012.

The Fiske Guide to Colleges

Edward Fiske, Sourcebooks, 2021.

The Insider's Guide to the Colleges

Yale Daily News staff, St. Martin's Griffin, 2015.

Visiting College Campuses

Janet Spencer and Sandra Maleson, Princeton Review, Random House, 2001.

The College Finder, 4th Edition

Steven Antonoff, Fawcett Books, 2012.

College Stories and Perspectives

Who Gets In And Why: A Year Inside College Admissions

Jeff Selingo. Simon & Schuster, 2020.

Where You Go is Not Who You'll Be: An Antidote To the College Admissions Mania

Frank Bruni. 2015.

The Gatekeepers

Jacques Steinberg. Viking, 2002.

Acceptance: A Legendary Guidance Counselor Helps Seven Kids Find the Right College – And Find Themselves

David Marcus. Penguin Press HC, 2009.

The Big Test

Nicolas Lemann. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.

Parent Specific

The Price You Pay for College: An Entirely New Road Map for the Biggest Financial Decision Your Family Will Ever Make

Ron Lieber. Harper, 2021.

How To Raise An Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid For Success

Julie Lythcott-Haims. Henry Hoyt and Company, LLC, 2015.

****The iConnected Parent: Staying Connected to Your Kids in College (and Beyond) While Letting Them Grow Up***

Barbara Hofer and Abigail Sullivan Moore. Free Press, 2010.

I'm Going to College - NOT YOU!: Surviving the College Search with Your Child

Edited by Jennifer Delahunty. St. Martin's Press, 2010.

Crazy U: One Dad's Course in Getting His Kid Into College

Andrew Ferguson. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

The Neurotic Parent's Guide to College Admissions

J.D. Rothman. Prospect Park Media, 2012.

Maximizing the College Experience

The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up A Generation For Failure

Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt. Penguin Random House Inc., 2018.

The Years That Matter Most: How College Makes or Breaks Us

Paul Tough. Houghton Mifflin Publishing, 2019.

The Road To Character

David Brooks. Penguin Random House, 2015.

Academically Adrift: Limited Learning On College Campuses

Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

The Thinking Student's Guide to College: 75 Tips for Getting a Better Education

Andrew Roberts. University of Chicago Press, 2010.

College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be

Andrew DelBanco. Princeton University Press, 2012.

Gap Year

The Gap Year Advantage

Karl Haigler and Rae Nelson. Macmillan, 2005

The Complete Guide to the Gap Year

Kristin White. Jossey-Bass, 2009

Taking Time Off

Colin Hall and Ron Lieber. Penguin Random House, 2016

Closing Remarks

This is Vail Mountain School's 16th edition of the College Counseling Manual. An effort was made to include information that would be most helpful for students and their parents in the college application process. Every detail is not included, and therefore, frequent communication with the college counseling office is encouraged as families conduct their own research. The goal is for students and parents to be as informed as possible while also expecting hard work and responsibility on behalf of the students. Finally, please note changes and additions may occur to the timetables provided. Remember, Ms. Ferrara and Mr. Heinemann are your best resources!

Standardized Testing Map

2023-2024

9th Grade

November: PreACT 8/9

10th Grade

October: PSAT

November: PreACT

May: AP exams (if applicable)

11th Grade

October: PSAT/NMSQT

February: ACT at VMS

March: SAT at VMS

April: ACT at VMS

May: AP exams (if applicable)

June: SAT at VMS (if applicable)

12th Grade

August: SAT at VMS

September: ACT at VMS

October: ACT at VMS

May: AP exams (if applicable)

ACT Test Administration Dates

September 9, 2023 at VMS

October 28, 2023 at VMS

December 9, 2023

February 10, 2024 at VMS

April 13, 2024

June 8, 2024 at VMS

July 13, 2024

SAT Exam Test Administration Dates

August 26, 2023 at VMS

October 7, 2023 at VMS

November 4, 2023

December 2, 2023

March 9, 2024 at VMS

May 4, 2024

June 1, 2024 at VMS

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