



Oregon  
Episcopal  
School

# College Counseling Handbook



plan motivation explore challenge rigor prepare grow journey create  
experience strengths commitment

create commitment experience  
open strengths rigor  
education explore match resilience  
challenge pursue  
healthy balance goals prepare learn college grow career develop future  
options choices journey motivation research plan relationships  
investment opportunity enjoy



## College Counseling Handbook

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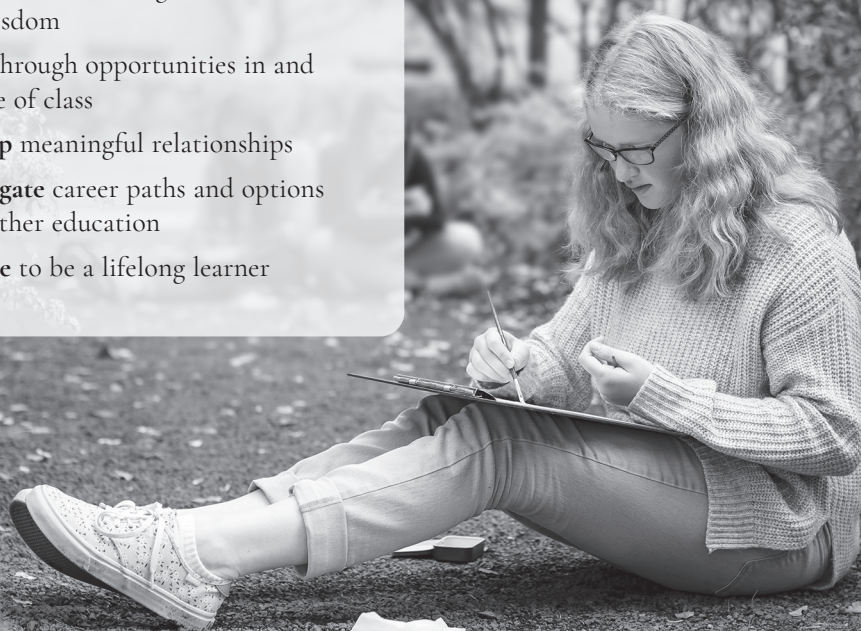
## Undergraduate Education in Perspective

Undergraduate education is a wonderful opportunity, requiring a significant investment of time and resources. College, however, is not a final destination or a prize to be won, but rather an important component as you begin the phase of your life in which you will make choices regarding what you study, the experiences you have, the career path you create, the relationships you cultivate, where you live, and the lifestyle you adopt.

Finding a college that meets your needs and fits who you are should be the focus; for most students there are many colleges that are potentially a good match. However, where you attend college is less important than what you do while there. Your ability to learn, grow, and find success on your terms and make the most of your education is what counts. Employers and graduate or professional schools look for individuals with integrity and drive who have demonstrated the ability to learn from and succeed in previous experiences.

### COLLEGE IS A PLACE TO:

- ❑ **pursue** an education that offers both breadth and depth
- ❑ **explore** and develop interests
- ❑ **build** skills, knowledge, confidence, and wisdom
- ❑ **learn** through opportunities in and outside of class
- ❑ **develop** meaningful relationships
- ❑ **investigate** career paths and options for further education
- ❑ **prepare** to be a lifelong learner





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## Introduction to the College Admission Process

The college admission process—because it involves planning for your future, a range of options, and a good dose of uncertainty—is both exciting and daunting. Our goal is to help students and their parents navigate this process effectively. Students should feel good about the outcome and learn from the process.

We are in a time and place in which college admissions garners a great deal of media attention and has spawned a growing industry connected to the process. Many will offer you advice along the way, some of it accurate and

helpful and some based on the proverbial urban myth. You are surrounded by peers going through the process at the same time. As hard as it may be, you need to block out some of the “noise” around college admissions and walk your own path. Find an approach to your education and college search that fits you and your needs and goals. This process unfolds over time, at a different pace for each student. You will most likely bring some assumptions and misconceptions to this process, and you will make new discoveries about yourself and college options along the way. Keep an open mind and let the journey instruct you.



## Finding Balance in a College Preparatory School

*“Wisdom is having things right in your life and knowing why. If you do not have things right in your life you will be overwhelmed: you may be heroic, but you will not be wise.” —William Stafford*

As a result of all the attention placed upon college admissions and the college-going culture of a school such as OES, students often feel a great deal of pressure to achieve at a high level in high school. And of course we want our students to work hard and take advantage of opportunities to learn and grow. This is a healthy approach to life and learning, but it can also turn into a slippery slope of stress and overachievement that is not sustainable. Students need to make choices that fit their interests, strengths, goals, and level of motivation. Maintaining a sense of balance means different things for different students.

### EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Colleges seek students who engage in their school or local community. This engagement can take many forms, and there are no “preferred” activities. Some students come to high school with clearly identified extracurricular pursuits, and many find areas of interest during high school. Colleges generally value depth of experience over breadth, and the case can be made that a student benefits from “going deeper” with one or more of his/her interests. Students benefit from involvement that shows evidence of one or more of these types of qualities: staying power, courage, creativity, mastery, leadership, growth, passion. Students should look for

activities they enjoy and find meaningful and should not pursue activities because they think they will look good to colleges, as this is not a good approach to the college admissions process, nor is it a healthy approach to life. The best advice we can give is to explore options in order to identify areas of interest and then follow those interests. Less is often more—quality over quantity.

### SELECTING COURSES DURING HIGH SCHOOL

Students should select courses that challenge them at an appropriate level. For some this means honors and AP courses and/or four years in most subject areas, and for others, it doesn’t. Finding the right balance of a challenging but reasonable course load is important. We encourage students and parents to consult with teachers, the advisor, and a college counselor about these decisions, as there is no “one size fits all” advice that we can offer in relation to course selection. Colleges do pay attention to the level of rigor in a student’s schedule, and the more selective the college, the higher the level of rigor they will expect (relative to the courses available at the high school). That said, students need to make wise choices for themselves, finding classes that are a good fit in terms of the level of challenge and the student’s learning style.

## Roles and Responsibilities

*I'm Going to College—Not You! Surviving the College Search with Your Child* — Jennifer Delahunty

The title from a wonderful book of essays edited by Jennifer Delahunty when she was Dean of Admissions at Kenyon College says it all. Students need to own this process, but they will be assisted by the adults in their lives, and sometimes these relationships and roles will be complicated. It is our hope that the student, parents, and college counselor will work together as a team. We are committed to meeting students and parents where they are in this process, and we think that clarifying roles is important.

### THE STUDENT

Since you will be the one attending college, you should take an active, leading role in this process. Try to strike a balance between asserting your independence and using the help available to you. Your job is to engage in honest self-assessment, carefully research college options, and present yourself to colleges in an effective and authentic manner. Discuss with your parents any parameters they may have in relation to location, finances, or the types of colleges you consider. You will have information and important deadlines to keep track of, so stay organized. Consult the checklists and timetables that we provide, pay attention to announcements and e-mails, and read instructions carefully when working on applications. Stay in touch with your college counselor throughout the process, and keep your parents informed of your thoughts and progress. Finding a college is a good opportunity for you to practice your skills in taking initiative, self-advocacy, being organized, attending to details, researching and assessing options, decision making, and presenting yourself effectively. Finally, we encourage you to be good citizens of the process. Remain true to yourself, support your classmates, and show integrity in your actions and words.

### THE PARENTS

Your role is to guide and support, while encouraging your child to take the lead in the college search. In her book *How to Raise an Adult*, Julie Lythcott-Haims points out the harm that can be done by asking so much of our children academically and so little when it comes to life skills. You need to gauge how much support and oversight your child

will need (this, of course, varies from family to family). Avoid the two extremes of assuming your child and the college counselor have it all under control or taking charge and micro-managing the process. It is important for parents to make any parameters clear early in the process (financial, location, etc.). Your child should conduct a great deal of the research, register for tests, and complete all portions of the applications. While it is acceptable for parents to make some contact with colleges, much of this should be done by the student. Some students need help keeping track of deadlines for testing, applications, and financial aid. Early in the process talk with your child about when and where college visits make sense for your family. You may want to assist in planning the logistics of these visits. Most parents play an active role in matters related to need- and merit-based financial aid, as it can be a complicated aspect of the admissions process, and you will be completing most of the financial aid forms. We also encourage you to stay in touch with your child's college counselor. We want to hear from you anytime you have questions or concerns.

### THE COLLEGE COUNSELOR

The college counselor will work with students and parents (through individual and group meetings), offering information, guidance, and perspective throughout the process. We encourage students to reflect about their needs and priorities as they research options and make choices. When students begin to work on applications and essays, we advise them as needed and answer questions along the way. Students should seek feedback from us on their essays, activity lists, and applications and consult with us on the final list, teacher recommendations, and testing. In addition, we advise families on issues of cost and financial aid (most of this is done on an individual basis as requested by the family). The college counselor writes a comprehensive letter of recommendation for each senior that provides context and describes his/her personal and academic strengths and accomplishments. The college counselors also stay on top of trends in college admissions and maintain connections with colleges. It should be noted that we see it as the student's responsibility (with parental support) to know and meet deadlines and requirements related to testing, applications, and financial aid.

## Building Essential Skills

*“Let us all—counselors, students, and parents—reclaim the college selection and admission process as a form of education rather than a form of commercialism.” —Philip Ballinger, Director of Admissions, University of Washington*

In addition to finding a college that serves your needs, we want you to come out of this process with the framework, skills, and confidence that will help you navigate similar situations and transitions down the road: selection of a major, applications for graduate and professional schools, career choices, and job applications. The skills needed to research and apply to college are the same skills you will use each time you explore and pursue education and career options. We note these skills in this section and encourage you to approach the process in a thoughtful manner that allows you to learn how to best manage each stage and component: **reflection, research, organization, presentation of self, interviewing, connecting/networking, self-advocacy.**

It is important to **know your resources** and **use them effectively** and **proactively**. This is true in the college admission process, and it will be equally true in college.

### REFLECTION

*“If you don’t ask the right questions, you don’t get the right answers.” —Edward Hodnett*

An essential part of selecting a college is reflecting on what you need and want in your education and in a college. At different stages of this process, pause to actively reflect on and clarify your needs and desires by asking yourself important questions. Take an approach that works for you: journal writing, discussions with parents, relatives, friends, college counselor, and/or time alone. Creating the space for reflective work is as important as researching options. In addition to those listed here, we encourage you to add questions that are important to you, keeping in mind that these are questions to ask yourself, not colleges. As you consider the many factors that might influence your selection of a college, consider the pros and cons of these factors and carefully weigh the importance of them in your search (this may change over time). Think about how much each factor will impact your daily experience in college.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN YOUR SEARCH FOR A COLLEGE

- Why do you want to attend college?
- What do you hope to get out of this experience intellectually (knowledge/skills), emotionally, socially, other? What are your goals during college?
- What experiences have you had in school that might influence your college selection? Think of the types of educational experiences that challenge, inspire, and energize you (also consider things that haven’t worked so well).
- What experiences have you had outside of class that might influence your college selection: service, travel, work, internships, athletics, art, religion, other?
- Consider where you want to fit in intellectually in terms of your peer group in college. Do you want to feel like one of the top students or do you perform better when you feel the pressure that comes with being among peers who are mostly stronger than you academically? Or somewhere in between?
- In what academic areas do your strengths and interests lie? Are there areas of study or issues that you find particularly appealing, inspiring, or engaging?
- Are you seeking particular programs or areas of study?
- Most colleges have a framework of academic requirements for all students. These are often referred to as distribution requirements or core requirements. Are you interested in distribution requirements that are more or less structured?
- Are you looking for certain values in a college: traditional, innovative, conservative, liberal, religious, other?
- Are you looking for a campus culture that values or emphasizes certain things: community, diversity, athletics, politics, the arts, the outdoors, intellectual endeavors, global outlook, other?
- Are there activities you want your college to have: type of sport, music, theatre, outdoor club, etc.?



- Do you have any strong preferences in relation to the residential aspect of the campus: portion of students living on campus, housing arrangements in relation to gender, role of Greek life, availability of single rooms, apartment style housing, or off-campus housing?
- How important is the college's setting to you: urban, suburban, town, more rural, contained campus? How much will your surroundings matter to you?
- In what ways is the size of the college important to you (think about the implications of each size range in terms of your academic and social experience)?
- What priorities do you have in relation to the location of the college? Does distance to home matter or convenience of travel? Are you looking for the new experience that a different or more distant location might offer?
- "Flow experiences" (according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi) describe those activities in your life during which everything lines up. You are focused on the task at hand (it is neither too difficult nor too easy). You are immersed, fully present in the moment, "in the zone," as they say. These optimal experiences happen for different people in different areas: singing, dancing, skiing, reading, cooking, public speaking, research, playing an instrument, sports, painting, writing a computer program (you get the picture here). Think of times in your life when you have had these "flow" experiences. What are they for you and how might this knowledge influence your choice of an area of study and a career?

## RESEARCH

Think about how you approach research in academic disciplines. Many of the same principles apply to college research.

- Use a variety of resources.
- Use primary and secondary sources (directly from the colleges and outside sources).
- Consider the quality, accuracy, and biases of various sources of information.
- Confirm important facts and information on the college's website.
- Formulate questions that you are trying to answer in your research (remember the importance of asking the *right* questions, meaning the right questions for *you*).

## ORGANIZATION

- Think about how you are going to keep track of the information you gather on colleges as you research and visit.
- Develop a system for staying organized as you work on applications. For many students this takes the form of a spreadsheet with key requirements and dates related to application deadlines, testing, interviews, contact information, and financial aid.
- Organization also includes follow-up and follow-through with colleges, your college counselor, and teachers in relation to questions you have, assistance you need, missing items in your application, or items that we have asked you for (questionnaires, information, etc.). You need to be responsible and timely in relation to your obligations in this process.
- Checking your email and spam is important. This is how the college counselors and some colleges will communicate with you.

## TELLING YOUR STORY: APPLICATIONS/ESSAYS/RESUMES

Think about what you want to communicate to colleges in this process, both the bigger themes of who you are and the important details. What you don't *tell* colleges in your application, they won't *know* about you. Learning how to present yourself in a positive, accurate, compelling, and concise manner is key in applying to educational institutions and places of employment.

Consider how you want to come across, what you want to emphasize, and how you will *take shape* as someone reads your application file. We don't like the terms *positioning*, *packaging*, and *hook*. However, we know it is important for students to be thoughtful about the obvious and implied messages that your application materials convey. Focus on the integrity, authenticity, and clarity of how you present yourself in your essays, activity list, and other application materials. Think about these areas *before* you begin and *as you work* on applications.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Have I focused on the important parts of my academic and extracurricular experiences?
- Have I accurately and honestly conveyed my best qualities as a student and as a person?
- Am I *showing* and not just *telling* who I am?
- Have I presented an authentic picture of who I am and what I value in education and in my life?
- Have I left out important details?
- Have I included so much information in my application that it is hard to determine what is important to me?
- Have I asked for feedback from my college counselor and parents on how effectively I have presented myself?

## INTERVIEWING AND MAKING CONNECTIONS

How you convey yourself in person matters. Interpersonal skills and the ability to connect may play a role in some admission decisions. You will convey who you are directly in interviews, but you will also create impressions as you make contact with your college counselor, teachers, and admission officers (conversations and emails). In these encounters, focus on making positive connections with people and a good impression. Reaching out to college representatives when you have genuine questions is a good idea both for the information and perspective you will gain and for the connections you will make.

- Be honest and demonstrate integrity.
- Prepare for interviews by thinking about your responses to potential areas of questioning and by formulating your own questions.
- Smile, make eye contact, speak up, have a firm handshake, be yourself (your best self).
- Take an interest in other people by asking questions and listening.
- Show appreciation in person and when appropriate with thank-you notes.

## SELF-ADVOCACY

You are deserving of people's time and attention and you certainly need good information during your college search. Make sure you *ask for what you need* along the way (always in a polite and respectful manner, of course). For example, if you need more assistance from your college counselor on some aspect of this process, let her know. If you are having conflict with your parents over their role in this process, set aside time for a conversation in which you let them know (calmly and reasonably) how they can best support and assist you. And by all means, if you have questions in relation to a college of interest, email or call the college representative. They want to answer your questions and they like hearing from you (this shows initiative and maturity on your part).

## Majors and Careers

*“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” —Howard Thurman*

We find that some students begin this process thinking they are at a disadvantage if they don’t know what they want to study in college. Fortunately, that is not the case. In reality, many students are in this position, in part, because education in the United States is designed to give students time, once they are in college, to select an area of focus.

For most programs and colleges, students can apply “undecided” and have until toward the end of their sophomore year to select a major. There are exceptions, most notably engineering and some architecture and nursing programs that have freshman entry. Some universities ask students to apply to a particular school such as business, engineering, arts and sciences (they may allow students to apply to the school of arts and sciences “undecided”). The ease of shifting from one school to another (internal transfer) depends entirely on the program and the policies at the university. Once you decide to apply to a college, it is useful to know if a particular program or school is more selective in relation to other options at that college. This information may be available on the college’s website or you may need to ask an admissions representative.

We encourage students to explore options in high school and college before settling on a major. There are many areas of study that you are not exposed to in high school. Most colleges offer a wide array of majors, and many students change their minds, so we urge you to find colleges that offer a good overall match. We believe that starting college with an open mind is a distinct advantage for some students, as it affords them the opportunity to explore a range of options and gain maturity and perspective before deciding on a focus for their undergraduate education.

When students are given access to Scoir toward the end of grade 10, we encourage them to utilize the tools and information in the YouScience program. Through YouScience, students can explore their aptitudes and various career areas and areas of study.

### CAREER EXPLORATION

We advise students to explore career options, but to not necessarily get caught up in selecting a career path at this stage. Students should talk with individuals involved in various jobs and learn about the skills, knowledge, and education required, the types of problems solved in that career area, and what the job entails on a daily basis. Various opportunities are available to high school and college students that will help you explore careers such as summer programs, internships, and volunteer positions. The Bureau of Labor Statistics website has good information about careers ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)).

Once students start college, we highly recommend that you learn about resources available in relation to career planning, graduate school advising, and academic advising, and that you take advantage of these resources as appropriate. For example, a conversation with a professor, your advisor, and someone in the career planning office can be very helpful when it comes to deciding on your major. When it comes to looking ahead to graduate school and jobs, there is a tendency for students to seek out the career planning office and faculty during the junior or senior year of college. We encourage you to begin to connect with these folks during your freshman or sophomore year. They have experience helping students sort out issues and questions related to your future and could prove very helpful in the choices you make early on in college.

Finally, we want students to understand that selecting a major and then a career path (possibly entailing graduate school) are not always as linear as one might assume. In fact, just one class, professor, or experience can have a significant impact on your path in life. More often than not, though, a variety of factors will influence the choices you make. Serendipity plays a role in life choices as well. We encourage you to seek a balance between an *intentional approach* to your undergraduate education that helps you set goals and make plans and a more *exploratory approach* that allows you to keep an open mind and an open heart to the opportunities before you.



## Researching College Options

*“Higher education is what economists call an “experiential good,” something you can’t fully understand until after you purchase and experience it.” —Kevin Carey, Washington Monthly*

During the early stages of this process we encourage students to consider a range of options before reaching conclusions about what they want and need in a college. In the United States, there are over 2,200 four-year colleges and over 1,700 two-year colleges. They vary in their sizes and in their settings (from urban to rural and everywhere in between). Most are co-educational, but a number of women’s colleges exist, and a handful of men’s colleges. Some have a religious affiliation; others do not. Most colleges offer a wide range of majors, but some specialize in the arts or in science, math, and technology. Beware of stereotypes about institutions. For example, although students will have some big classes at large state universities, they will over time encounter a range of class sizes. Most “small” colleges will be at least four times the size of the Upper School at OES and will offer far more courses, activities, and clubs than students will be able to take advantage of.

Look beyond the label such as “research university” or “liberal arts college.” Most four-year institutions (including universities) provide an educational experience that trains the mind and offers both breadth and depth in the curriculum—the historical hallmarks of a liberal

arts education. Similarly, “research” carried on by professors and students is not confined to universities, but occurs in colleges as well. Almost all institutions encourage service, internships, and study abroad.

Some students bring to this process a fairly well defined set of criteria of what they want in their college experience, but many find that their criteria take shape along the way. All students benefit from ongoing research about college options intertwined with reflection about what matters most to them. As you begin the college search process, we encourage you to pause and think about how you want to approach the research. Utilize the skills you have learned about research in your classes, as some apply well to researching colleges: formulating questions, using a variety of primary and secondary sources, considering biases of sources, confirming facts, keeping track of information.

**We highly recommend that you get on college mailing lists for colleges of interest** to learn more about the college (they will mail/email information) and to demonstrate interest to colleges. Being on the mailing list insures that you will be alerted of updates from the college and opportunities for receptions/interviews in the Portland area.

## Resources for Gathering Information on Colleges

### SCOIR

Each junior and senior has a Scoir account that offers access to a web-based college counseling program utilized by many high schools. This excellent resource aids in researching colleges and gives students a place to keep track of colleges of interest, view the schedule of college representatives visiting OES, and access data on OES applicants (graphs showing GPA/test scores in the context of admission decisions). In addition, we use Scoir to track college applications for seniors and send school materials (transcripts and letters). Students are introduced to Scoir at the end of the sophomore year.

### COLLEGE VISITS

Of all your options for research, none compares to visiting a campus and seeing for yourself what a school is like. Each family needs to determine what its schedule and resources will allow in terms of visits. At a minimum we recommend visits to some colleges in the Northwest prior to the senior year to help the student understand different types and sizes of colleges. While it is not necessary to visit every college you apply to (particularly if you are looking at colleges in distant and varied locations), it is helpful to visit some if possible. We recommend that you visit any colleges in the Northwest to which you plan to apply. See the handbook section on planning college visits.

### COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES AT OES AND IN PORTLAND

Over 125 colleges visit OES each year (mostly in the fall) to meet with interested juniors and seniors. These meetings taking place during the school day are an excellent way for students to learn about colleges and meet admission officers (who often read applications from Oregon). In addition to or in place of school visits, some institutions hold information sessions or interviews in the evening or on weekends in the Portland area. In some cases we are not aware of these events, and you will only receive an invitation if you are on the college's mailing list. Parents as well as students are welcome to attend off-campus receptions. We encourage you to contact admission representatives (via telephone or e-mail) at colleges

of interest when you have questions. The admissions staff welcomes contact from prospective students.

### COLLEGE FAIRS

Two major college fairs take place in Portland each year, a large national fair during the fall (sponsored by the National Association for College Admission Counseling) and a smaller fair in the spring (sponsored by the Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling). In addition, there are two events designed for students interested in pursuing programs in the arts in college: Performing and Visual Arts College Fair (fall) and National Portfolio Day (fall). During fairs, college representatives are available to talk with students or parents and distribute information on their colleges.

### COLLEGE MATERIALS (PRINT AND ONLINE)

Colleges spend a great deal of time and money creating websites and publications designed to inform and attract prospective students. Yes, these are marketing-oriented and meant to entice. Nonetheless, college publications are the best place to turn for facts and information, and you should pay close attention to how a college describes and portrays its programs and culture, as this will offer insight into what the college values. Colleges utilize blogs and social media such as Facebook and Twitter in their marketing efforts.

### COLLEGE GUIDEBOOKS (FACTUAL AND SUBJECTIVE)

A number of factual and subjective college guides are available in libraries (including OES) and for purchase. Guides can be a quick and convenient source of information and perspective (it is often easier to find a fact about a college in one of these guides than on the college's website). College guides provide a helpful starting point in the college search and serve as useful reference tools along the way. The subjective guides will give you a feel for the culture and ambience of a college, but should never be used as your sole source of information (some use better methodology than others when gathering perspectives on colleges). Use a variety of subjective guides if you intend



to use these in your research (they can be quite helpful, if used wisely). Print and online resources generally obtain information on colleges via the Common Data Set (CDS), an annual survey that colleges complete for outside agencies. Many colleges make the report available on their website (try searching Common Data Set).

### **COLLEGE SEARCH ENGINES AND DATABASES**

Many websites have been developed over the last decade that serve as online college guides, allowing students to look up information about colleges and conduct searches for colleges based on selected parameters (programs, location, size, athletics, etc.). These can be very useful, particularly at the early stages of a search.

### **FAMILY, FRIENDS, TEACHERS**

Family, friends, and teachers may be a good source of information. They come from many different perspectives and experiences. Curious about what it is like to live in

the Midwest or South? Ask around. Wondering what engineering programs are like? Ask an engineer. You can ask people what they think of various colleges, but keep in mind that much of their information may be based on what they have heard or read and may or may not be accurate or even relevant to you and your needs. The closer to the source, the better, meaning someone who attended the college recently is better than someone whose aunt attended fifteen years ago. Keep in mind that in the end, nobody knows what you want and need but you. Research carefully, gather a range of facts and perspectives, and then trust your instincts. Do not reject a college at any stage of this process simply because of one negative comment from someone, a concern expressed in a subjective college guide, or an ineffective tour guide.



## A Guide to Visiting Colleges

Visiting colleges is an excellent way to explore a range of options and confirm your theories about what matters to you in a college, such as size, setting, location, and school culture. Visits to colleges of interest will help you determine campuses that could be a good fit. Each family needs to decide what makes sense in terms of visiting, knowing that schedules, finances, and logistics may prove challenging. Keep in mind that day trips in the Northwest can provide exposure to a variety of types and sizes of colleges (even if you don't wish to attend college here). Given the amount of time and money that will be invested in your college experience, careful research (including visits in some form) is highly recommended.

### VIRTUAL VISITS

Although most of this section focuses on advice related to in-person college visits, we will take a moment to acknowledge virtual options. When most colleges closed their campuses to visitors in spring 2020 due to the pandemic, they put time and resources into developing robust virtual opportunities for tours, admission information sessions, and other options for learning about the school online. We encourage students and families to explore these options.

### TIMING OF VISITS

College visits make sense during two different phases of this process. **The first is during the “shopping around” stage:** your junior year and fall of your senior year. This time frame has the advantage of helping you decide which colleges truly interest you. Visits early in the process may help determine what you are looking for in a college and to assess the role that various factors might play as you decide where to apply. (Some students begin to visit colleges—usually on a more casual and exploratory basis—prior to the junior year, timing that works for some students but not others.)

**The second stage of visits comes after you receive admission decisions.** Students considering more distant colleges sometimes visit *after* they have been accepted (hopefully these students have already visited *some* of the colleges on their application list). Visits after a student has been admitted can be very helpful in deciding which college to attend. This option can work well, but keep in mind that you may only have a few weeks in which to visit and make a decision by May 1 (the date colleges expect to hear back from you). Many colleges plan special programs in April for accepted candidates.

Colleges also offer visitation days for groups of prospective students throughout the year. The advantage of these events is that the college will have an array of people available and programs designed to help you learn more about the college. The disadvantage is that you are seeing the campus with a large group of prospective students and in a carefully orchestrated program that may not match the day to day feel of the campus.

It is ideal to visit a college when it is in session. However, there is also much to be gained from a visit when the college is not in session (you can still get a sense of the setting and facilities, and the tour guides are almost always current students).

### ARRANGING COLLEGE VISITS

Colleges post information on their websites (under admissions) about when and how visits take place: times for tours and group information sessions, whether or not students can interview, and other opportunities for visitors. In addition, they often include hotel information, and other useful tips for those traveling to campus.

Visits are typically arranged online or via a call to the admissions office. Give the admission office plenty of notice so that they can accommodate your interests and arrange a good visit for you (at least two weeks and more at certain times of year and in some locations). Tours and interview slots may fill up.

When planning a trip to a number of campuses, pace yourself. We generally recommend one to two campuses per day, depending on logistics and your stamina. Students are urged to see a range of colleges in terms of selectivity, particularly when you plan a trip to a group of colleges beyond the northwest.

### WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A CAMPUS VISIT

In addition to the usual components of a campus visit listed below, you may want to explore the campus on your own, pick up a school newspaper, eat in the dining hall, chat with students whom you see on campus, etc.

- All colleges offer **tours** for students and parents. Tours are almost always led by current students. Some colleges offer tours on Saturdays.
- Many colleges offer **group information sessions** for students and parents. These are typically hosted by a representative from the admission office.
- Some colleges offer **interviews** or an opportunity for the student to meet with an admission representative (or in some cases a student interviewer). Interview slots may fill quickly, so plan ahead. We encourage you to take advantage of the option to interview while on campus.
- Students may be able to **visit classes**.
- If appropriate, inquire about arranging to meet with a **coach** or a **faculty member** of a department of interest.
- Some colleges offer **overnight visits** hosted by a current student. Typically these are on weeknights only.
- Interviews, class visits, and overnights may be limited to seniors at some colleges.

### AFTER A VISIT

- **Make notes soon after the visit** while information and impressions are fresh in your mind.
- **Parents:** We encourage you to share your impressions of a campus, but only *after* you have heard what your child thinks. Listen carefully and ask questions that will help the student reflect thoughtfully on the visit.
- **A word of caution:** During visits you will interact with a variety of students, faculty, and administrators. There are excellent tour guides and ineffective tour guides, and there will be admission representatives you will connect with and those you won't. Try not to let one mediocre tour guide or one not so dynamic admission representative spoil a campus that might otherwise be a good match for you.

## Questions For Colleges

### STUDENT LIFE

- What is unique about your college?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the college's location and setting?
- Describe the strengths and weaknesses of this college.
- Where do your students come from geographically?
- Talk about the diversity of the students and faculty. In relation to issues of diversity, what challenges does the school face and what strengths does it have?
- What kinds of activities are available to students? Which organizations are the largest and most active?
- What percent of students live on campus? Is housing guaranteed for four years? How affordable is off-campus housing and how easy is it to obtain?
- What are the various types of dorm/housing options? How are dormitories supervised? Rules? Security?
- How are roommates selected?
- Are you a commuter campus? Do most students stay on campus during the weekends?
- What are the dining options and meal plans?
- What opportunities do students have to interact with the administration?
- What are some current issues of concern on campus among students? Among faculty?
- What role do groups such as sororities/fraternities play on campus?
- Are athletics a major part of the school?
- What is the role of religion on campus?
- How is public transportation? What transportation does the school provide?
- What are the main reasons why students who are admitted decide to enroll here? Why do students leave the college?

### ACADEMICS

- What is the average class size and the range of class sizes?
- Describe your academic advising.
- Describe the relationship between faculty and students.
- Do professors teach all classes or are there graduate students involved in teaching or leading sections?
- Describe your distribution requirements or core requirements for students.
- What are the most popular majors? (Don't necessarily equate popular with "best" or vice versa, but it is interesting to know which majors have high numbers of students.)
- Tell me about your \_\_\_\_\_ Department (depth and breadth of courses, areas of concentration, facilities, opportunities for research and internships, co-op programs).
- Describe the services offered via your career planning office.
- What percentage of students who begin at your college complete a degree at your college?
- What percentage of your students go onto graduate school? Jobs?
- Tell me about options for study abroad (length of programs, who leads, programs with other colleges, faculty-led). What portion of students participate?
- What laboratory facilities are available for science majors or language majors? Studios for artists/musicians?
- Can you transfer from one major or school to another within the institution with ease?



## APPLICATION PROCEDURES

- What are your deadline options?
- If the college offers early action or early decision, what are the advantages and disadvantages of these options for the applicant?
- Do you consider legacy in admission decisions for applicants who don't apply under your early decision or action plan? (A few colleges make this stipulation.)
- What do you focus on in making admission decisions?
- Does my choice of major or school impact my chance for admission?
- What role do college admission tests play in admission decisions?
- Do you consider demonstrated interest in admission decisions (the amount and type of contact the student has had with the college)?
- Do you have options for students to interview? What role do interviews play in the application process?
- What role do special interests or qualities play in applications (legacy, ethnicity, special talents)?

## FINANCIAL AID

- Do you admit on a "need blind" or "need aware" basis in relation to financial aid?
- What portion of demonstrated financial need are you typically able to meet?
- Do you offer merit-aid, and are there special applications or deadlines that I should be aware of?
- Do I have to file the FAFSA and/or Profile to qualify for merit-based aid?

## Criteria for Considering College Options

### DEMOGRAPHICS, SIZE, LOCATION

- ❑ Size of college
- ❑ Setting / location of college
- ❑ Cultural / recreational opportunities
- ❑ Distance from home
- ❑ Weather / climate
- ❑ Number of undergraduates
- ❑ Number of graduate students
- ❑ Average class size
- ❑ Range of class sizes
- ❑ Male / Female ratio
- ❑ Percent of students living on campus
- ❑ Geographic origin of students
- ❑ Ethnic diversity
- ❑ International students

### TYPE AND PURPOSE OF COLLEGE

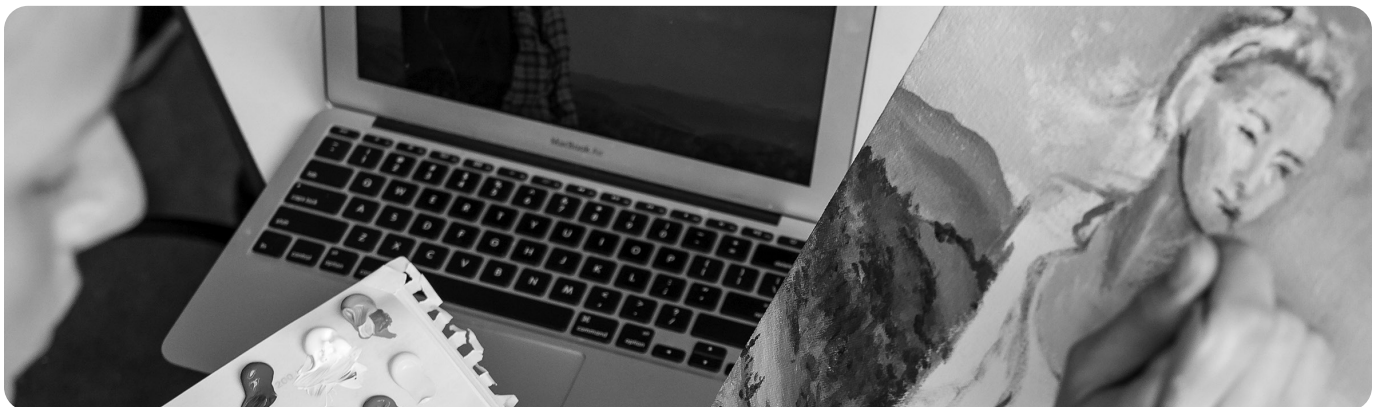
- ❑ Two / four year
- ❑ Public / private / religious
- ❑ Liberal arts / pre-professional (business, engineering, education, nursing, etc.)
- ❑ Comprehensive (including programs for undergraduate / graduate / liberal arts / professional)
- ❑ Specialized (arts, science, business)
- ❑ Traditional / progressive / alternative
- ❑ Deeply scholarly / career-oriented

### SCHOOL CULTURE

- ❑ Campus atmosphere
- ❑ Academic pressure / competition
- ❑ School spirit
- ❑ Controversial campus issues
- ❑ Level of student engagement
- ❑ Student interest in service, politics, religion, athletics, arts, other areas
- ❑ Diversity and campus culture around diversity
- ❑ Traditional / intellectual / artsy / conservative / liberal / alternative / athletic

### ACADEMIC OFFERINGS AND ENVIRONMENT

- ❑ Semester / trimester / quarter
- ❑ Inter-term program (January term)
- ❑ Overall flexibility / structure of academic programs
- ❑ Required courses / distribution requirements
- ❑ Majors / minors offered (including self-designed)
- ❑ Strong / popular departments
- ❑ Breadth and depth of courses offered in areas of interest
- ❑ Lecture / seminars / tutorials / independent study
- ❑ Joint degree programs (3 / 2 programs)
- ❑ Grading / honor code
- ❑ Workload / types of assignments / assessment



## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- ❑ Orientation programs for new students
- ❑ Academic support services for all students (writing, study skills, tutoring, etc.)
- ❑ Academic support for students with learning differences or executive function challenges
- ❑ Academic advising structure and system
- ❑ Counseling options
- ❑ Support and affinity groups connected to identity
- ❑ LGBTQ+ support
- ❑ Programs and support connected to faith-based groups
- ❑ Advising system for career paths and graduate school

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- ❑ Research/field work
- ❑ Internships
- ❑ Exchange programs
- ❑ Foreign study
- ❑ Cooperative work/study plan

## FACULTY

- ❑ Percentage with Ph.D. / number of adjuncts
- ❑ Teaching course load and expectations for research
- ❑ Graduate students teaching classes or sections
- ❑ Academic advising

## CAREER PREPARATION

- ❑ Advising for graduate school and pre-professional programs
- ❑ Career services and advising
- ❑ Percentage who attend graduate school

## LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

- ❑ Predominantly large dorms / theme houses / apartment style
- ❑ Availability of single rooms / doubles / suites

- ❑ Freshman dorms / mixed age
- ❑ Single sex / coed dorms (by floor or room) / coed bathrooms
- ❑ Centralized / decentralized dining

## CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

- ❑ Clubs, organizations, athletics, and activities related to your interests
- ❑ Presence of fraternities and sororities (Portion of students involved? / Do they have houses? / When do they rush?)
- ❑ Presence of religious, ethnic, or cultural groups
- ❑ Athletic division and league
- ❑ Athletic culture on campus

## FACILITIES

- ❑ Classrooms / laboratories / libraries / studios / practice rooms / athletic / student center / housing / dining hall

## ADMISSIONS

- ❑ Admission selectivity
- ❑ Deadline options
- ❑ College policies on testing
- ❑ SAT / ACT range of scores for applicants
- ❑ GPA range

## COSTS & FINANCIAL AID

- ❑ Tuition, room and board per year
- ❑ Transportation costs
- ❑ Need-based financial aid
- ❑ Need blind / need aware
- ❑ Merit-based financial aid
- ❑ Work Study options for students receiving need-based aid
- ❑ Campus employment options for students who don't qualify for Work Study



## How Colleges Make Admission Decisions

Colleges are interested in admitting a “well-rounded class,” a diverse group of students who match their academic profile and who will contribute to the life of the college in varied ways. The more selective the college, the more admission will depend on impressive accomplishments in addition to top academic achievement (and neither will guarantee admission). There are also many fine colleges eager to accept solid and involved students and colleges that admit most students who apply, including those with mixed academic records.

Applications are evaluated differently at different types of colleges. Inevitably, the most important information in your application and the most carefully scrutinized is your **transcript**—the record of high school courses taken and grades received. Transcripts are evaluated within the context of the school. Many colleges know of OES and understand that our academic program is rigorous.

**Each transcript tells a story**, and while grades are certainly important, colleges also note the classes you take and how demanding your classes are in relation to what is offered at your school. They are interested in trends in your grades; an improving record is preferable to a declining one. Although most colleges will look at grades earned in grades nine through twelve, they understand that the student you are in the last couple years of high school is a more accurate indication of the student you will be in college. If there is anything on your transcript (a trend, pattern, or grade that doesn’t fit with your overall record), consult with your college counselor about whether or not this should be explained in your application.

To aid their assessment of your academic credentials, many colleges use **standardized test scores**. Test scores are meant to provide a more objective measure than grades, since grades may not indicate the same level of academic accomplishment from school to school. Scores are not as important as your transcript and are seen as one piece of a larger academic picture. Many colleges do not require tests as part of the admission process (go to [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)) and some are test blind.

**Recommendations, essays, extracurricular activities, special talents** and accomplishments, and **interviews** are taken into consideration by many colleges (public and private). They want to get a sense of you as a student and as a member of a community. If you have a special talent (athletic or musical, for example) this may play a role. In addition, many colleges consider **ethnicity** (an optional question on any application), **geographic diversity** (usually a small factor unless you are from an underrepresented state or country), and whether or not the applicant is a **legacy**, which typically means that one of your parents graduated from the college. Many public universities do not consider legacy.

The role played by various admission criteria depends, in general, on the selectivity of the college and the degree to which its academic profile matches yours. In addition to your academic record, colleges are usually interested in your interests and talents, since most colleges desire a diverse student body and sometimes have institutional “needs” that dictate admission decision (the lacrosse team needs a goalie; the orchestra needs a flute player). If your academic record is noticeably weaker than that of most students admitted to the college, other factors (a great essay or interview, for example) will not usually override the basic criteria of a reasonable academic “match.” However, other factors can take on heightened importance for applicants to a highly selective college (where most applicants are qualified academically) or for students whose academic records make them borderline applicants.

### DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

Some colleges also consider *demonstrated interest*, which include points of contact along the way that may demonstrate your level of interest in that college: campus visit, interview, attending a reception or high school visit hosted by the college, getting on the college’s mailing list, contact with the admission office, how you respond to the “why this college” question on the application, etc. Consideration of a student’s demonstrated interest is a trend that comes from the fact that as more

students apply to more colleges, it has become harder for colleges to predict “yield” (the number of students who will accept the college’s offer of admission). As a result, some colleges factor “demonstrated interest” into admission decisions. That said, there are many colleges that don’t track demonstrated interest. Many of the most selective colleges, for example, can count on a high yield and assume a high level of interest in their applicants. Other colleges don’t think they are helped much by tracking demonstrated interest.

We do not want students to feel the need to be overly strategic in this process. Most colleges that track demonstrated interest are reasonable. They don’t expect you to take all the steps listed above, and they realize that if you live far away or don’t have the resources, a campus visit is less likely. However, the types of actions that demonstrate your interest to colleges are actually steps you *should* be taking if you are researching options thoroughly. And if you are applying to colleges in Oregon or Washington, you should visit, both for your own sake in this process and because local colleges may question your level of interest if you don’t.

In general, we encourage you to develop *relationships* with colleges (which usually means the representative who works with students from Portland). Not only will you learn more about the college, you may also get a small boost in the admission process. Creating connections is an important life skill that will serve you well in job searches and graduate school applications.

### A WORD ABOUT HIGHLY SELECTIVE COLLEGES

In 2011, National Public Radio ran a story on the admission committee process at Amherst College that is a good starting point for understanding admissions at highly selective colleges. This excerpt from the story includes comments from the admission office at Amherst.

“You know, I think the process to anybody who is not inside it is baffling. It’s perplexing. It’s just that these kids look remarkably similar, and we’re making nuanced judgments. None of us are going to pretend that that’s exact science. You know, it’s a flawed process... we’re exhausting the meaningful criteria to separate John from Mary. For that group, it’s effectively a lottery. It really is.” The admission officer concedes that this may be a disturbing notion to many high achievers, but in an odd way he hopes it may also be a kind of relief to know that the decision is not a referendum on their worth. As he puts it, “It’s kind of like that old break-up line: it’s not you, it’s me.”

Although competition for entrance to highly selective private colleges and some public universities can be keen and their decisions may feel arbitrary, it is more accurate to say that they are very difficult to predict. Colleges with acceptance rates from say 5%-40%, consider each applicant individually and rarely talk in terms of a minimum GPA or “required” courses (“recommended” is the term typically used). At highly selective colleges, most of the applicants meet or exceed these recommendations, and the more rigorous your course of study (within reason) the better. Depth and accomplishment in extracurricular activities are important. Test scores can take on exaggerated importance in this context, with scores in the 650-800 range being the norm at the most selective colleges. Keep in mind that at these highly selective colleges, most applicants are very qualified. The colleges face difficult choices each year that take into consideration the nuances of individual applicants and institutional needs. Most students who are denied to these colleges don’t look much different than the admitted students (we tell these denied students that they are in good company). From the outside, these decisions don’t always make sense. Due to a simple lack of spaces for all attractive applicants, these colleges know that they will be turning away many qualified students.

## Creating a Final List

During the fall of your senior year, you will focus on developing a final list of colleges. You are not looking for the one perfect college, but rather a list of colleges that are appropriate for you and that will meet your needs. In counseling meetings, we will discuss what you have discovered in your research, clarify your criteria, and assess the likelihood of your acceptance at various colleges. Eventually, you will arrive at the list of colleges to which you will actually apply.

For most students, this list includes **four to twelve** colleges. We ask that students not apply to more than twelve colleges for the following reasons.

- Completing high quality applications is time consuming. You need to stay on top of your school work and extracurricular commitments during your senior year. Colleges will be watching your academic performance carefully.
- You will have more time to research colleges carefully and cultivate relationships with colleges on your final list if it isn't too long.
- Keeping your list reasonable in length forces you to make informed decisions about your college choices before you apply. Waiting until April of your senior year to look closely at options and make choices is a high stress situation—it is best to do most of this work earlier in the process.
- The entire system becomes more competitive for all involved if applicants apply to an excessive number of colleges.
- Do not apply to any colleges that you haven't researched carefully or do not find appealing. When you do so, you are wasting everyone's time and potentially taking a place from a student who may be very interested in that college.

### FINAL LIST ADVICE

- Use College Kickstart to evaluate various final list configurations
- Your final list should be **balanced** and thoughtfully constructed. Include colleges with a range of selectivity and a **smooth curve** of selectivity: 2-4 reasonable **reach** colleges / 2-4 **target** colleges / 2-4 **likely** colleges.
- Think of your likely colleges as the foundation of your list. They may not be your top choice, but you need to have a strong interest. Don't apply to *any* colleges you won't consider attending.
- Find at least two colleges that you find appealing and that are likely to admit you. Identifying foundation colleges should be a priority rather than an afterthought in your search.
- Know why you are applying to each college on your list.
- Avoid extremes: a list heavy with reach colleges or one heavy with likely colleges.
- Consider your capacity for disappointing news when decisions come back from colleges.
- Make sure your college counselor and parents are comfortable with your final list.
- Include a "financial safety," if this is important
- **Ask yourself this question:** If I only get into my likely colleges, will I be satisfied? If the answer is No, then you need to keep working on your list until you can respond with a heartfelt, Yes!

## Completing Applications

Completing college applications is a big task that requires planning, effort, and attention to detail. We will provide you with guidance and checklists. **Our most basic and important advice is this:**

1. **Take an organized approach.**
2. **On each of your college websites, read application instructions carefully.**
3. **Work well ahead of deadlines.**

### APPLICATION DEADLINES

Application deadlines vary. Many colleges have a **regular application deadline** that falls between November 15 and February 1. Colleges often notify students of their decisions during March or early April (some earlier).

**ROLLING ADMISSION** means that admission decisions are made within a month or two after receipt of a complete application. If you are applying to a college with rolling admission, it may be important to submit your application early in the year (often during November or December). Check with the college and notify your counselor.

Many colleges have **early decision** or **early action** programs and some have both. **Most early decision/ action deadlines fall between November 1 and January 15**, with admission decisions coming from the college within a month or two after the deadline. Students who have applied early decision or early action and are not admitted may be **deferred**; their applications will be considered again with the regular applicant pool.

**EARLY DECISION (ED)** allows you to apply early to a college and receive an admission decision and a financial aid package early. Some colleges offer two rounds of ED (EDI and EDII). During each of the two rounds you can apply ED to only one college. It is assumed that if you are admitted via ED, you will attend that college. You must withdraw applications from all other colleges after you have been admitted and accepted the college's offer.

Early decision requires that you make a commitment to that college well before the May 1 deadline that colleges follow for other deadline options. If you apply for need-based financial aid and are not offered an award that makes attendance possible, you may decline the offer of admission and be released from the early decision commitment. There are pros and cons to applying early decision that you should discuss with your college counselor. In general, early decision is a good idea only if you have done a thorough search process (including a campus visit) and feel confident that you have found the school that is right for you. If you want to compare financial aid packages, early decision may not be a good option for you because you will *not* have the opportunity to do so.

**EARLY ACTION (EA)** allows you to apply early and hear early from a college. An early action acceptance is non-binding (once you are admitted you can continue with the application process at other colleges). You do not have to notify an early action college of your intent to enroll until May 1 (the date by which applicants for early action or regular deadlines need to select a college). You can apply to more than one college under an early action plan. If your fall semester senior grades are going to be important in your application (for a student who had a weaker performance earlier in high school), early action might not be a good idea, because the college will make a decision before these are available.

**RESTRICTIVE EARLY ACTION (REA)** is a more limited version of EA. A small group of colleges offer this option in which you apply early and hear early, and if you are admitted, the decision is non-binding and you can continue with other applications. However, REA colleges will restrict other early applications in some way (read their instructions). They may ask that you not apply EA and/or ED to other colleges. Most REA colleges will allow you to apply to your state university using an early notification deadline.



## COMPLETING APPLICATIONS

College applications are completed and submitted online. Applications and instructions are on college websites. Most students use the Common Application for some or all of their colleges.

Over 1000 colleges (private, public, and international) use the **Common Application**, which allows you to complete one form online and submit it to more than one institution. Many colleges require additional forms or “supplements.” Use the chart in the Common Application or individual college websites to check requirements for supplemental forms or essays. The Common Application has been utilized since 1975.

We urge students to take an organized approach to the application process, to read all instructions carefully and to work well ahead of deadlines. The college counselors work with seniors to advise them as they complete college applications. We encourage them to share essays and activity lists with us for feedback. They should have a parent or trusted adult help them proof applications.

## ESSAYS

Most private and many public universities ask for an essay (and sometimes more than one essay or short answer question) as part of the application. We encourage you to think of the essay as an opportunity to breathe life into your application and convey information that helps capture who you are and what you value. While essays generally do not outweigh long-term measures, such as grades, they are important and can make a difference. Seek feedback from people you trust, but do not let others do any of the writing or editing. The best essays convey the true voice of the writer. There is no formula for writing a good essay. In fact there are many effective ways to approach these essays. If you choose to write about something that genuinely matters to you, you will have made a good start.

Some colleges will leave the essay topic to you. Others will ask very specific questions. It is appropriate to use an essay for more than one college application (as long as the essay fits the topic or question posed). You may find yourself having to write several different essays.

- Read the essay question/prompt carefully.
- Brainstorm ideas before selecting your topic. List activities and experiences from your past; an unexpected topic might emerge from your brainstorming. Have a conversation with your college counselor or a family member if you are having trouble selecting a topic.
- Focus your essay topic as much as possible. For example, if you choose to write about a two-week backpacking trip or trip to Mexico, you will be best served by selecting a small slice of that experience (an event during the trip that lasted five minutes, an hour, or a day) that illuminates an important lesson learned or a meaningful event.
- Some of the most powerful essays are based on surprisingly simple or everyday topics or events. Tell a story about something that has happened to you or an experience that has shaped you, changed your perspective, or stuck with you. Incorporate anecdotes, examples, and quotes from conversations. Create a “you are there” feeling if this fits your topic.
- Go beyond the description of an event: analyze and reflect on the significance of it.
- Consider what you want the reader to think and feel about you after reading your essay.
- Do not select a topic because you think it will “look good.” This may result in flat, predictable essay. Select a topic that is meaningful to you.
- Do not use the essay to describe, in narrative form, your activities or accomplishments.

- Know the purpose of the topic you select. Think about what you want to convey.
- Use a personal, not scholarly style (first person is appropriate), and write something you think will reach and elicit a response from a real person, not some imagined committee.
- Your essay should sound like you. Don't let anyone put words in your mouth.
- Your writing should be honest, direct, clear, concise, and personal. Use active verbs.
- Proof your essay carefully and read your essay aloud as part of the editing process.
- Seek feedback on your essay from at least two people (parent, teacher, college counselor).
- Start your essay well before the deadline and seek feedback at various stages to make sure you are headed in the right direction. Allow yourself adequate time and work through several drafts of your essay. It may take longer than you think!

One of the key questions that some colleges ask is **“Why do you want to attend this college?”** It is important that you respond to this question in a thoughtful, specific, and genuine way. If you have done the type of research that you should do before applying to a college, you will be in a better position to respond in a compelling and convincing manner that explains why *you* are interested in *this particular college*. If you offer a generic answer that could be given for most small liberal arts colleges or most colleges in an urban setting, for example, the admission office may assume that you are not that interested and that you really don't know much about their campus and programs. Do not make this a love fest in which you go on about how wonderful the school is. Write a sincere response based on careful research that explains *your* interest in the college. What is it that draws you to the college and makes the college a good match for you and you a good fit for the college?

## ACTIVITY LISTS

Students will be asked to list extracurricular involvement for most colleges, typically using a format provided within the application. When admission counselors are trying to move quickly through applications, they often prefer a familiar format. In some cases, students will have the option to send a supplemental activity resume that will allow for more detail and description. We encourage students to seek feedback on activity lists to make sure they are communicating in a clear, thorough, and concise manner. Supplemental activity lists should generally be limited to 1-2 pages.

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Many colleges ask for a college counselor letter of recommendation (also known as a secondary school report) and 1-2 teacher letters. We typically send the counselor and two teacher letters to your colleges. See college instructions regarding teacher recommendations (occasionally they specify subject areas and grade levels).

Discuss options with your college counselor spring of your junior year and then select two academic teachers who will write letters to use for all of your colleges. The teachers need to have taught you in an academic course (English, history, language, math, science), preferably in your junior year. If you had a teacher in ninth or tenth grade who will be teaching you fall of your senior year, this may also work. On some occasions it works to have one sophomore and one junior year teacher. The teachers must be from two different departments, and generally it is a good idea to have one teacher from math or science and one from the humanities.

Teacher comments may give you a sense of what your teachers would say about you and how they write. However, keep in mind that letters of recommendation and teacher comments are not the same and serve different audiences and purposes. Your selection should not be

based only on the grade you earned. More important factors are your level of effort and engagement in the class. In fact, a class in which you struggled and improved may put a teacher in a strong position to write a letter.

Teachers are happy to write letters for students, but keep in mind that this takes time and effort on their part. After your letters have been completed, it is important to thank them.

We do not share counselor or teacher letters with students and will encourage you to sign a form indicating that you waive your right to see the letters. Most colleges destroy letters of recommendation at the end of the admission process, and they prefer letters that they know students are not viewing. Rest assured that teachers will not agree to write a letter for you unless they feel they can write a supportive letter overall.

## INTERVIEWS

Interviews can be influential in the admission process, and we strongly encourage students to take advantage of the opportunity that interviews offer (to show interest, learn more about the college, provide the interviewer with a good impression that will be noted in your file, and to practice your interviewing skills). Interviews often take the shape of a conversation or an “exchange of information.”

Very few colleges require interviews and many colleges don’t offer interviews. Some colleges recommend interviews and others offer them as an optional component of the application process. Some colleges offer interviews on campus and/or virtually, and others utilize alumni. Early in your senior year research interview options for colleges of interest.

Remember in your interview, as in your essay, to be yourself. Colleges are looking for a mix of students. Interviewers understand that some students are reserved and that a certain amount of nervousness goes along with this type of situation; they will do their best to put you at ease. Smiling, making eye contact, offering a firm handshake, and speaking up are important. Avoid extremes with your clothing (not too dressy or too casual).

In preparing for the interview, give some thought to how you will answer questions about common topics and types of questions.

- Why are you interested in this college?
- Describe an intellectually stimulating class/experience that you have had in high school.
- What qualities and strengths will you bring to the campus community?
- What extracurricular activities have been the most meaningful to you and why?
- What books have you enjoyed reading in the past year?
- How did you spend the last two summers?
- Describe a challenge you have faced and overcome.
- What do you do for fun?
- Describe some of your goals for college.
- What interests do you want to pursue in college?

Interviews are also an occasion for you to obtain information. Come prepared with thoughtful questions about the college (you should have some knowledge of the college, but you do not need to be an expert). Alumni interviewers may want to share their enthusiasm for their college. Listen carefully and respond graciously.

## College Admission Tests

*"You are not your test scores."* —Anonymous

Requirements for standardized tests vary among colleges, and many colleges are test optional or test blind (they don't consider test scores as part of the admission process). For students, testing is often one of the more stressful aspects of the application process. It is important to keep these tests in perspective and to remember that test scores are only one factor in admission decisions.

In this section we provide an overview of college admission tests and basic advice on testing and preparation. We can best address which tests to take and when in individual meetings with students.

Colleges give equal consideration to the SAT and ACT and do not have a preference between these tests. While most students find that they have comparable scores on the ACT and SAT, some do better on one test or the other. Sample tests can be viewed on the testing websites (the tests have different structures and scoring systems). Some students try both tests to see if one is a better match, and others select one test from the beginning and focus their energy on preparing for and taking that test.

### STANDARDIZED TEST INFO AND ADVICE

- Most students take the ACT and/or SAT between November of the junior year and December of the senior year.
- Students generally take a given test 1-3 times over the course of the junior and senior year.
- For regular and rolling admission deadlines, most colleges will accept scores for tests taken through December of the senior year. Check with the college for test dates accepted by colleges with early decision and early action deadlines.
- Confirm testing requirements on college websites.
- The SAT and ACT exams are given at various locations in Portland/Vancouver. Register for tests online and include the OES code (380915). Without the school code, we will not receive a copy of your scores.

- When you register for SAT and ACT tests, you will have the opportunity to send scores to four colleges at no cost. Most students wait until their senior year to take advantage of this offer.
- Register ahead of deadlines to insure that your preferred location is available. Use your *full legal name* (consistently) each time you register. For international students this will be the name on your passport. Students are responsible for keeping track of test dates and registration deadlines.

**To register online:**

[www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) (SAT)

[www.act.org](http://www.act.org) (ACT)

### PRELIMINARY SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST (PSAT)

- During October sophomores and juniors take the PSAT at OES during a school day (they do not need to register).
- The PSAT is a practice test; scores do not go to colleges.
- Scores will be available in December.
- PSAT scores earned by juniors are used to determine qualification for the National Merit Scholarship program (a program for students who score in the top 1-2 percent).
- The PSAT consists of sections on Math and Evidence-Based Reading and Writing. Scores on each section range from 160-760 (total of 320-1520).

### DIGITAL SAT

- Two Sections: Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, Math
- Scores on Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and Math range from 200-800 (total of 400-1600)
- Testing time: 2 hours and 14 minutes
- The College Board allows students to use "score choice," selecting which scores to send to colleges by test date for the SAT. Not all colleges allow score choice.



## ACT

- Five sections: English, Math, Reading, Science Reasoning, and Writing (optional)
- Scores range from 1-36 on each section
- Testing time: 3 hours and 25 minutes (with writing)
- When the ACT sends your scores to colleges, they will ask you to specify which test date you want reported if you have taken the test more than once

## TEST PREPARATION

Students should learn basic test taking strategies and should prepare for standardized tests using a method that works for them (class, tutor, self-directed using books/online programs). Timed practice tests are an excellent way to prepare and can be done at home. Excessive preparation is discouraged. A list of test preparation options in the Portland area is available on the College Counseling Google page.

## SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Extended time and other accommodations are available for students with documented physical or learning disabilities. If you think you may qualify, contact the Upper School Learning Resource Coordinator at OES as soon as possible (**well in advance of test registration deadlines**) for information regarding eligibility and the application process.

Students who cannot test on Saturday because of religious beliefs can request to test on a Sunday. See ACT or SAT registration materials for information on this option.

## SUBMITTING TEST SCORES TO COLLEGES

Students are responsible for knowing the testing requirements of their colleges and for having scores sent to colleges from the testing agencies. Score reports can be ordered online or as part of the test registration process. To be safe, we encourage students to order score reports at least one month before the deadline. A growing group of colleges is allowing students to self-report SAT/ACT scores at the application stage and verify with an official report if the student matriculates to the college. Students should consult with their college counselor regarding



which scores to send and when to utilize score choice. Most colleges will mix scores from various test dates to acknowledge your highest scores, while some colleges will consider your highest combined score from a single date. Keep in mind that not all colleges allow score choice.

### ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAMS

- Advanced Placement Exams are given at OES for our AP classes in math and language (Calculus AB, Calculus BC, Statistics, French, and Spanish), as well as a handful of other subjects.
- Students register for the exams at OES in the fall.
- Satisfactory performance on AP Exams may earn students college credit and/or entrance to upper level classes. Policies about when and whether or not to grant credit for AP exams vary at colleges.
- AP exams taken prior to the senior year can be used as an admissions credential for students who wish to report scores in their college applications.
- AP scores are not reported to colleges by OES or required by colleges in the U.S. as part of the admission process. Students decide whether or not to self-report AP scores in college applications.
- Taking AP exams not connected to an AP class at OES should not be a priority for students who do so hoping to present a score of a 4 or 5 to colleges in the admission process. AP scores will play a minor role in admission decisions for most college and some will pay no attention to scores submitted with applications. Your academic work during high school is far more important, along with how you engage in your school community (and/or beyond).
- Students seeking college credit will need to have the College Board send AP scores to their college at the end of the senior year.

### TOEFL

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is designed to measure English proficiency for students whose first language is not English. Colleges have different policies about who must take this test and varying minimum qualifications. We encourage international students for whom English is a second language to take both the TOEFL and the SAT and/or ACT beginning in the junior year. The combination of these scores helps colleges assess your language and math abilities. Many colleges accept IELTS and/or the Duolingo English Test as alternatives to the TOEFL. Check college websites to confirm policies.

## The Conclusion of the Application Process

Once colleges have your applications, students will hear from colleges by early April.

This can be an important time for continuing to gather information and deciding on first-choice colleges. It is also a strategic time for warding off the “senioritis” epidemic that sweeps the country this time of the year. Continue to be the interesting, motivated student you are, and get the most out of your last few months of high school. And remember—all college acceptances are conditional upon finishing your senior year in a manner consistent with the rest of your record. Colleges have been known to withdraw offers of admission after final grades are submitted. Even OES students have received such letters.

In April, when all the college acceptances (and, alas, denials) are in hand, you need to decide by **May 1** which college you want to attend. May 1 is known as the **National Candidates Reply Date**. **It is not appropriate to tell more than one college of your intent to enroll (also known as double-depositing).**

For many, this decision is easily made; for others, it is one they agonize over. If you have more than one college option that appeals to you, schedule a meeting with your college counselor. We welcome these conversations and will ask questions and listen carefully to help you develop a framework for making this decision. Keep in mind, that only *you* can make this decision; others do not necessarily know which college is best for you. Seek advice, do your research, visit again if appropriate, and in the end, rely on your instincts. If you are having a tough time deciding between colleges, we encourage you to take until May 1. There is no reason to rush this decision.

If you are comparing need-based financial aid packages, talk this through with your college counselor to make sure you have a good handle on how to make these comparisons. It can be complicated, given the varied ways that colleges present financial aid packages.

Once you have selected a college, read all instructions about enrolling, housing, deposits, registration and other matters related to matriculating at the college, to make sure that you are on top of important details. Applying for admission is only the beginning.

### WHEN A COLLEGE DEFERS AN ADMISSION DECISION

Students applying under an early action or early decision plan may be deferred. This means that your application will be reconsidered and given full consideration with the regular applicant pool. In most cases you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged by having applied early. Colleges that defer an admission decision typically want to see their full applicant pool before making a decision on your application, and they want to see your fall semester grades. Consult with your college counselor if you are deferred. It is important to express your interest in the college and update them with new information if appropriate. If you are denied admission under an early deadline plan, you can't reapply that year. It is time to move on to other options.

## COLLEGE WAIT LISTS

Each year during this period, some students find themselves in the uncertain position of being on a college wait list. Colleges, of course, have no way of knowing how many of the applicants they accept will actually come, so the wait list provides them with a group of qualified applicants who continue to be interested. If you end up on one or more wait lists, please respond promptly to colleges about your interest in remaining on the wait list (you can be on more than one). It is important to demonstrate interest to colleges in relation to their wait list, so consult with your college counselor if you are in this situation.

Even if you stay on one or more wait list, you will need to make a deposit at another college by May 1 to hold your space there. If you are later offered a place from a wait list and you decide to accept that offer, you can notify the college where you already committed (you

will probably lose your deposit). Colleges understand that they may lose some students after May 1. Be aware that if you stay on any wait lists, you will be extending your college search process—this may make good sense, but you need to be prepared for the increased time of uncertainty. The timing of hearing about an offer from a wait list varies from one week (after May 1) to a couple of months, occasionally longer. If a college offers you a place off their wait list, they are expected to give you at least 48 hours to respond to their offer of admission.

When you have decided which college you will attend from those that have accepted you, be sure to thank other colleges by May 1, and let them know that you plan to go elsewhere (tell them where—they like to know). This is good etiquette.





## Financing a College Education

### FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid for college comes in a variety of forms. If paying for college is a concern (and it is for many families), please talk with the college counselor early in this process, and educate yourself about options for making college more affordable. There are a number of resources available: your college counselor, financial aid offices at colleges, books, and websites.

While financial concerns may influence the mix of colleges to which you apply, do not rule out a college simply because of the cost. In the end, the cost of the college may play a big role in determining which college you attend, but early on you should look at a range of options. At most colleges 40 to 90 percent of the students receive need- and/or merit-based financial aid. Until you complete the process for admissions and financial aid, you will not have all the information you need to determine the colleges that will be most affordable. If you are offered need-based and/or merit-based financial aid, a college that first seemed beyond your means may be affordable. Financial aid can equalize the cost of attending different types of institutions. We do encourage students to have a financial aid safety on their list if appropriate (this is a college that is more affordable based on cost or the high likelihood of merit aid).

If you are receiving substantial financial aid at OES, you may be eligible for **fee waivers** for the SAT/ACT and college application fees. Check with your college counselor.

### NEED-BASED AID

All colleges offer need-based financial aid, which is given according to the student's **demonstrated financial need**. The **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** is determined when you file the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** and is based on your income, assets, family size, number of family members attending college, and other related factors. This is the amount of money your family is expected to contribute to the cost of education.

Some families wonder if they will qualify for need-based aid. Because need is determined in relation to the cost of the college, we encourage families to use financial aid calculators available on various websites such as [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) and [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org). In addition, all colleges are required to have a **Net Price Calculator (NPC)** available on their website. The NPC will be tailored to the college's approach to financial aid and should allow families to calculate an estimated net price of attendance at an institution (defined as cost of attendance minus grant and scholarship aid). Financial aid calculators and NPC's will help you assess where you stand in relation to need-based aid (sometimes merit-based as well). Some families are surprised to find out that they may qualify for need-based aid.

To determine your financial need, a college will subtract your EFC from the cost of attendance at that college. The difference between these two figures is your **demonstrated financial need**. Some colleges will meet 100 percent of your demonstrated financial need; other colleges will meet a portion of your need, but may not have the resources to meet full need. A variety of factors will impact the financial aid package that you receive from a college, including how the college determines need, the resources available at that college, and the strength of the applicant. Some families find that when they take their financial package into account, the out-of-pocket cost of a private college might be similar to a public university. Some colleges are "**need-blind**" and some are "**need-sensitive**" (or need-aware). Need-blind indicates that a college does not take into consideration a family's ability to pay in the admission process. Need-sensitive colleges may take a family's ability to pay into consideration in admission decisions. However, it is important to remember that all colleges offer need-based aid; those that are need-sensitive usually only factor this in for some applicants (usually a relatively small portion of their pool each year).

Need-based aid comes from federal, state, and institutional (college) sources and usually consists of a combination of the following:

- **Grants and Scholarships** (gift money, which does not need to be repaid)
- **Loans** (financial aid that must be repaid, with interest)
- **Work-Study** (a federal program that provides students with part-time employment during the school year—usually on campus)

### A SPECIAL NOTE ON LOANS

We encourage families to avoid extremes when it comes to thinking about loans for a child's education. Some families are determined to avoid loans at all cost. Because the cost of education is an investment in a student's future and probably one of the largest purchases a family will make in life, loans, if utilized wisely, can help students consider a wider range of college options. Taking on excessive debt, however, is strongly discouraged. We advise families to educate themselves about loans, seek advice, and use **loan calculators** to determine a reasonable level of loan to take on over a four-year period. Students whose level of loan debt from federal loans is high relative to their income may qualify for the Income-Based Repayment Plan (IBR). Most major types of federal student loans are eligible for IBR (PLUS loans for parents are not). Federal loans are the best option and should be utilized fully before considering private loans. Federal loans are available for both students and parents (PLUS loan). Private loans are best avoided and should be seen as a last resort, to be used with great caution as to the amount of debt incurred (there are exceptions to this, depending on the terms of the loan and the family's situation).

### MERIT-BASED FINANCIAL AID

Many public and private colleges (over 80%) award merit-based aid to students as a way to discount tuition for families and attract applicants (some highly selective colleges do not offer merit aid). At some colleges merit-aid is highly competitive and offered only to a small portion of the applicant pool. At other colleges, merit-aid is offered to a number of applicants (usually based on academic, athletic, or artistic ability). Many colleges that offer merit aid consider all applicants automatically for these awards, but at some colleges some or all of their merit scholarships require a special application. Some colleges have well-defined parameters for merit aid based on GPA and test scores and the college may or may not consider the context of the school attended in awarding merit aid. Some colleges have a priority deadline for consideration for merit aid, and a small handful of colleges require the family to complete the FAFSA and/or CSS Profile for merit-based aid. College websites are the best source of information on the types of aid offered.

### OUTSIDE SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships from private sources (foundations, non-profits, businesses, service organizations) are available in varying amounts. Many private scholarships are based on merit (as defined by the organization giving the money) and require a separate application. There are websites and guides that list the availability of outside scholarships. In the college counseling office, we keep a file of scholarship applications that we receive in the mail. Students and parents are welcome to look through this file and copy applications of interest.

While we encourage students to investigate outside scholarships, please be aware that students generally receive most of their financial aid and scholarships directly from the colleges via the need- and merit-based aid system. Outside scholarships account for less than eight percent of the funding that students rely on for financial aid. Many of these scholarships are for \$2,500 or less. Students should gauge the amount of time they want to devote to applying for outside scholarships and should make sure that they give a high priority to completing their college applications on time as well as any need-based or merit-based forms required by the colleges for financial aid. Students often have more success with scholarships that come from local sources (Portland or Oregon) or from a parent's place of work than from scholarship programs that are national in scope.

### **OREGON OFFICE OF STUDENT ACCESS AND COMPLETION**

The Oregon Office of Student Access and Completion (OSAC) administers more than \$18 million in private scholarship funds available to Oregon students. Some of these scholarships apply only to colleges in Oregon. To apply for scholarships through OSAC, students must file a FAFSA and complete the OSAC application by March 1. The OSAC application is available online. Students can review the list of OSAC scholarships for their eligibility for specific programs. For more information on OSAC scholarships go to [www.oregonstudentaid.gov](http://www.oregonstudentaid.gov).

### **THE OREGON OPPORTUNITY GRANT**

Low- and moderate-income students who are residents of Oregon may qualify for an Oregon Opportunity Grant (this grant can only be used at colleges in Oregon). Students apply by filing the FAFSA and listing at least one participating Oregon college. Oregon schools listed on the student's FAFSA will notify students of their actual award amount.

### **WESTERN UNDERGRADUATE EXCHANGE (WUE)**

Through WUE students from Oregon and Washington may enroll in some out-of-state two- and four-year public colleges at a reduced tuition level: 50 percent more than the school's regular resident tuition. WUE tuition is considerably less than nonresident tuition. Eligibility for admission and for WUE tuition is determined by each participating institution, and in some colleges it is handled like merit aid with established academic qualifications that may not take into account the context of the school attended. Some colleges only offer the discount for certain programs. Participating states include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. See the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education website: [www.wiche.edu/wue](http://www.wiche.edu/wue).

### **OTHER OPTIONS (ONCE IN COLLEGE)**

Some colleges have Cooperative Work-Study programs that allow the student to combine employment and academic endeavors. Some students work as resident assistants in dormitories (after the freshman year) and are paid for this or have free room for that year. Many colleges have non work-study jobs available for students who don't qualify for need-based aid.

## Financial Aid Forms to File

### FAFSA

All students applying for need-based aid must file the FAFSA. Some colleges ask students to complete the FAFSA to qualify for merit-based aid as well. Parents who wish to qualify for a Federal PLUS Loan must also file a FAFSA. There is no charge for filing the FAFSA and it can be completed online (a paper version is still available but not recommended). The FAFSA will be available October 1 of the senior year. To access the FAFSA form and additional information go to: [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) (beware of [www.fafsa.com](http://www.fafsa.com)). In families where the parents are divorced, separated, or not married, the parent with whom the child lives the most will complete the FAFSA.

### CSS PROFILE

In addition to the FAFSA, some colleges also require that you complete a College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile. This form provides colleges with additional financial information to be utilized in awarding non-federal student aid funds. The CSS Profile is also used for awarding financial aid to students applying early decision (and sometimes early action) at a college. This form is available online during the fall of the senior year. You first need to register and then complete and submit the form. The CSS Profile is available at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) (go to “Pay for College”). There is a fee for completing the CSS Profile (the fee is waived for families who qualify, based on income).

### ADDITIONAL FORMS

Some colleges also have their own financial aid form that you need to complete to qualify for need-based aid. To check on deadlines and required forms, go to the college’s website and locate information on financial aid.

### REPORTING SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO COLLEGES

If you have **special circumstances** (unemployment, excessive medical bills, changes in marital status, etc.) not reflected on the FAFSA, report these in a letter directly to college financial aid offices (call colleges for their advice on how to handle the reporting of special circumstances and what documentation they might want). There is a space on the CSS Profile that allows for some explanation.

### FINANCING COLLEGE: QUESTIONS TO ASK COLLEGES

- What are costs for tuition/fees, room/board, books/supplies?
- Are there additional costs that we should be aware of?
- How and when should students apply for need-based financial aid (forms required and deadlines)?
- Does financial need affect admission decisions and if so how?
- Is the institution able to meet 100 percent of a student’s demonstrated need?
- For parents who are divorced or legally separated, does the college ask for information from the non-custodial parent?
- Does the institution offer merit scholarships that do not include consideration of financial need?
- Are there special applications for merit-based aid or are all applicants automatically considered?
- Is there a priority deadline for applying for merit-based financial aid?
- How will outside scholarships be treated in relation to my need-based package? Will they reduce loan, work study, or grant money?
- What portions of the financial aid package will be renewed from year to year, assuming that financial circumstances don’t change? Will the package change from year to year?



- How are jobs assigned in student employment including federal work-study?
- Are jobs available on campus if one doesn't qualify for work study?
- How many hours per week will one be expected/allowed to work with work study?
- What are the academic requirements for the renewal of financial aid, including scholarships?
- What amount of student loan indebtedness from student loan programs at a given institution does the typical student borrower have upon graduation?
- How many times a year and when will the family be billed?
- Does the institution accept payment via credit card?
- Is there an option to pay monthly?

## Students Needing Accommodations

Students with disabilities that might impact their college experience or necessitate testing accommodations are encouraged to talk with their college counselor about these issues. Students with learning differences/disabilities, ADHD, a mental health diagnosis, or some kind of a hearing, visual, or physical disability may qualify for accommodations and/or extended time on standardized tests (SAT, ACT, AP). They may also qualify for special services and support at the college they attend. (Ask the college how recent documentation needs to be.)

During the college counseling process we will advise you on these issues and how they should be handled in relation to your testing and search for an appropriate college and in the admission process. The process for approval of extended time and accommodations for testing takes time, so it is important that you contact the Upper School Learning Resource Coordinator at OES, if you think you might qualify for testing accommodations.

Colleges and universities in the United States that receive federal financial assistance cannot discriminate in the recruitment, admission, or treatment of students with disabilities. Colleges are required to provide reasonable accommodations to students (academic support, auxiliary aids, and modifications) that allow them to participate in and benefit from all the activities and programs that colleges offer. Most colleges offer support services for students with disabilities. In addition, some colleges offer more structured programs for these students. Some of these more structured programs require a separate application and an extra fee for the program. For more information on programs and services for students with disabilities, see your college counselor. Two useful guides: *Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or ADHD* (Peterson's) and the *K & W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Differences*.

## College Athletics

Many options exist for students who wish to participate in sports in college: classes, intramurals, club teams, and intercollegiate athletics. This section offers information and advice for students considering competing in **intercollegiate athletics**.

Students who participate in intercollegiate athletics typically attend colleges with athletic teams that are classified through the **National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)** or the **National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)**. A number of rules and practices govern the process of the recruitment of athletes for college teams, and if you wish to take part in intercollegiate athletics, you will need to learn about the steps you should take to research teams and take part in the recruitment process. Students are encouraged to talk with their college counselor and to coaches to learn more about the recruitment process and college athletics.

**Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center** at the **end of your junior year** if you are looking at Division I or II teams. They evaluate your academic record to determine your eligibility to participate as a freshman student-athlete. Register at **[www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org)** and let the college counseling office know that you have registered. We will send your transcript to the NCAA at the end of your junior and senior years. Use the code 9999 to have your SAT or ACT scores sent by the testing agency to the NCAA Eligibility Center.

### NCAA

Established in 1906, the NCAA serves as the athletic governing body for over 1,200 colleges and many conferences. Participating colleges must follow the rules and guidelines for athletic eligibility and athletic competition for each of the three NCAA divisions. You can download a copy of the **Guide for the College Bound Student-Athlete** at [www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org).

### NCAA DIVISION I

Colleges with Division I athletic teams offer athletic scholarships to athletes (with the exception of a handful of colleges including the Ivy League that offer only need-based financial aid). This division includes mostly medium to large state universities (66%) and private colleges (34%). There are approximately 350 Division I member colleges.

### NCAA DIVISION II

Division II colleges offer athletic scholarships (but not as many as Division I colleges). There are over 300 Division II member colleges, including mostly smaller state-supported universities (49%) and private colleges (51%).

### NCAA DIVISION III

Colleges with Division III athletic teams are not permitted to offer athletic scholarships. This division includes a variety of private colleges (80%) and smaller state universities (20%). There are approximately 450 Division III member colleges.

### NAIA

There are approximately 250 members of this athletic organization, which started in 1937. College athletic teams governed by the NAIA are allowed to offer athletic scholarships. NAIA colleges tend to be smaller private colleges and public universities. **[www.naia.org](http://www.naia.org)**

### HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR ATHLETES

**[www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org)**

**[www.naia.org](http://www.naia.org)**

**[www.ncaaclearinghouse.net](http://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net)**

**[www.national-letter.org](http://www.national-letter.org)**

## Advice for the College Athletic Recruitment Process

### KEY STEPS FOR POTENTIAL COLLEGE ATHLETES

- ❑ Assess your athletic ability through conversations with high school/club coaches.
- ❑ Determine your goals and priorities in relation to how playing a sport in college fits into your overall college search.
- ❑ Talk with your college counselor and coaches for advice on the timing and nature of your contact. For DI and DII athletes this may be as early as the freshman or sophomore year. For DIII athletes it is typically during the sophomore or junior year.
- ❑ Early in the process, ask OES and club coaches about events and strategies that will make you visible to college coaches in your sport.
- ❑ Identify appropriate colleges (academically and athletically).
- ❑ Do not wait for coaches to initiate contact with you. Take the lead.
- ❑ Go to college websites for contact information and instructions for making contact with coaches. Some colleges will have you complete a prospect questionnaire.
- ❑ Prepare an email and athletic resume (if appropriate) with information important in your sport. Coaches will want your SAT/ACT (or PSAT) scores, GPA, and brief athletic background. Consult with one of your coaches on what information to provide and on whether or not you need a video of you playing your sport.
- ❑ Plan ahead if you need to create a video.
- ❑ If you have not heard back from the coach after 1-2 weeks, follow up.
- ❑ Interested coaches want to talk with you more than your parents. Have questions ready. Keep in mind that coaches evaluate three areas: athletic ability, academic match, quality of character.

- ❑ Respond promptly to any requests for information from a coach.
- ❑ Make sure that the college is a good match academically and athletically. Would you like to work with the coach for four years? If you were injured and could no longer play your sport would you still want to attend this college?

### QUESTIONS FOR YOUR HIGH SCHOOL COACH/ES

- ❑ How would you assess my ability and skills in relation to college teams and the appropriate level of play?
- ❑ What level and size of college do you recommend?
- ❑ Are there particular colleges that you recommend for me?
- ❑ Do you have any search suggestions? When should I begin to contact college coaches?
- ❑ What should I include on an athletic resume?
- ❑ Would you be willing to write a letter or contact coaches on my behalf?

### QUESTIONS FOR COLLEGES AND COLLEGE COACHES

- ❑ What is the coach's background and philosophy of athletics?
- ❑ What are the strengths and weaknesses of your program?
- ❑ What was your overall record the last three years?
- ❑ What conference are you in?
- ❑ What is the schedule for competition?
- ❑ Where do you travel and how does the team travel (method of transportation)?
- ❑ Where do I fit into the program?
- ❑ How much time per week will I spend at practice? What are the off-season commitments?
- ❑ How are the facilities for this sport? What is the training environment?
- ❑ What if I am injured?

## Gap or Interim Year Options

While you are busy trying to figure out which college is right for you, do not forget to give some thought to *why* you are going to college and what you hope to get out of this experience. If you are having trouble answering those questions (and even if you are not), you may want to consider delaying your enrollment and taking a gap or interim year. Taking a year off from your formal education to hang out and drink coffee is probably not in your best interest. There are, however, many productive ways to spend a year off such as working, travel, internships, and service, and there are programs that help students design what is known as an interim or gap year. There is a Gap Year Fair in Portland each year and we have gap year resources in the Upper School Library. For additional information ask the college counseling office.

Most private colleges are willing to hold spots for students who wish to defer for a year (sometimes more). Deferral policies at public universities vary. In fact, many admission officers and college professors feel that students who defer a year make better use of their educational opportunities once they are at college.

If you are interested in deferral, it is a good idea to investigate the policies at the colleges you are considering as part of your research process; however, you do not need to notify them that you plan to defer until you have been offered admission and have chosen *one* school at which to deposit. At that time, you need to contact the admission office. Need-based financial aid offers cannot be deferred (you will need to apply again the next year) and for merit-based aid it will depend on the college. In other words, you would need to apply for financial aid again during your year off.

## Making the Transition to College

Starting college represents a significant transition in one's life. We encourage students and parents to prepare for the changes this event involves. *Allow yourself time* as you move away from home and head off to college to settle into a new educational setting and adjust to changes. Do not be too quick to judge your new surroundings. Relying on family and friends for support and advice is essential, but do not ignore the rich variety of resources on campus related to your academic, emotional, and physical well-being.

Some students find the first weeks or months of college the hardest period of adjustment; others enjoy a "honeymoon" stage, only to find themselves second-guessing their college choice after the honeymoon ends. If you find yourself in your first year questioning whether or not you've selected the best college, don't rush too quickly to conclusions. Most students work through

these very common feelings and find that they go away with time. Keep in mind that no college (or roommate) is going to be perfect.

We encourage parents to prepare for this transition as well. Consider, for example, the frequency of your contact with your child. Find the right balance between offering support and encouraging independence. The title of a fairly new book says it all: *The iConnected Parent: Staying Close to your Kids in College (and Beyond) While Letting Them Grow Up*.

We list here the types of resources that most colleges offer and urge you, during your first year, to make yourself aware of the *specific* resources available on your campus. College students who proactively seek support and guidance are more likely to have a successful experience and less likely to miss key opportunities along the way. You will face many choices in college and seeking the advice of others may help you make wise decisions.



Well-timed advising from a variety of vantage points may help you create a more intentional and meaningful path through college that will prepare you more effectively for your career path and additional education.

## COUNSELORS

Most colleges have counselors available on campus who can also make referrals for outside counselors in the area. Counselors at colleges are very familiar with the types of transition issues and stress that students face in college.

## RESIDENTIAL LIFE STAFF

Colleges structure these positions in a variety of ways and give them different titles, but all have some combination of students and adults who help supervise and support students living on campus.

## FACULTY/ACADEMIC ADVISOR

Many colleges assign students an advisor (often a faculty member) to help them plan their course of study and to offer advice about meeting academic challenges in college.

## CAREER PLANNING AND GRADUATE SCHOOL ADVISING

Colleges organize and identify their career and graduate school advising in a variety of ways. We encourage you to become familiar with the people and resources in this office early in your college years, as these folks will have wisdom and resources that will help you plan for your future.

## LEARNING SUPPORT/WRITING CENTER

Many colleges offer support to students who are struggling in a class or subject. Find out if such an office exists at your college and see what services they offer. Students often have access to assistance with their writing.

## MENTORS

A Gallup-Purdue Index Report reveals that “College graduates...had double the chances of being engaged in their work and were three times as likely to be

thriving if they had connected with a professor on campus who stimulated them, cared about them, and encouraged their hopes and dreams.” We encourage students to find at least one mentor in college.

## SUGGESTED BOOKS ON TRANSITION ISSUES

- *The Thinking Student's Guide to College: 75 Tips to Getting a Better Education*, Andrew Roberts
- *The Dean's List: Eleven Habits of Highly Successful College Students*, John Bader
- *The Naked Roommate: And 107 Other Issues You Might Run Into in College*, Harlan Cohen
- *The Happiest Kid on Campus: A Parent's Guide to the Very Best College Experience*, Harlan Cohen
- *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*, Richard Light
- *The Launching Years: Strategies for Parenting from Senior Year to College Life*, Laura Kastner & Jennifer Wyatt
- *The iConnected Parent: Staying Close to your Kids in College (and Beyond) While Letting Them Grow Up*, Barbara K. Hofer & Abigail Sullivan Moore
- *What the Best College Students Do*, Ken Bain
- *How College Works*, Daniel Chambliss

## TRANSFERRING

It is not unusual for students to go through a period of adjustment to the new environment of college. If you find yourself going through a rough time, first and foremost give yourself time (months often and sometimes an entire year) to adjust and make this transition. Keep in mind that there are many resources on campus that can provide support (including counseling services), but you need to seek them out. Often, more time to adjust is all that is needed. However, if you decide that you wish to investigate transferring, you are welcome to contact the OES College Counseling Office to discuss options and to request that your transcript be sent. Transfer admission statistics for individual colleges can be found on the College Board website. Some colleges are more selective for transfer students than they are for freshman, and other colleges are less selective when it comes to transfers.



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