

## SENIORS – JANUARY NEWSLETTER

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Hello and Happy New Year from the Counseling Center at Moon Area High School. My name is Julie Sitko and I am the College and Career Counselor. This is the time to think about life after high school. My role is to advise and support students and families in the college search and to help identify “best fit” colleges and universities, and to assist students in realizing their post-secondary goals. This monthly newsletter will keep you on track for post-secondary planning. Please reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

### Here are some things to think about as we go through your child’s senior year:

#### WINTER - Post-Secondary Timeline for seniors

- Transcripts will be updated with grades at the end of the first semester, senior year. Credits are earned when a class is complete. The GPA will only update after the completion of a class, either a semester or full year course. If your child wants to send an unofficial report card to a college or scholarship program, they can download it from Skyward.
- An updated copy of your child’s transcript will be uploaded in the portfolio section of Skyward on January 23.
- All college applications should be completed and submitted. Check on the school’s websites, to ensure the applications are complete and they are not missing anything. Check to see if your schools require mid-year senior grades (7th semester grades) to be sent. **Most schools will NOT need/want semester grades. Only request them if you need them.** (If you need them, you’ll see that in your schools’ portal, or you will have received an email from the school requesting them). **Instructions on how to request mid-year grades is at the bottom of this page.**
- In the winter/spring, colleges will have accepted student programs. Attend those for the schools where students have been accepted and are interested. These are helpful programs with great information about desired program of study. These might be in person or virtual - check with the schools.
- Students will be getting college acceptances through the next several months, as well as financial aid award letters. Be sure to look at financial aid awards prior to picking a college. This is huge investment – do your homework, do your research, and make an informed decision. If you have specific questions about financial aid a financial aid award, contact the financial aid offices at the colleges. If you need general help understanding your financial aid award letter, let me know. I’m happy to read and interpret what is a grant/a loan/out of pocket expense. If you have specific questions about financial aid, contact the financial aid offices at the colleges.
- College is all about fit. What fits what you’re looking for in academics? Social life? Distance from home? Affordability?
- It’s still a requirement for male students, when they reach the age of 18, register for the Selective Service. More information can be found here: <http://www.sss.gov>

**Requesting Mid-Year Transcripts:** Some colleges require mid-year transcripts. Your mid-year transcript will include your grades 9-11 and semester grades for all of your senior year courses, as well as a cumulative GPA. The GPA will only update if you’ve completed semester courses. Full year courses are not included in the GPA until you’ve completed the course. Mid- year grades will be available around January 22, 2024. If colleges have ‘deadlines’ prior to January 22, they’ll accept grades later than the posted deadline. **Check with your colleges prior to requesting mid-year reports – not all schools want or need them.** To request mid-year transcripts:

1. After January 16, go to the seniors 2024 Teams page
2. You’ll see the link to the transcript request form.
3. There are only two questions. Please fill the form out accurately. If you need mid-year transcripts sent to more than one school, you can put all of your schools on the same request.

### Check Your Email and your college portals!

Colleges communicate with through email and through the online admissions portal that was created when you applied for admission. You have to check your email and your portals. If you don’t, you might be missing out on important information from the colleges, regarding your admission status or scholarships. For example, if you apply to Pitt through the Common Application; after you submit your application, you get an email from Pitt, telling you to complete the SRAR. If you miss out on the email, your application is incomplete and will not be read.

### **Completing Applications:**

In September, you may have been excited about applying for a school and now that it's January, you're not as excited about the school. Maybe you even applied, but you haven't sent your transcripts or board scores because you decided you don't want to go to that school. If you're no longer interested in a school, please send a quick email to the school, or call them and let them know. If you don't tell them you're no longer interested, they will think you are still interested in their school and may continue contacting you to remind you to turn in the missing application materials. Additionally, if you've been accepted to a school and decided to attend another school, please let them know – again, they like to know this information and it's nice to let them know where you are in your application journey.

### **FINANCIAL AID AWARENESS**

**The FAFSA is being revamped this year and has been released.** But the Department of Education has said January is going to be a 'soft launch' of the FAFSA and we should anticipate shut-downs and times when the form is not available. They are saying the form should be fully functional by the end of January. Historically, when the FAFSA becomes available, there are always kinks and the system doesn't work great. It's been highly recommended (by people who work in financial aid) to wait a few weeks after it's released to complete the FAFSA (and hopefully it's working when you try it)!

The information I'm getting is constantly changing, but was most recently told that the colleges will get your financial information in early February and will hopefully start to send out financial aid packages in late February/early March. With the delay of the site, we are optimistic colleges will still be able to send out financial aid information as early as February, but also understand it might be delayed. The hope is that the colleges will communicate with you when they anticipate sending aid letters.

As you wait for the FAFSA to become available, there are a few things you can do. To complete the FAFSA, both the parent and student continuing their education will need to create a FSA ID. You can do that now:

<https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch>

You can also complete a Net Price Calculator – found on the financial aid page of every college in the US. This online tool will give families an idea of the cost of education – it is not exact, but an estimate. Here are two good resources for paying for college and understanding financial aid:

[www.mysmartborrowing.com](http://www.mysmartborrowing.com)

[www.collegecosts.ed.gov](http://www.collegecosts.ed.gov)

And here are some good websites for scholarship searches:

[www.goingmerry.com](http://www.goingmerry.com)

[www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com)

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

[www.scholarshipamerica.org](http://www.scholarshipamerica.org)

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

### ***IN-PERSON FAFSA Completion workshop***

***Date change to Thursday, February 1***

***6:30 PM***

This is an opportunity for families to complete the FAFSA with the help of Amy Sawdey, our partner at PHEAA. Families need to sign up prior to the workshop. Here is the registration link: <https://forms.office.com/r/JbEy5zSK8f>

Sign up is required, as I need a headcount and will be sending out information on what you need to do prior to the workshop. It is HIGHLY recommended that both the student and the parent are at the workshop. You will need both parties present to complete the FAFSA. It's also recommended that all families complete the FAFSA at least the first year their child goes to college/continue their education.

### **Scholarships:**

All scholarships that come through our office are listed in Naviance. To find the scholarships, log in to your Naviance account, go to the colleges>scholarships and money>Scholarship list. The scholarships we get in the counseling center

are listed on the 'scholarship list' page. That site is updated regularly, so be sure to check back regularly as new scholarships are posted. You should be checking this site regularly. My favorite scholarship search sites are: [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com), [www.goingmerry.com](http://www.goingmerry.com), and [www.pittsburghfoundation.org/scholarship\\_search#hs](http://www.pittsburghfoundation.org/scholarship_search#hs). The last site is local (Pittsburgh) scholarships. You do have to search through the site, but there is a lot of money available to students.

The [Pennsylvania Association for College Admission Counseling \(PACAC\)](#) sponsors a scholarship for PA high school seniors. This is a short application with three short answer questions. Students must have a 3.0 GPA to qualify. Deadline is **February 1, 2024**. There are four scholarships – one worth \$1500 and three scholarships worth \$1000. It's a quick and easy scholarship application – apply!

[APIA Scholars](#) – offers scholarships to qualified students of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage. Application deadline **January 9, 2024**.

[The Jackie Robinson Foundation](#) – scholarships and leadership development to minority students. Application deadline **January 10, 2024**.

**The Hermine Solt Student Scholarship** which is a \$500 scholarship for a Pennsylvania High School senior who is pursuing higher education in a business-related field (office technology, accounting, secretarial, business education (including business education teaching), business management, etc.). Complete details including criteria, guidelines, and scholarship application can be found at PAEOP's website, <https://www.paeop.com/site/Default.aspx?PageID=71>

Mrs. Marciniak will be making the **local (Moon) scholarships** available at the end of this month/early February. Look for more information on the Seniors 2024 Teams page. These will all be in the Scholarship List in Naviance (colleges<Scholarships and Money>Scholarship List>Local & Regional Scholarships), with a \* before the name of the scholarship (\*Moon Education Association Scholarship).

**Transcripts for Scholarships:** Most transcripts for scholarships can be unofficial transcripts. Check with the organization granting the scholarship. You can find your unofficial transcript in the portfolio section of Skyward (transcripts in Skyward will be updated with semester grades about a week after reports are distributed). If you checked with the organization offering a scholarship and they absolutely require an official transcript, contact Mrs. Marciniak at [mmarciniak@moonarea.net](mailto:mmarciniak@moonarea.net).

#### **ACT and SAT testing:**

If your child wants to test, go to the testing websites for information about testing and open test sites. **(SAT: [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) and ACT: [www.act.org](http://www.act.org))**. A schedule of tests dates is in the class of 2024 Teams (under Post-Secondary Planning, then files). The same list is also on the High School Counseling Center webpage. For the current seniors, many colleges in the United States are test optional for both admission and scholarships. Before deciding if your child wants to test, check with the schools they are interested in and determine if they need to test. When students apply without test scores, schools are often examining the transcript much closer. For example, if your child is interested in studying business, colleges will look closely at the math classes they took and the grades earned in those math classes. Even if your children do test, they don't have to apply with test scores – look at the scores normally accepted at a school and determine if they should apply with or without test scores. For test optional/test flexible schools, students should only apply with test scores if the test scores are going to enhance the application.

--Students on free/reduced lunch are eligible for a fee waiver. Have your child see their school counselor or Ms. Sitko

--Every college accepts either the SAT or ACT. There is no preference.

-- When registering for the ACT, I do not recommend taking the writing portion of the exam. It is not necessary for admission.

--Check out this site to see if schools your child is interested in have determined their testing policies

<https://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>.

#### **NCAA:**

If your child is an athlete considering playing sports at a division I or II school, make sure to visit the NCAA Eligibility Center website [www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org). Student athletes need to submit an official high school transcript (requested

through Naviance) and official test scores, if they are available. These scores must be sent directly from ACT or College Board. If your child hasn't tested, they can still gain eligibility without test scores. It is the student's responsibility to ensure they are taking the appropriate classes to qualify for NCAA Eligibility. A list of NCAA approved courses are on page 6 of the Program of Studies. *This registration does not apply to students attending division III or NAIA schools*

### **Visiting schools:**

If you have a chance to visit schools, here are things to think about when you're on campus:

--Talk to people in the department of anticipated study. If your child is totally undecided, talk to the schools about what they do to help pick a major. Colleges have robust career centers and advising programs which help students pick a major, find internships and eventually jobs and graduate schools.

--Ask what is the four-year graduation rate? Colleges report a six-year graduation rate, due to financial aid. Ask about the four-year rate-- schools should try to get students in and out in four years -- make sure the school is going to help your child make the best use of their time and get the classes needed to get out in time.

--Ask what is the retention rate for returning sophomores? This number can tell you a lot about what schools are doing to make students happy and keep them enrolled. If a number is low, ask why students are leaving -- what's going on? If the number is high, it's safe to assume students are generally happy and the college is doing a good job of educating students and keeping them happy.

--College is not just about getting a degree. It's about so much more. Is your child going to be challenged at each school? Are they going to have to put in more effort than they ever have? That's a good thing!

--Learn the middle 50% SAT/ACT scores and GPA of admitted students at the schools that interest you. This can serve as a guide to schools that will be a good academic fit for you. Also -- remember if board scores are lower than the middle 50%, but the GPA fits in the middle 50%, in most cases, students do not need to submit test scores, if they could potentially hurt an application. Keep in mind, with most schools being test optional, the students who are submitting test scores generally have higher scores, so the middle 50% are going to be skewed to the higher end.

### **Summer Opportunities:**

[Magee-Womens Research Institute \(MWRI\) 2023 Summer Internship Program for High School Students](#). This program provides current high school juniors and seniors with the opportunity to participate in basic science or clinical research projects with the goal of interesting students in biomedical research as a potential career. During the 4-week program (160 total hours) each student will have the opportunity to work on their own research project under the guidance of an investigator and their staff at MWRI or Magee-Womens Hospital. In addition, students will attend informal Lunch & Learn sessions, during which investigators will discuss biomedical science as a career from their personal perspectives and journeys in the field. At the end of the program, students present their research findings via a PowerPoint presentation to other participants as well as to the MWRI faculty and staff at the annual High School Internship Presentation Day. **Deadline is January 31.**