COLLEGE COUNSELING HANDBOOK



Oregon Episcopal School

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"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

– Eleanor Roosevelt







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Undergraduate Education in Perspective

> *"Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it."*
>
> *– Henry David Thoreau*

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, your career path, how to put your power for good to use, the relationships you cultivate, where you live, and your priorities and lifestyle.

Finding a college that meets your needs and helps you flourish should be your 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 and professional schools look for individuals with integrity and drive who have demonstrated the ability to learn from and succeed in previous experiences.

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. The OES college counselors are committed to helping students effectively navigate each phase of the process.

- Reflecting on needs and priorities
- Researching college options
- Shaping the college list
- Completing applications and essays
- Selecting a college

College admissions garners a great deal of media attention and has spawned a growing industry connected to the process. Many will offer well-intentioned advice along the way, some of it accurate and helpful and some, not so much. Students are surrounded by peers going through the process. 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. The process unfolds over time, at a different pace for each student. You will most likely bring some assumptions and misconceptions to your search, 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 Growth and Balance in a College Prep School

The college-going culture of a school such as OES results in some students feeling a great deal of pressure in high school. And of course, we want 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 doing things for the wrong reasons and an unsustainable pace. Students need to make choices that meet their needs and align with their interests, strengths, and goals. Maintaining balance means different things for different students.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Colleges want students who engage in their community (whether in or outside of school). 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 value depth of experience over breadth, knowing that students benefit from "going deeper" with one or more of their interests. Students should seek activities they enjoy and find meaningful rather than pursuing something they think they will look good to colleges. 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.

UPPER SCHOOL ACADEMICS

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 we can offer in relation to course selection. Colleges pay attention to the level of rigor in a student's schedule, and the more selective the college, the higher the level of rigor expected (relative to the courses available at the high school). Students should prioritize making wise choices for themselves.



Advice and Perspective for Students and Parents

> *"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*

The title from a book of essays edited by Jennifer Delahunty when she was Vice President for Enrollment and Dean of Admissions at Kenyon College sums it up: *I'm Going to College—Not You! Surviving the College Search with Your Child*. Students need to own the process, with appropriate assistance from the adults in their lives. Students and parents will benefit from striving for a healthy sense of perspective on both the high school experience and college aspirations. As you navigate the process together, we encourage parents and students to remember the power of laughter and humor as tools for reducing tension and managing stress.

TOP 10 TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- **TAKE AN ACTIVE LEADING ROLE: OWN THE PROCESS.** Strive for a pro-active, organized approach to your college search and applications. Seek a balance between asserting your independence and utilizing the help and resources available. Pay attention to checklists, instructions, deadlines, and communication from the college counseling office.

- **FOCUS ON HONEST SELF-ASSESSMENT AND REFLECTION.** Determine YOUR strengths, challenges, and priorities as you select colleges to explore and add to your application list. Find an approach to the process that fits YOU, which may differ from that of your peers.

- **RESEARCH OPTIONS WITH THE GOAL OF BEING WELL INFORMED.** Use a range of resources, including primary and secondary sources, to carefully and thoughtfully gather information and impressions of colleges.

- **KEEP AN OPEN MIND.** Don't be quick to dismiss colleges you know little about. Explore and test theories about what you think you want in a college related to size, location, and other features. It takes time to sort out and understand one's preferences. Do not be overly influenced by the opinions of others in relation to specific colleges. Also try not to be overly influenced—in a negative way—by the personality of a tour guide or admission officer.

- **BE ASPIRATIONAL AND REALISTIC IN YOUR COLLEGE CHOICES.** Wishful thinking and ignoring the data typically lead to poor outcomes. Make wise choices and thoughtful use of data and advice from your college counselor.

- **KEEP YOUR PARENTS INFORMED ABOUT YOUR THOUGHTS AND PROGRESS.** Your parents will appreciate hearing your thinking about college options and knowing that you are on top of the process. The more you share with them on your terms, the less likely they are to nag.

- **STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR COLLEGE COUNSELOR THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS.** Ongoing and timely communication with your college counselor can make a difference. Schedule meetings as needed to ask questions, to seek support when stressed, to confirm that you are on track, or to have exploratory conversations about topics on your mind.

- **BE GOOD CITIZENS OF THE PROCESS.** Remain true to yourself. Support your classmates. Represent yourself in a positive, honest, and authentic manner. Show a high level of integrity in your actions and words.

- **RESPECT YOUR CLASSMATES.** Some students don't wish to share grades, test scores, college lists, or outcomes. Be respectful of your peers and sensitive to their preferences. If you have information about a classmate's college list or outcomes, do not share it with others.

- **MAINTAIN A SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE.** What you do in college matters much more than where you attend. The college process has a way of working out, getting students to colleges in which they thrive. Avoid the slippery slope of making high school all about getting into college. Focus instead on enjoying and making the most of opportunities at OES. Find balance and an optimum level of stress that helps rather than hinders your high school experience.

"Don't be afraid. Be focused. Be determined. Be hopeful. Be empowered."

— Michelle Obama

DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS

The college process is an opportunity to develop and practice important life skills. Identify your resources and use them well.

- **ask good questions**
- **listen carefully**
- **engage in honest self-assessment**
- **research and assess options**
- **make well-informed decisions**
- **take initiative**
- **self-advocate**
- **stay organized: attend to details**
- **develop interview skills**
- **present yourself effectively**



TOP 10 TIPS FOR PARENTS

- **FIND YOUR SHADOWING DISTANCE.** Your role is to guide and support, while encouraging your child to take the lead in the college process. In her book, *How to Raise an Adult*, Julie Lythcott-Haims highlights the power of building life skills. Gauge how much support and oversight your child will need along the way. Avoid the extremes of assuming your child and the college counselor have it all under control or taking charge and micro-managing the process.
- **HOW CAN I HELP?** Asking how you can help periodically and engaging in exploratory conversations (asking questions and listening carefully) are generally more effective than nagging or bringing up the college topic every night at dinner. Some families find it helpful to set up a regular time (every 2-3 weeks) to check in about the process.
- **MAKE YOUR PARAMETERS CLEAR.** If you have expectations in relation to cost, location, or other college features, let your child know early in the process.
- **HELP YOUR CHILD FIND THE OPTIMAL BALANCE BETWEEN BEING ASPIRATIONAL AND REALISTIC.** We encourage students to make wise choices and good use of data. Pushing your child to apply to schools that look unrealistic is not a good idea.
- **IT'S ALL ABOUT FIT AND MATCH.** Bring an open mind to the college search. Go beyond rankings and prestige to help your child find colleges that will help them thrive in the next phase of their education. Colleges have changed since you were college age. We caution parents about relying on dated perceptions of colleges and the selectivity of specific colleges.
- **LOOK AHEAD TO PLAN FOR COLLEGE VISITS AND TESTING.** 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. Much can be learned from local college visits. Family and student calendars may impact which SAT or ACT dates work best, so plan ahead.
- **BOUNDARIES FOR PARENTS.** Your child should conduct a great deal of their college research and register for tests. Students should be the sole authors of their college applications and essays. While it is acceptable for parents to make some contact with colleges, much of this should be done by the student. Some students invite parents to help them create a spreadsheet of information as they research colleges.
- **STAY ON TOP OF DETAILS RELATED TO COST AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.** Most parents play an active role in monitoring deadlines and forms required for need-based financial aid and merit-based aid, since you have a more central role in this part of the process.
- **RESPECT THE PRIVACY OF OTHER FAMILIES.** We encourage students to respect the privacy of their classmates in this process in relation to intrusive questions and the sharing of college list and outcome information of others—and we respectfully ask the same of parents. Feedback from students and parents over the years tells us that excessive college chatter among students and parents can be a source of unnecessary stress.
- **MAINTAIN A SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE.** What students do once in college matters more than where they attend. Help your child avoid the slippery slope of making high school all about getting into college. Focus instead on helping them enjoy and make the most of high school. Encourage your child to seek meaningful opportunities for growth in and outside the classroom in a sustainable, balanced manner.

KNOW THYSELF:
Questions to Ask Yourself



Why do you want to attend college? What do you hope to gain from your time in college in relation to experiences, knowledge, skills, and growth?

What educational experiences have you had that may influence your college selection? Reflect on experiences that challenge, inspire, and energize you, while helping you go. What hasn't worked so well?

What experiences have you had outside of class that may influence your college selection? Consider service, travel, work, internships, athletics, art, religion, hobbies, etc.



Where do you want to fit in intellectually with your college peer group? Do you thrive when you are one of the top students, or do you perform better when among peers who are mostly stronger than you academically, or somewhere in between?

In what academic areas do your strengths and interests lie? Are you seeking particular programs or areas of study?

Are you interested in a framework that is more structured or less structured? Most colleges have a framework of academic requirements for all students. These are often referred to as distribution requirements or core requirements.

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, a global outlook, other.

Are there particular activities or extracurricular options you want a college to offer?

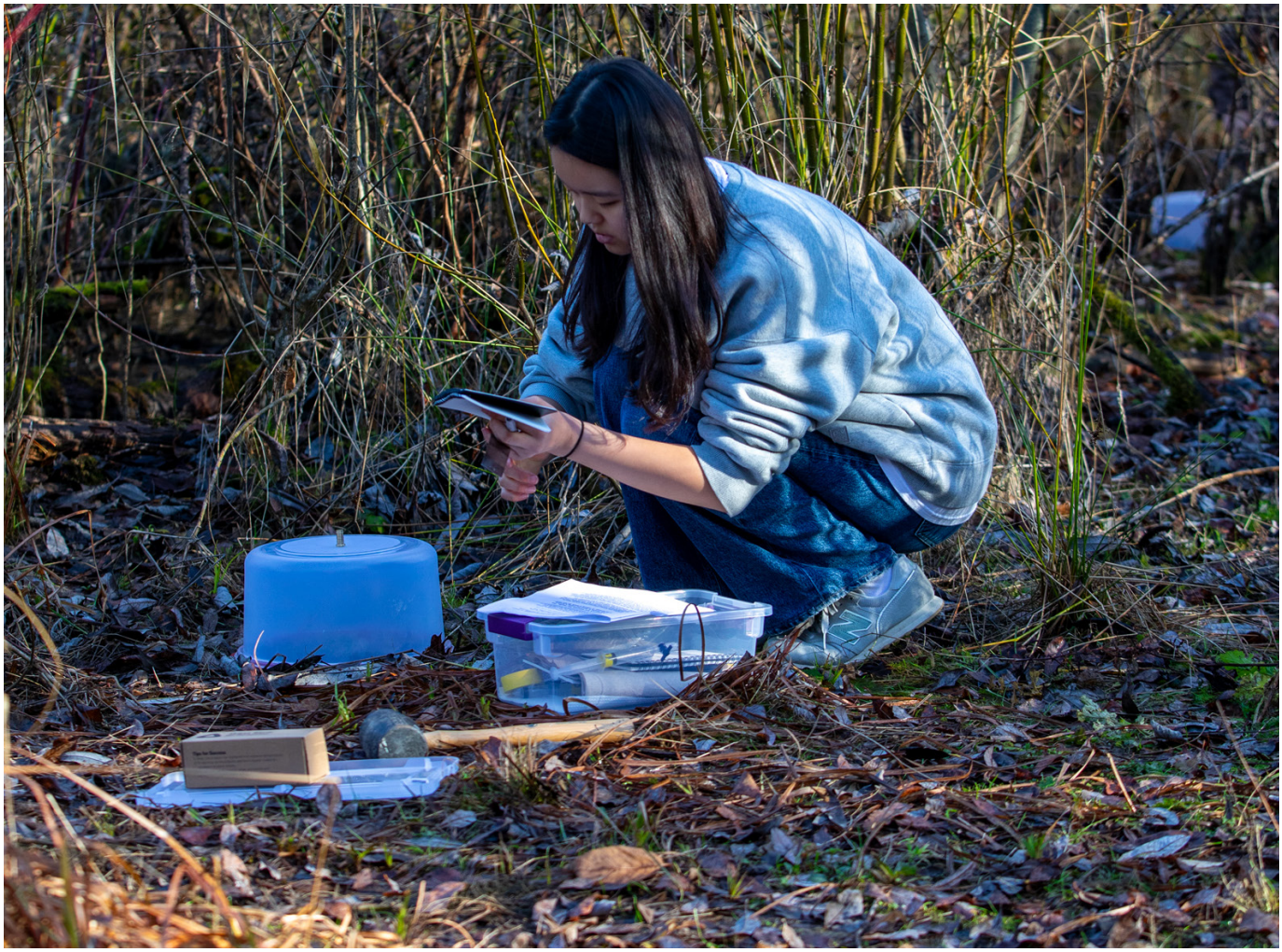
Do you have strong preferences in relation to the residential aspect of the campus? Portion of students living on campus, housing arrangements in relation to gender, role of Greek life, availability of single rooms, apartment style housing, or off-campus housing.

How important is the college's setting to you? Urban, suburban, town, more rural, contained campus. How much will surroundings beyond the campus matter to you?

In what ways is the size of the college important? 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? Does climate matter?

> *"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."*
>
> *– Aristotle*



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*

COLLEGE MAJORS

Students sometimes think they are at a disadvantage if they don't know what they want to study in college. Fortunately, that is not the case. Education in the United States is designed to give most students time—once in college—to select areas of focus.

- We encourage students to explore options in high school and college before settling on a major. There are many areas of study you are not exposed to during 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.
- 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.
- For many programs and campuses, students can

apply "undecided" and have until toward the end of their sophomore year to select a major. There are exceptions, most notably engineering, architecture, and nursing programs.

- There are also universities that ask students to apply to a particular school such as business, engineering, communications, or arts and sciences. The ease of shifting from one school to another once enrolled at a college (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 you are applying to a program that is particularly selective and how easy or difficult it is to make an internal transfer. When you can't find this info on the college's website or via a conversation with your college counselor, contact the college admission office.

CAREER EXPLORATION

We advise students to explore career options without feeling pressure to select a career path at this stage. When students gain access to Scoir toward the end of grade 10, you have access to career assessment and exploration tools.

- Talk with individuals involved in various jobs and learn about the skills, knowledge, experience and education required, and what the job entails on a daily basis.
- Seek opportunities to explore careers: summer programs, internships, and volunteer positions. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has useful career information (www.bls.gov).
- Throughout college, take advantage of resources available in relation to selecting classes and a major and find opportunities to build skills and experience. Conversations with professors, advisors, and folks in the career planning and graduate school office can make all the difference in setting goals and planning your future.
- Selecting a major, potential graduate school, and a career path are often not as linear as one might assume. In fact, just one class, mentor, or experience can have a significant impact on your path in life. More often than not, though, a variety of factors, including serendipity, will influence your choices. Seek a balance between an intentional approach to your education that helps you set goals and make plans and a more exploratory mindset that allows you to stay open to unexpected opportunities.



Resources for Learning About Colleges

- **OES COLLEGE COUNSELORS**
  The OES college counselors have extensive knowledge regarding the application process and college options that we incorporate into our program and individual advising.

- **LOCAL COLLEGE EVENTS**
  Over 100 colleges visit OES each year to meet with interested juniors and seniors during the school day. In addition, colleges hold information sessions in the evening or on weekends in the Portland area that are open to students and parents. Additionally, college fairs are hosted annually in the Portland area.

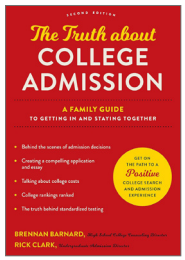
- **COLLEGE WEBSITES AND MAILING LISTS**
  Colleges create websites, virtual opportunities, social media accounts, and publications designed to inform prospective students. These resources are a valuable source of facts and impressions. How a college portrays its programs and culture offers insight into what the college values. Get on college mailing lists to learn more about colleges, demonstrate interest, and ensure you will hear about opportunities for receptions/interviews in the Portland area.

- **COLLEGE ADMISSION BOOKS AND GUIDEBOOKS**
  There are books about a range of topics related to the college admission process, as well as guidebooks providing factual and subjective information on colleges. We have a list of recommended books here, which are available in the OES library (a longer list of books and websites can be found on the OES College Counseling Google page).

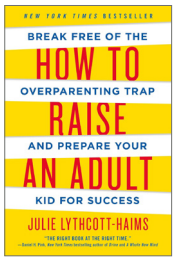
- **COLLEGE SEARCH ENGINES AND DATABASES**
  There are a number of websites that serve as online college guides, allowing students to look up information about colleges and conduct searches for colleges based on selected parameters (programs, location, size, athletics, etc.). These can be useful, particularly at the early stages of a search. See our resource list for recommendations.

- **COMMON DATA SET (CDS)**
  Colleges provide a rich array of data to outside agencies through this annual survey. Many colleges make their CDS report available on their website (try searching for it).

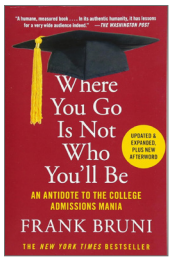
- **OES ALUMNI, FAMILY, FRIENDS**
  People you know can be a good source of information. The closer to the source, the better, meaning someone who attended the college recently is better than someone whose uncle attended twenty years ago. Keep in mind that in the end, nobody knows what you want and need 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 the process simply because of a negative comment from someone.



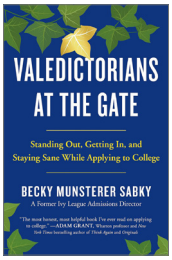
The Truth About College Admission
Brennan Barnard & Rick Clark



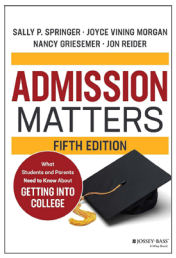
How to Raise an Adult
Julia Lythcott-Haims



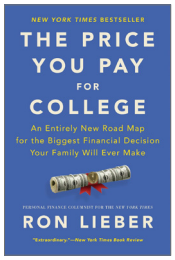
Where You Go is Not Who You'll Be
Frank Bruni



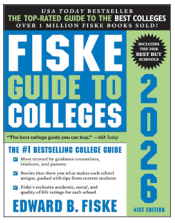
Valedictorians at the Gate
Becky Munsterer Sabky



Admission Matters
Sally Springer, Jon Reider, Marion Franck



The Price You Pay for College
Ron Lieber



The Fiske Guide to Colleges
Edward B. Fiske

OES College Counseling Platforms

SCOIR

Students are introduced to Scoir, a web-based college counseling program, at the end of the sophomore year. Parents are able to create an account that gives them access to Scoir as well. The college counseling office uses Scoir to track college applications and send school transcripts, letters of recommendation, and the OES Profile.

STUDENTS USE SCOIR TO:

- View basic data on colleges, including scattergrams with data on OES applicants
- Use the college search tool
- Create an Activity List
- Maintain a list of colleges of interest
- View the schedule of college reps visiting OES during the fall
- Learn about career preparation and paths
- Explore summer program opportunities on college campuses

COLLEGE KICKSTART

Students have access to College Kickstart (CK) from January of the junior year through December of the senior year. Utilizing OES and national admission data, CK provides easy access to data that empowers students to gauge selectivity and manage expectations. The platform also tracks information on key elements of the application process. By design of the program, parents do not have access to CK. However, we encourage you to have your child give you a tour of the program and show you the data and information accessible through CK.

STUDENTS USE COLLEGE KICKSTART TO:

- View selectivity data with the goal of building a college list with a mix of likely, target, and reach,and sometimes unlikely schools
- Navigate college deadline options strategically
- Access information on admit rate, demonstrated interest, interviews, SAT/ACT score ranges, testing policies, application fees, application type, direct links to info on college websites
- Review data on need-based financial aid and merit-based financial aid



Researching Colleges

> *"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*

Begin your college search not as a hunt for the perfect college, but rather as a search for a collection of colleges with the potential to meet your needs. Develop criteria that matter to you, while learning about colleges across the continuum of selectivity: likely, target, reach. If you find yourself focused mostly on prestige or rankings, challenge yourself to dig deeper in your research, giving careful thought to what matters beyond the name or ranking of a particular college. Keep an open mind.

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 labels such as "research university" or "liberal arts college." Most four-year institutions provide an educational experience that offers both breadth and depth in the curriculum—the hallmarks of a liberal arts education. Most four-year institutions, regardless of size, offer and encourage research, internships, and study abroad.

COLLEGE RESEARCH IN BRIEF

DETERMINE WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT COLLEGES AND HOW YOU WILL TRACK YOUR RESEARCH.
Review questions for colleges in this document's appendices section.

SELECT RESOURCES: college websites | search engines | college guidebooks | virtual and in person visits | OES alumni | college reps at OES | Scoir | College Kickstart

USE A RANGE OF SOURCES: primary (from colleges) and secondary (outside sources). Consider the quality, accuracy, and biases of your sources.

CONFIRM IMPORTANT FACTS AND INFORMATION ON COLLEGE WEBSITES
Three reliable sources: Scoir | *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* | college websites

DELVING DEEPER INTO FIT AND MATCH

Throughout this process you will hear college admission officers and college counselors speak of finding colleges that *fit* you and *match* your needs. We offer specifics here to help you apply the concepts of fit and match to your college search.

- **ACADEMIC FIT:** Majors offered, special programs, class size data, level of intensity, where you fit in academically, approach to general education, advising program, academic support, grading/evaluation system, accessibility of professors, accommodations. Explore the depth and breadth of course offerings in departments of interest. By comparing departments across colleges, you will see how programs vary. Academic departments don't have to be large to be strong.
- **EXTRACURRICULAR FIT:** Many colleges offer a similar range of options, so this category may not be as critical as others, except to confirm the college has extracurriculars important to you and to have a sense of how accessible they are.
- **SOCIAL FIT:** What is the demographic profile of students at the college? What types of diversity do you desire? How do constituents describe the culture of the college? Does the school have a leaning toward intense academics, the arts, athletics, the environment, social justice issues, service learning, a more global outlook? What do you know about the vibe?
- **KEY FEATURES FIT:** College size (campus & student population), location & setting, (urban, suburban, small town, large town, etc.), housing options, special programs, study abroad, internship and research opportunities, jobs on campus, distance from home.
- **FINANCIAL FIT:** How much does the college cost? After researching need and merit-based financial aid and utilizing the Net Price Calculator, what might your college cost be? How many students pay full cost? What is the average amount of need met? If the college offers merit-based aid (tuition discounting), what is the typical range?

A NOTE ABOUT RANKINGS

We aren't big on rankings, because they don't predict how a college will match a student's needs, and many people don't bother to understand the criteria behind rankings. Rankings can make very similar schools seem more different than they actually are. For example, what meaningful difference exists between a college ranking 10 and one ranked 35? If you are tempted to look at rankings, know and use the data behind them, more than the ranking itself. Better yet, create your own ranking system, using criteria that matter to you. Read this article on college rankings and the powerful role a student's level of engagement can play during college. The article on rankings has criteria and weights from 2017. The most recent criteria and weights can be viewed here.

Visiting Colleges

Visiting colleges is an excellent way to gain first-hand impressions of a college campus and its vibe or ambiance. Seeing varied campus types will help you 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. Each family needs to decide what makes sense in terms of visiting, knowing that schedules, finances, and logistics will influence choices. 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 ENGAGEMENT OPTIONS

When colleges closed their campuses to visitors in spring 2020, they put time and resources into developing robust virtual opportunities for tours, admission info sessions, and other options for learning about the school. Explore these options.

TIMING OF VISITS: TWO PHASES

The first phase is the "shopping around" stage before you submit applications. For most students this is from the summer prior to your junior year through the fall of your senior year. Visits during this phase can help you gain more clarity regarding your college criteria and help you form impressions of specific colleges. Each family needs to determine what its schedule and resources will allow in terms of visits. At a minimum, we recommend visits to some local colleges prior to the senior year to help you understand different types of colleges.

While it is preferred to visit colleges when in session, you can only fit so many college visits in during the school year. Be assured that there is much to gain from a visit when the college is not in session; you can still get a sense of the programs, setting, and facilities, and tour guides are almost always current students. Spring break of the junior year is an excellent time to visit colleges (many colleges are in session and you won't be missing school).

The second phase comes after you receive admission decisions in the senior year. Visits after a student has been admitted can be helpful in deciding which college to attend. Many colleges plan special programs in April for admitted applicants. Keep in mind that you need to select a college by May 1, and OES attendance policies need to be followed.

ARRANGING COLLEGE VISITS

Go to the school's admission webpage to schedule a visit. Look for information regarding tours and group information sessions. Some colleges offer interviews on campus. In addition, they often include other useful tips for those traveling to campus. Sign up weeks, if not months, in advance, as spaces may fill.

Most college visits take 2-4 hours, which typically allows for two colleges per day.

Include a range of selectivity in the group of colleges you select for a college trip. All too often, students see the most selective colleges on their list, when it would be far more valuable to focus on a good balance of likely, target, and reach colleges.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN VISITS BEYOND THE TOUR AND INFO SESSION

Explore the campus on your own, take some photos, pick up a school newspaper, eat in the dining hall, engage with students and faculty whom you see on campus.

Some colleges offer class visits or overnight visits. Prospective athletes may want to reach out to a coach in advance to arrange a meeting.

Students with highly focused academic interests may try to meet with a faculty member.

AFTER VISITS

Make notes soon after the visit, while information and impressions are fresh.

Parents: Share your impressions of a campus *after* you hear what your child thinks. Ask questions that will help the student process the visit.

A word of caution: During visits you may interact with a variety of students, faculty, and administrators. Don't let a mediocre tour guide or one not so dynamic admission representative spoil a campus that might otherwise be a good match for you.

College Interviews

ROLE OF INTERVIEWS

Although interviews can be a stressful element of the application process, think of them as a friendly conversation and information exchange. Many colleges don't offer interviews, and among those that do, they are rarely required. Students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity interviews offer:

- To demonstrate interest in the college
- To learn more about the college
- To make a good impression, which will be noted in your application
- To practice for other types of interviews in life

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

- Some interviews are evaluative and some are informational. We suggest you treat all interviews as evaluative.
- There are on-campus interviews, virtual interviews, and interviews held in the Portland area by alumni or admission officers. Virtual and on-campus interviews hosted directly by the college are conducted by admission officers or students trained at the college.
- Research interview options during the summer and early in your senior year, as slots can fill up, and colleges are on different timelines regarding the window of opportunity for interviews. Some colleges only offer interviews after you have applied (usually these are alumni interviews).
- If you are visiting colleges during your junior year, research and take advantage of opportunities to interview when on campus.
- College Kickstart indicates which of your colleges offer interviews and provides a link to more info.

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

- To prepare for an interview, give thought to how you will answer questions about topics frequently covered in college interviews.
- Common topics: your strengths, a challenge you have overcome, academic interests and achievements, extracurricular interests and accomplishments, what friends or teachers would say about you, your goals in college, potential areas of study and why, a favorite book, how you spend your summers, three words that describe you, what you would like to be involved in during college.
- Consider practicing for the interview by having a friend or family member ask you questions based on the topics above.
- Come prepared with thoughtful questions about the college. While it is important to have basic knowledge of the college, you do not need to be an expert.

DURING THE INTERVIEW



- First and foremost be yourself.
- Interviewers understand that a certain amount of nervousness goes along with this type of situation and will do their best to put you at ease.
- Avoid extremes with your clothing (not too dressy or too casual).
- Shake the person's hand firmly and look them in the eye (if meeting in person).
- Throughout the interview, make eye contact and speak up. Look directly at your camera during a video interview.
- It is generally best to avoid really lengthy or extremely short responses.
- Alumni interviewers may want to share their enthusiasm for their college. Listen carefully and respond graciously.
- After the interview, write a thank you note to the individual who interviewed you.



College Admission Decisions and Gauging Selectivity

> *"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which one has overcome."*
>
> *– Booker T. Washington*

Colleges are interested in admitting a "well-rounded class," a diverse group of students (picture diversity in its many forms) who align with their academic profile and will contribute to the life of the college in varied ways. The more selective the college, the more admission will depend on academic and extracurricular accomplishments (and neither will guarantee admission). There are also many fine colleges eager to accept solid and involved students and many fine colleges that admit most applicants.

Although admission practices differ between colleges and are impacted by level of selectivity and institutional priorities and resources, admission offices at selective public and private institutions have more in common than not. On the following page are a list of factors many colleges consider when making admission decisions.

FACTORS IN COLLEGE ADMISSION DECISIONS:

- High school grades and courses
- Rigor of courses
- Positive character attributes
- Essay or writing sample
- Counselor and teacher recommendations
- Extracurricular activities
- Admission test scores
- Demonstrated interest

ADDITIONAL FACTORS THAT MAY PLAY A ROLE:

- Interview (if the college offers interviews)
- Performing or Visual Art Portfolio (when required or submitted by a student)
- Legacy (considered by many private campuses and some public campuses)
- Students being "recruited" for achievement in athletics, the arts, speech and debate

ACADEMIC RECORD:

- For most colleges, the high school transcript, including classes the student plans to take through the end of the senior year, is the most carefully scrutinized aspect of the application. Each transcript tells a story of courses taken and grades earned. Transcripts and the rigor of the student's courses are evaluated within the context of the school attended and courses offered. Colleges understand that OES has a rigorous academic program. They pay attention to grade trends, as well as context provided by the applicant and recommenders.

COLLEGE ADMISSION TESTS:

- Although the majority of colleges are test optional, many colleges use SAT or ACT scores when required or submitted to assist in their evaluation of applications. Test scores 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 the transcript and are viewed as one piece of a larger academic picture.

TOOLS FOR GAUGING SELECTIVITY

- **Scoir Scattergrams and College Kickstart** provide helpful data based on outcomes for OES applicants from the past 5 years.
- **College Admit Rates** are in Scoir. Not all applicant pools are equal, which means that a 20% admit rate at one school may not be equivalent to the same rate at a different school.
- **Test score ranges** are available in Scoir and College Kickstart.
- **National GPA ranges** for admitted students are published by some colleges. This data is drawn from too many different high schools to be of much use.
- **Conversations with your college counselor** will help you interpret data in the context of your situation.

UNDERSTANDING COLLEGE KICKSTART (CK) CATEGORIES

- Picture your list of colleges as sitting on a continuum of selectivity across the CK selectivity categories. Some colleges sit close to the category above or below.
- Colleges relying on OES data in CK will be noted by a small ***HS*** next to the name. Colleges without the ***HS*** are relying on national data, which is helpful, but not as nuanced as OES data.
- The role of a student's GPA in gauging selectivity can be impacted by grade trends and curriculum rigor. Consult with your college counselor to better understand your situation.
- The CK categories of selectivity don't take into account a designated major or school within a campus that may be more selective. Examples of programs that may be more selective (depending on the college): business, engineering, computer science, nursing, audition-based music and theater programs, film making.

WHAT IS A LIKELY COLLEGE?

These are colleges for which your candidacy is strong. *Likely* does not indicate that admission to the college is a given. On average, OES applications deemed as likely are admitted approximately 90% of the time.

WHAT IS A TARGET COLLEGE?

Possible* is a more accurate word to describe this category than *Target*.** Most applicants are competitive for colleges in this category based on their academic profile. However, for a number of applications in this category, the decision could go either way. On average, OES applications deemed as ***Target are admitted approximately 58% of the time.

WHAT IS A REACH COLLEGE?

Reach* colleges have two general definitions**. A college will be a reach if your academic profile is at the low end of admitted candidates on previous admission history. Colleges with admit rates lower than 20% are considered a reach for all or most applicants. For highly selective colleges with low admit rates, it is very difficult to predict who will be admitted. In these colleges where the majority of applicants are qualified, students who are admitted, denied, and waitlisted can look fairly similar. On average, OES applications deemed as ***Reach are admitted approximately 30% of the time.

WHAT IS AN UNLIKELY COLLEGE?

Our data shows that one to two percent of OES applications deemed *Unlikely* in CK are admitted or wait-listed. Applying to more than one or two ***Unlikely*** schools is generally not recommended (and if your profile is far off the target, it isn't worth your time). If you are considering adding ***Unlikely*** schools to your list, consult with your college counselor to find out how your academic profile compares to admitted applicants. Some students are on the margin of admissibility to ***Unlikely*** schools. If your college counselor confirms that this is the case for you, it may make sense to apply.

A WORD ABOUT HIGHLY SELECTIVE COLLEGES

Competition for entrance to highly selective colleges (those admitting fewer than 25 percent of their applicant pool) is keen, and decisions are very difficult to predict. At highly selective colleges, most applicants are qualified. These colleges face difficult, nuanced choices that take into consideration individual applicants and institutional needs. Many students denied or waitlisted at these colleges don't look any different than the admitted students. Some people wrongly equate selectivity with quality. In reality, there are many excellent public and private institutions that accept a high percent of applicants. Factors such as size and location can impact admit rates. Flagship publics attract a range of students from their state, including some very strong students.

Shaping College Lists

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE COLLEGE LIST

- **Good college lists come in different shapes and sizes.** We know from experience that for most students 6-12 colleges is enough. Lists that go beyond 12-14 colleges rarely give students a greater advantage in the process and often result in diminishing returns.
- **As you weigh options, categorize your college list in various ways:** selectivity, size, location, type of school, other features on your mind. This helps students organize their thought process and see gaps in the list or places to trim.
- **Shape your list, making good use of College Kickstart and Scoir data and advice from your college counselor.** Lists based on wishful thinking or fear are not advised. We have enough data and experience to know when a student really doesn't have a chance of being admitted.
- **Your final list should be balanced and thoughtfully constructed.** Include colleges with a range and smooth curve of selectivity: 3-5 reach colleges / 3-5 target colleges / 2-4 likely colleges. Include a financial safety, if needed.
- **Likely colleges are the foundation of your list.** They may not be top choices, but you must find them appealing. Include at least two colleges highly likely to admit you (not all likely colleges are safe).
- **Do not apply to colleges you have not researched carefully or do not wish to attend.** When you do so, you waste everyone's time and potentially take a place from an applicant at OES or beyond with a high level of interest in that college.
- **Avoid extremes:** a list heavy with reach colleges or likely colleges.
- **Consider your capacity for disappointing news** when college decisions arrive.
- **Ask yourself this question:** If I only get into my likely colleges, will I be satisfied? If the answer is *No*, you need to work on your list until you can respond with a confident, *Yes*!

> *"May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears."*
>
> *— Nelson Mandela*

WHY NOT APPLY TO AS MANY COLLEGES AS POSSIBLE?

HERE IS OUR RESPONSE TO A QUESTION WE HEAR OFTEN ENOUGH

- **Our data shows that longer lists are often overly ambitious and not well-balanced or carefully researched.** Statistically speaking, students with lists longer than 12 have an overall lower admit rate than students with lists of 12 and under.
- **Completing high quality applications is time consuming.** You need to stay on top of your school work and extracurricular commitments during your senior year (and have some fun).
- **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 pushes you to make informed decisions** about college choices before you apply, which leads to better lists.
- **Excessively long lists don't serve the student well, nor the greater good of the applicant pool.** As application numbers per student have gone up in recent years, the process has become more competitive and unpredictable for students and colleges alike.



Application Deadline Options

- Most colleges offer regular decision or rolling admission.
- A number of colleges that have a regular decision deadline also offer early decision or early action options, and some have both.
- Most early 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.

- **REGULAR DECISION (RD)** Many colleges have a regular decision application deadline that falls between November 15 and February 1. Colleges offering RD often offer one or more other deadline options as described below. Colleges offering RD notify students of their decisions by April 1, with most decisions coming during March.
- **ROLLING ADMISSION** means that admission decisions are made within a month or two after receipt of a complete application. Some colleges with rolling admission offer advice on a preferred timeframe.
- **RESTRICTIVE EARLY ACTION (REA) & SINGLE CHOICE EARLY ACTION (SEA)** are restricted versions of EA. The colleges listed below offer these options in which you apply early and hear early. If you are admitted, the decision is non-binding, and you can continue with other applications. However, these colleges will restrict other early applications in some way (read their instructions): Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale, Georgetown, University of Notre Dame.

- **EARLY DECISION (ED)** allows you to apply early to a college and receive an admission decision and 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. Via a written agreement, it is assumed that those admitted ED will withdraw other applications and attend the ED college. If you apply for need-based aid and are not offered an award that makes attendance possible, you may decline the offer of admission. Discuss the pros and cons of applying early decision with your college counselor. If you want to compare financial aid offers, early decision may not be a good option, 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 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 and 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, early action may not be a good idea, because the college will make a decision before these are available.

NAVIGATING DEFERRED ADMISSION

Students applying under an early action or early decision plan may be deferred. This means your application will be reconsidered with the regular applicant pool. 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 continuing 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.

Completing Applications

APPLICATION OPTIONS

Common Application Over 1,000 colleges (private, public, and international) use the **Common Application**, which allows students to complete one form online and submit it to multiple institutions. Colleges have their own supplemental questions and prompts with expected responses of varying lengths. Use the chart in the Common Application or individual college websites to check requirements for supplemental questions. The Commin Application has been used since 1975.

The University of California and **California State University** campuses each utilize a centralized application system that can be found online.

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) is a centralized shared admission platform for colleges and universities in the United Kingdom. Students utilizing UCAS should ask their college counselor how to access the registered OES UCAS Centre (a portal into the application system).





TIPS ON COMPLETING APPLICATIONS

Learning to present yourself in a positive, accurate, compelling, and concise manner is key in applying to educational institutions. Completing college applications requires planning ahead, effort, and attention to detail. Keep in mind that all the components of your college application come together to tell your story.

- **Take an organized approach.** 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.
- **Carefully read application instructions** on college websites well in advance of deadlines.
- Complete applications **well ahead of deadlines.**
- **Present yourself to colleges in an effective and authentic manner. Tell your story.**
- **Know what you want to communicate to colleges, 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. However, if you overload the reader with information, it may be difficult to discern who you are and what matters.
- **Consider how you want to come across, what you want to emphasize, and how you will take shape as someone reads your application file.** Focus on the integrity, authenticity, and clarity with which you present yourself.
- In the **activity section** be as clear and thorough as you can be in the space given. Abbreviate as needed. Use strong verbs, but don't overdo verbs. They should sound like you and they should sound like a high school student, not a corporate employee.
- In consultation with your college counselor, use **additional information sections** to provide important context about yourself.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation are part of the application process for many colleges. During the spring, we work with juniors to select two OES teachers to write letters of recommendation. In addition, the college counselor writes a letter of recommendation based on conversations with the student, advisor comments, teacher comments from grades 9-11, and letter questionnaires completed by students and parents during the summer following the junior year.

DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

Many colleges consider demonstrated interest, which include points of contact along the way that may demonstrate your level of interest in that college:

- campus visit
- virtual tour
- interview
- attending a reception or high school visit hosted by the college
- connecting with college reps at a college fair
- getting on the college's mailing list
- contact with the admission office (including activity on their website and opening their emails)
- how you respond to the "why this college" question on the application

Demonstrated interest has become more important as more students apply to more colleges, which has made it harder for colleges to predict "yield" (the number of students who will accept the college's offer of admission). As a result, it is common for colleges to factor "demonstrated interest" into admission decisions. The degree of importance placed on demonstrated interest and how the ways colleges track it vary. Colleges that fall into the most selective range and public universities put little emphasis, if any, on demonstrated interest.

Colleges don't necessarily track all the steps listed above and they don't expect students to take all these steps. In addition, they are sensitive to the resources required to visit campus (unless you live locally). However, the types of actions that demonstrate your interest to colleges are 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, to learn more about the college and because local colleges may question your level of interest if you don't.



College Essays

Embrace college essays as opportunities to breathe life into applications and help application readers gain a deeper understanding of who you are. While essays generally do not outweigh long-term measures, such as academics, they are important and can make a difference. There is no formula for a good essay. If you choose to write about something that genuinely matters to you, you will have made a good start.

TIPS ON SELECTING ESSAY TOPICS

- **Good college essays often take the form of a well-told story that conveys something meaningful about the writer.** Look for experiences that have shaped or impacted you.
- **Read essay prompts carefully and brainstorm ideas before selecting a topic.** List activities and experiences from your past; an unexpected topic or theme may emerge.
- **Explore topics with your college counselor** or someone who knows you well.
- **College essays should focus on reflection, not on reporting and listing extracurriculars and achievements.** Colleges want to know what matters to you and why.
- **Know the purpose of the topic you select.** Think about what you want to convey. What do you want the reader to know and feel about you after reading the essay?
- **Some of the most powerful essays are based on surprisingly simple or everyday topics or events.** Think of an experience that has led to growth by helping you build skills, perspective, or deeper insight into some aspect of life.
- **Write from the heart about something meaningful to you.** Selecting a topic that you think will "look good" may result in a flat, predictable essay.
- **Students are encouraged to reuse essays when they align with the prompt.** If your Common App essay works for a non-Common App essay prompt, use it.

TIPS ON WRITING ESSAYS

- **Authenticity is powerful.** Write an essay that only you can write. Craft focused, essays that clearly convey your voice. Your essay should sound like you. Don't let others put words in your mouth.
- **Go beyond the description of an event:** analyze and reflect on the significance of it (answer the "so what?" question).
- **Use a personal, not scholarly style**: first person is appropriate.
- **Your writing should be thoughtful, honest, direct, clear, concise, and heartfelt.** Use active verbs.
- **Be humble, be vulnerable, be reflective, show insight.** By crafting an essay that thoughtfully conveys how you grew from an experience or challenge or gained insight through a situation, you will be sharing your unique story.
- **Focus your essay topic as much as possible.** For example, if you choose to write about a two-week backpacking trip or job you have had, you might be best served by selecting a small slice (an event during the trip that lasted five minutes, an hour, or a day of that experience) that illuminates an important lesson learned or a meaningful event.
- **Create a "you are there" type feeling if this fits your topic.** Incorporate description, anecdotes, examples, and quotes from conversations when appropriate.

ARE THERE ESSAY TOPICS TO AVOID?

Despite what you might hear (even from college admission officers), the answer to this question is generally, *No.* There are no bad topics, including fairly common topics (see below for essay approaches to avoid). Humans have many common experiences that connect us to one another. If you write thoughtfully, authentically, and specifically about an experience and your insights from the experience, your story is unique and will likely resonate with others. There are, however, ineffective essays on any topic. Sometimes the student's approach to a topic doesn't work because the topic is too broad or there isn't enough potential for nuanced reflection in the topic choice. Or the essay is all about impressing the reader (in a way that is opposite of show me, don't tell me) and falls flat.

TWO ESSAY APPROACHES TO AVOID

- **The resume essay:** a narrative version of the student's resume that showcases areas of involvement and achievements.
- **The look how successful I was or how many great qualities I have essay:** an essay, for example, describing a student's perseverance and success in planning and leading an event or service project. The student takes a great deal of credit for how well the event went, but doesn't reference missteps or growth along the way (also known as the *too good to be true essay*).





GUIDANCE ON SEEKING ESSAY ASSISTANCE

- Proof your essay carefully, and read your essay aloud as part of the editing process.
- Seek feedback from your college counselor and possibly one teacher. Do not seek excessive opinions on your essay, as this may lead to confusion on your part.
- Start your essay well before the deadline and seek feedback at various stages to make sure you are headed in the right direction.
- When seeking input, think *feedback*, not *editing*. It is appropriate for folks to point out typos or grammatical issues, ask clarifying questions, or offer feedback on tone, organization, and what they learn about you from the essay.
- It is NOT appropriate for others to suggest how to word sentences. Do not let others do any of the writing or editing. If someone is giving extensive and highly detailed feedback or edits, they have gone too far. Please remind readers such as family members and tutors of our parameters in relation to feedback.
- AI should not be used at any stage of your work on college essays and supplements.

"WHY THIS" COLLEGE ESSAYS

Some colleges ask, "Why do you want to attend this college?" Respond to this question in a thoughtful, specific, genuine way. If you have done the research you should do before applying to a college, you will be in a better position to offer authentic insight regarding why the college appeals to you. Here are a few tips on tackling this question.

- Describe what truly draws you to the college. Thoughtfully explain what makes the college a good match for you and you a good match for the college.
- A generic response that could be given for most small liberal arts colleges or most colleges in an urban setting, for example, is not recommended.
- We caution against making your response a love fest about how wonderful the school is. Avoid words such as "perfect" and "ideal."
- If your primary approach to this question is to look for ideas on the college's website, aim for finding a few features that genuinely draw you to the college and explain why a particular feature is important enough to include. Name dropping multiple programs, classes, professors and/or using language lifted from the college's website is all too common and not recommended.

College Admission Tests

TESTING OPTIONS

In the current college admission testing landscape, most colleges are test optional. Additionally, there are colleges that require the SAT or ACT and colleges that are test free and do not consider test scores in their review of applications. Among colleges that review SAT or ACT scores, there is no preference for one exam over the other. Although we are not able to predict which colleges might still return to requiring scores, we expect the list of test optional and test free colleges to remain robust.

Excellent resource on college admission tests: ***Compass Guide to College Admission Testing***. Compass also maintains a current list of colleges' testing policies.

TESTING TIMELINES

- Most students take the SAT or ACT one to three times between November of the junior year and December of the senior year.
- Students should get a good start on testing during the junior year. A number of seniors also sit for at least one test date between July and December.
- Students with PSAT/ACT scores of 1200/25 and above are generally in a good position to start their testing in November or March of the junior year (although waiting until May or June is fine). Students with scores under 1200/25 may be better off starting their testing in spring of the junior year.
- Timelines for testing are ultimately up to the student and also need to take into consideration their preparation timeline and conflicts with potential test dates.
- Students should register on SAT and ACT websites for test dates well in advance of deadlines to ensure location choices. They are responsible for tracking test dates and registration deadlines.
- Enter the OES test code when you register for the SAT or ACT: 380915.

OPTING OUT OF TESTING

Students for whom standardized tests are particularly challenging may decide to opt out of the testing process at some point in the junior or senior year. The decision is usually made through conversations with parents and a college counselor, in which we determine that preparing for and taking an ACT or SAT is not going to prove beneficial in the college application process and, in fact, may detract from the student's ability to focus more fully on OES classes.

TESTING 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.

SCORE CHOICE & SUPERSCORING

Although some colleges ask students to submit all standardized test scores, most allow score choice (reporting SAT or ACT by date). Regardless of their policy, most colleges superscore, which means they take the highest section scores across test dates.

TEST PREPARATION

We encourage students to prepare for standardized tests using a method that works for them (class, tutor, self-directed using books or online programs). A list of test prep options can be found on our College Counseling Google page. Timed practice tests are an excellent way to prepare. Most students begin test prep the summer before the junior year or during the junior year. Excessive preparation is discouraged. OES offers access a diagnostic/practice ACT test that students do online. In the winter we partner with a local test prep business to offer an in-person SAT prep class on the weekends, and we subscribe to Method Test Prep, a test prep platform for students in grades 10-12.

PSAT

- Practice SAT / Given at OES during October to grades 10 & 11 (students don't need to register)
- Grade 11 PSAT used for the National Merit Scholarship Competition
- Reading & Writing / Math
- Scores range from 160-760 for each section / 320-1520 for combined score

DIGITAL SAT

- College admission exam / Grades 11 & 12 / Given at testing centers
- Test dates and registration: www.collegeboard.org
- Reading & Writing / Math
- Section scores range from 200-800 / combined scores range from 400-1600

ACT*

- College admission exam / Grades 11 & 12 / Given at testing centers
- Test dates and registration: www.act.org
- Five sections: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, Writing (optional)
- Very few colleges use the optional writing section.
- Section scores range from 1-36
- Composite score is the average of the 4 required sections

TOEFL

- Test of English as a Foreign Language
- Students for whom English is not their first language should take the TOEFL at least once during the junior year (and again fall of the senior year if necessary)
- Given to students at testing centers. Students register themselves and work with dorm parents to coordinate test dates: www.toefl.org

ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) EXAMS

- AP Exams are administered during May. OES offers five AP courses (Calculus AB, Calculus BC, Statistics, Spanish, and French) and the corresponding exams. We limit the number of additional AP exams we administer on campus to 6-8 exams, a group that typically includes: Chinese, Biology, Chemistry, Physics C exams, Computer Science A, English Language or Literature.
- AP Scores range from 1-5 and are not required by colleges in the US (scores are used for purposes of admission in some universities outside the United States).
- Most AP exams are taken in grades 11 and 12. We limit the number of AP exams students can take. Students should not prepare for or make plans to take AP exams not attached to an OES class until they speak with the Director of College Counseling.
- Students sign up by November 15, after receiving the fall registration email we send and after going through an approval process for exams not connected to an OES AP class in which the student is enrolled.
- Exam scores earned before the senior year can be self-reported in college applications, but generally play a minimal role in the admission process.
- Scores earned may lead to advanced placement in college or may earn college credit (college policies vary and can be found on their websites).

* The ACT will be making changes to the test in 2025 and 2026. Go to their website for details.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Some seniors will conclude their application process between late December and mid-February if admitted to an ED, REA, or EA college to which they decide to commit. Other seniors will conclude the process by early May as they wait for regular decision outcomes. May 1 is known as the National College Decision Day.

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 or give students a warning after final grades are submitted.



Selecting a College

> *"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."*
>
> *— John Dewey*

For many, selecting a college is a decision easily made; for others, it is a difficult decision. If you have more than one college option that appeals to you, schedule a meeting with your college counselor. We welcome conversations and will ask questions and listen carefully to help you develop a framework for making your choice. Only you can make this choice; 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 the decision.

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

Once you have selected a college, watch for their instructions about enrolling, housing, deposits, registration, and other matters.

TIMEFRAME FOR COMMITTING TO A COLLEGE

- Select one college (no double deposits) by May 1 and commit to the college, usually with a deposit (even if you are staying on waitlists).
- By May 1, notify colleges you won't be attending via your portal or an email to the admission office.
- Deposits are generally not refundable.

PERSPECTIVE ON SELECTING A COLLEGE

It can be difficult to select a college. Higher education is what economists call an 'experiential good,' something you can't fully understand until after you purchase and experience it. Keep in mind these words from higher education writer, Kevin Carey. Remember also that what you do in college matters more than where you attend. At some point—after doing your research—you need to trust your instincts and make a leap of faith.



SELECTING A COLLEGE: ADVICE AND STEPS TO TAKE

- Take until May 1 and don't get too far into the decision-making process until you have gathered all information and completed any planned visits.
- Using your criteria, develop a pros and cons list for each college. Write down thoughts and feelings related to selecting a college: hopes, fears, dilemmas, questions.
- Focus on fit, not prestige. Seek a college where you will feel comfortable, challenged, engaged, and inspired—a place with opportunities to grow and be successful.
- Talk with individuals who know you and/or know the colleges. Keep in mind, however, that you are the expert when it comes to what you want.
- Best to weigh your decision with people who listen well and ask open-ended questions.
- Don't think about the decision all the time. Give it rest and then come back to the topic.
- Try making a decision before May 1 and then see how it feels for a few days.
- Consider factors related to the cost of the college for you. Each family needs to weigh their priorities regarding the value of a given college in relation to its cost. Use the link here when considering how much debt to take on: Loan Calculator and repayment.
- Some families weigh how much to spend for undergraduate education, knowing they may also want to assist with graduate school.
- Consult with your college counselor if you need help comparing financial aid packages.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

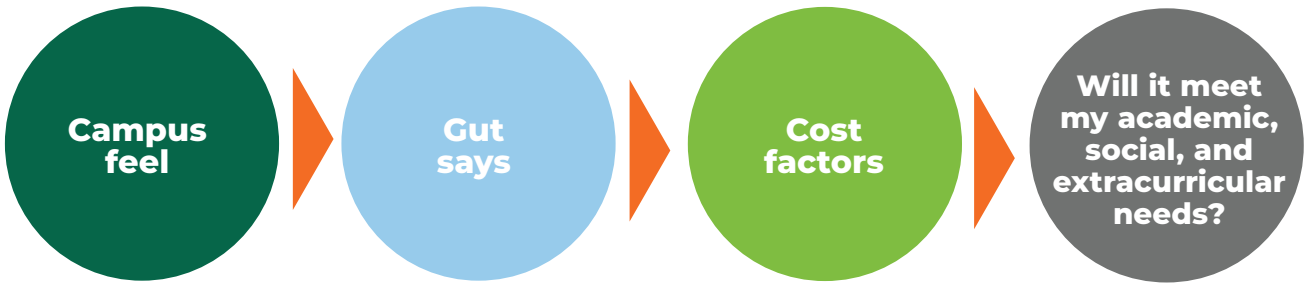
- Are you leaning toward a particular college? Why?
- What do you need to know to make this decision?
- How much weight will you give to the opinions of others?
- How do you know what you know about this college? How credible are your sources?
- Don't assume too much from a college visit. Are there impressions or details for which you would like to follow-up with further research?
- Where are you most likely to find challenge, inspiration, growth, and comfort?
- Where will you have the most opportunities?
- Which learning environment best suits you?
- How often can you come home? How much does it matter?
- What do you give up and gain with each option you are considering?
- How will a given factor play out in your daily life at college (location, size, academic programs) versus a factor that may only matter periodically, such as travel to the college?
- If you decide to go to college X, what aspects feel good and what are you worried about?
- How will cost impact your decision?

NAVIGATING COLLEGE WAITLISTS

A number of students will end up on college waitlists (WL). From year-to-year colleges don't know how many of the applicants they admit will actually come. The WL provides a group of qualified applicants to draw from if needed.

- Read instructions carefully and respond promptly to colleges about your interest in remaining on the WL (you can stay on more than one WL).
- It is important to demonstrate interest to colleges in relation to their WL (consult with your college counselor). Please don't ask for additional teacher letters.
- If you stay on one or more WL, you still need to commit to a college by May 1 to secure your place. If you are later offered a place from a waitlist and decide to accept that offer, you will notify the college where you committed (you will probably lose your deposit). If yet another desirable college offers you a spot off the WL, you can take that offer (you get the idea). Colleges know they may lose some students after May 1.
- The timing of hearing about a WL offer varies from just before May 1 to a couple months after May 1, occasionally longer. If you are staying on any WL, we suggest you not deposit at a college until May 1 or the day before (since deposits are non-refundable).
- If a college offers you a WL place, they usually give you at least 48 hours to respond to their offer of admission, but they generally don't give much more than 72 hours.

QUICK LIST OF FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING A COLLEGE





Financing a College Education

Financial aid for college comes in a variety of forms. If paying for college is a concern, talk with a college counselor early in the process and educate yourself about options for making college more affordable. We host a college financial aid presentation for Upper School families annually in the fall.

While financial concerns may influence the mix of colleges to which you apply, do not rule out a college simply because of the sticker cost. Although the cost of the college may play a big role in determining which college you attend, 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 application and financial aid process, you may not have the information you need to determine which colleges will be most affordable. Include a financial aid safety on your list if appropriate (a more affordable college based on cost or the high likelihood of adequate merit aid/tuition discounting).

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 BASICS

Colleges offer need-based financial aid, according to the student's demonstrated financial need. Colleges require the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and some also require the CSS Profile and/or their own forms to apply for need-based financial aid. Verify required forms and deadlines for each college.

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. Need-sensitive colleges often only factor this in for some applicants.

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)

FINANCIAL AID FORMS

FAFSA

Students applying for need-based aid must file the FAFSA. Some colleges (not many) 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 file a FAFSA. There is no charge for filing the FAFSA. The FAFSA will be available October 1 of the senior year and is completed online. To access the FAFSA form and additional information: https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa In families where parents are divorced, separated, or not married, the parent who provided more financial support during the last 12 months provides their financial information on the FAFSA.

College financial aid offices use the FAFSA Student Aid Index (SAI), an eligibility index number, to determine how much federal student aid you will receive if you attend the college.

To determine your financial need, a college will subtract your SAI from the cost of attendance at the 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.

CSS PROFILE

In addition to the FAFSA, some colleges (mostly private and a few public universities) also require a CSS Profile form that provides colleges with additional financial information to utilize in awarding non-federal student aid funds. The CSS Profile is also used for awarding financial aid to students applying early decision at a college (and sometimes early action). The form is available starting October 1 of the senior year. To learn more about the CSS Profile go to: https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/complete-application. There is a fee for completing the CSS Profile that is waived automatically for families who qualify, based on income.

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.

GAUGING FINANCIAL NEED

Because need is determined in relation to the cost of the college, we encourage families to use the Federal Student Aid Index and Net Price Calculators available on college websites. You can also access NPCs via links on the College Board's Big Future. Net Price Calculators are tailored to the college's approach to financial aid and 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 aid as well).

COLLEGE 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 often one of the largest purchases a family will make, 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 student loans are usually the best loan option and should be utilized fully before considering private loans or a parent PLUS loan, both of which should be approached with caution and full knowledge of the terms of the loan.

MERIT-BASED FINANCIAL AID (TUITION DISCOUNTING)

Most public and private colleges (over 80%) award merit-based aid to students as a way to discount tuition for families and attract applicants. A number of 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 many colleges, merit-aid is offered to a number of applicants and all applicants are automatically considered for these awards. At some colleges, all or some of their merit scholarships require a special application or a priority deadline. There are colleges with well-defined parameters for merit aid based on GPA, and the college may or may not consider the context of the school attended in awarding merit aid. A small number of colleges require the family to complete the FAFSA and/or CSS Profile for merit-based aid. College websites are the best source of more detailed 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. On the OES College Counseling Google page there is a list of some scholarship opportunities, many of which are local.

While we encourage families to investigate outside scholarships, 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 devote to applying for outside scholarships and 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.

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 the states listed below may enroll in some out-of-state two- and four-year public colleges at a reduced tuition level that may be considerably lower than normal nonresident tuition fees. 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. 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
- Wyoming

See the Western Undergraduate Exchange website: www.wiche.edu/wue

PAYING FOR COLLEGE: QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What are costs for tuition& fees, room & board, and books & supplies?
- How and when should students apply for need-based financial aid?
- Does financial need impact admission decisions, and if so, how? Do you admit on a "need blind" or "need aware" basis in relation to financial aid?
- What portion of demonstrated need does the institution meet on average?
- For parents who are divorced or legally separated, does the college ask for information from the non-custodial parent?
- Do you offer merit-aid or tuition discounting? Are there special applications or deadlines I should be aware of?
- Is a family required to file the FAFSA and/or CSS Profile to qualify for merit-based 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?
- What are the academic requirements for the renewal of financial aid and 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 will the family be billed? Is there an option to pay monthly?



Students Needing Accomodations and Support

During the college counseling process, we advise students on how disabilities and learning differences should be handled in relation to the search for an appropriate college, college admission testing, and the college application process. The process for approval of extended time and accommodations for testing takes time, so please contact the Upper School Learning Resource Coordinator at OES during the school year, if you think you may qualify for testing accommodations.

Students with learning differences/disabilities, ADHD, a mental health diagnosis, or some kind of physical disability may qualify for accommodations such as extended time on standardized tests (SAT, ACT, AP). Students may also qualify for accommodations and support services in college.

Colleges and universities 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 the activities and programs colleges offer. Most colleges offer support services for students with disabilities. In addition, some colleges offer more structured programs that may require a separate application and a fee.

PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

Throughout high school, students are encouraged to develop greater independence, confidence, and self-advocacy skills. Students need to understand and be able to articulate their differences, challenges, strengths, and needs to others.

The Upper School Learning Resource Coordinator works with seniors once they select a college to provide info about services and accommodations at their college.

Students and parents should discuss available resources at their college and determine well in advance what documentation is needed to access accommodations and services, including expectations about how recent documentation needs to be.

Parents should review FERPA laws in relation to disclosure once your child is 18 or older.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO ASK THEMSELVES IN THE COLLEGE PROCESS

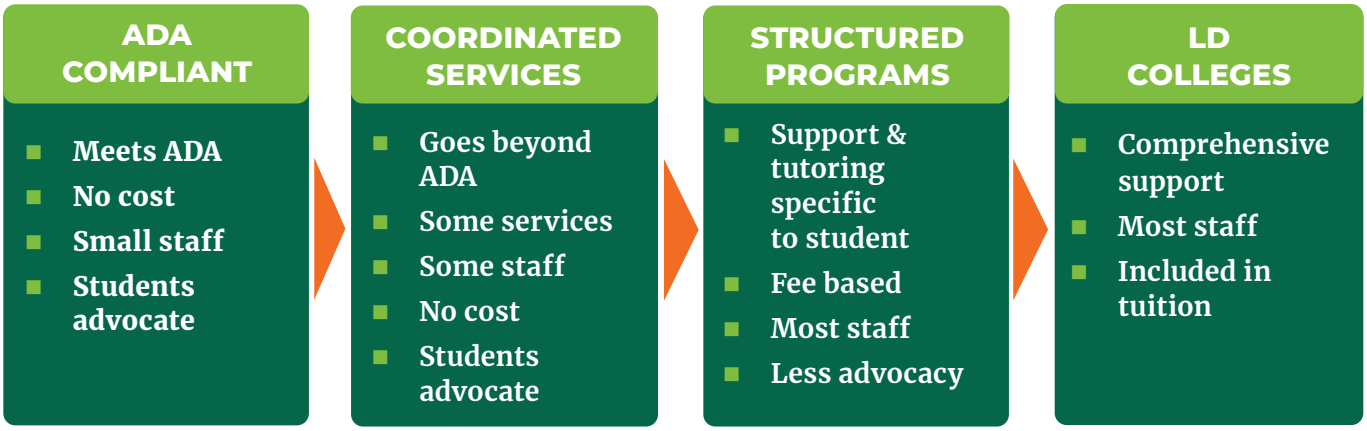
Considering factors such as academic structure and requirements, and class and campus size, students should contemplate what they will need to succeed in college.

- What do I want from my college experience?
- What type of a learner am I?
- What campus and academicwill be a good match for me?
- What accommodations and support do I need to succeed?

LEARN WHAT COLLEGES OFFER AND HOW TO ACCESS ACCOMMODATIONS AND SUPPORT SERVICES

- Research college websites
- Contact college admission office/disability services office
- Visit colleges and make contact with disability services office
- *K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Differences* (list not all inclusive) Although this guidebook is a good starting point, it is important to seek more detailed information on the college's disability services webpage.

LEVELS OF SUPPORT IN COLLEGE





College Athletics

> *"It's not wanting to win that makes you a winner; it's refusing to fail. It's the ability to look beyond your own limits and push yourself to do whatever it takes to succeed. Success is about doing the small things right every day, never getting complacent, and always finding ways to improve."*
>
> *— Peyton Manning*

Many options exist for students who wish to participate in sports during 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). Rules and practices govern the recruitment process of college athletes. Talk with your college counselor, coaches, and OES athletic directors to learn about the steps you should take to research options and take part in the recruitment process.

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. Let the college counseling office know once you have registered at www.eligibilitycenter.org. 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 1,000 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.

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 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 310 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 438 Division III member colleges.

NAIA

There are 241 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



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.
- **Ask your college counselor and coaches for advice on the timing and nature of college 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 and 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 by going to college websites for instructions for making contact with coaches.
- **Complete online athletic recruitment forms for colleges.** Coaches may ask about your academic record and SAT, ACT or PSAT scores (many colleges are test optional). 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.
- **Interested coaches want to talk with you more than your parents.** Have questions ready. Coaches evaluate three areas: athletic ability, academic match, quality of character.
- **Seek colleges that are a good match academically and athletically.** Would you like to work with the coach? If you were injured and could no longer play your sport, would you still want to attend the college?



QUESTIONS FOR YOUR HIGH SCHOOL COACHES

- How would you assess my ability and skills in relation to college teams and the appropriate level of play?
- Are there particular colleges 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 contact coaches on my behalf?

QUESTIONS FOR COLLEGE COACHES

- What is the coach's background and philosophy of athletics?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your program?
- What is your record in recent years?
- What conference are you in? Where and how often do you travel?
- Where do I fit into the program?
- How much time per week will I spend at practice? How about off-season commitments?
- How are the facilities for this sport? What is the training environment?



Gap or Interim Year Options

> *"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."*
>
> *— Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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 the 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. There are many productive ways to spend a year off such as working, travel, internships, and service, and there are programs that help students design a 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 and a number of public universities are willing to hold spots for students who wish to defer for a year (sometimes more). 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, 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 selected a college. 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) merit-based aid it will depend on the college. How colleges handle merit-based aid offers for students deferring a year will vary.



Questions to Research and Ask 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?
- 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?
- How does academic advising work?
- 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 the college complete a degree there?
- 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?
- Learn about facilities for various academic disciplines, athletes, artists, musicians, etc.
- Can you transfer from one major or school to another within the institution with ease?
- Percentage of faculty with Ph.D./number of adjuncts
- Teaching course load and expectations for research

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?
- 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 offer interviews and if so what role do they play in the admission process?

Oregon Episcopal School

Oregon Episcopal School | 6300 SW Nicol Road | Portland, OR 97223 | 503-246-7771 | **oes.edu**