



College Counseling Handbook



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Introduction

This handbook is designed to help guide you through the college search, application and selection process. Although this process requires hard work and can be complicated, it also can be rewarding. Counseling and assistance are available to you throughout the process, but *you are the one who is responsible for your search and application*. The more you do yourself, the more successful you will be. It is important to remember that you are the one who is responsible for meeting all deadlines, submitting applications, and keeping everyone informed of your thoughts and progress.

During your search you will learn about colleges, about other parts of the country (and perhaps the world), and most importantly you will learn about yourself. You should choose a college that feels right for you. Some people may tell you where they think you should go, but it is you who will spend four years there. Therefore, it must be you who decides where you will be happiest. Remember, the goal is to find colleges where you can be productive, successful and happy.

During this process it is essential that you stay organized, meet deadlines, and ask questions. College admission counselors are very helpful, so do not hesitate to reach out to a college if you have questions! No matter how strong a candidate you are, you will seriously jeopardize or even eliminate your chances of acceptance by missing deadlines or failing to follow instruction accurately.

We are here to support, guide, and advocate for you, every step of the way.

Your College Counseling Team

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Sophomore Year



College Counseling begins on an informal basis during the sophomore year. All sophomores take the PSAT in October. The results of this test will help you know where your strengths and weaknesses are and what you need to do to prepare for the junior year PSAT and the SAT. We also partner with Revolution Test Prep to offer an optional ACT practice test in the spring. Use the following checklist as a guide for your sophomore year.

- Start thinking about how you learn best. Do you prefer to work on your own? As part of a group? Do you do your best work in classes with lots of independent work? In those more closely guided by the teacher?
- Imagine what you want your college experience to be like. Will you play a sport? Join a fraternity or sorority? Pursue a creative passion? What activities do you imagine yourself doing? Do you see yourself at a large university? Small college? In the big city? In a small college town? Is climate important to you? How about the distance from home?
- Build upon your coursework by taking a balanced and progressively more challenging curriculum, especially in areas of your academic interest.
- Solebury's Director of Studies and Associate Head of School host check-ins at the end of sophomore year to discuss your experience so far and how you can build upon this foundation to make the most of your high school years.
- Think about ways you can continue to grow and show commitment to your activities, and how you can develop as a leader. Use your time at Solebury to discover the activities you love. Think quality over quantity.
- Consider summer opportunities: jobs, camps, travel, volunteer work, classes, internships, etc. .

Junior Year

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Formal college guidance begins during your junior year. **In the fall**, juniors take PSATs. Also in the fall, college representatives come and visit Solebury and juniors should meet with as many as possible. **In the winter**, juniors are required to attend a series of college workshops designed to help them get started on their search, they will also begin building their first list of colleges. **During the spring and summer**, juniors should visit colleges and do more research to be sure they have explored all possible paths so that they are confident when making their final choices. During this time, students should speak frequently with their parents, advisor, and counselors. Juniors also typically take the SAT in the spring. Use the following calendar as a guide for your junior year:

Fall

- Attend meetings with college representatives
- Take the PSATs in October
- Attend Junior College Night

Winter

- Participate in the college workshops
- Begin to build your college list
- Prepare for and take the SAT or ACT in the spring.
- Consider taking the SAT Preparation and ACT practice test offered at Solebury.

Spring

- Take the SAT/ACT
- Attend the college fair
- Meet with your college counselor to discuss summer plans, essays, recommendations, senior year classes, and creating a balanced college list.

Summer

- Refine list
- Visit colleges
- Work on applications
- Take time to relax





There are nearly 4,000 degree-granting post-secondary institutions in the United States. Although no one person can know about all of them, there are several resources available at Solebury to help you learn more. Do not limit yourself to using just one source of information. Pooling research from different resources will give you a broader, more in-depth, and accurate view of the schools you are interested in.



College Counselors

Erin is here to help reduce the confusion about college admissions and make the process more educational and interesting. Meet with her regularly to discuss your search.



Faculty & Alumni

Your teachers and young alumni have been through this process. Talk to people about their college experiences -- this is where you will learn about how other people decided on schools, if they were happy where they went, and other specifics about colleges.



College Representatives

Counselors from various colleges visit our school to talk with you about their college. You will be emailed a weekly list of visitors. Make an effort to meet with them. You can get a feel for a college by who they send to represent them and make a connection with someone who may be reviewing your application.



Scoir

Students can use SCOIR to search for and start building a list of colleges that interest them, gauge their likelihood of admission to various colleges, take virtual tours, fill out surveys, sign up for the hundred or so colleges that visit Solebury each fall, and more. Parents also have access to SCOIR to assist students in their college selection.

Creating A College List

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Consider the following:

Type of Institution:

- Single-purpose schools include art, nursing, music, and technical schools. If you are sure about your vocational interest, a single-purpose school may be best. However, also consider liberal-arts colleges with strong departments in your area of interest. It's a lot easier to change your major than it is to transfer schools.
- The 2-year school offering an Associate Degree is a good option for some students, although many who take this route will transfer to a 4-year school.
- Universities are large schools offering many kinds of degrees: Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BS), Master of Arts (MA), Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), and specialized degrees (such as law or medicine).
- Liberal Arts Colleges: Students who believe that a well-rounded education is important usually attend colleges or universities that have a solid tradition in the liberal arts. "Liberal arts" means that students learn how to think in many disciplines and are exposed to a wide range of ideas. Emphasis is on educating the whole person, not just enhancing the wage-earning aspects of life. For students who are not yet sure about what to do with their lives, a liberal arts education offers many chances to discover exciting fields of study. Sound familiar? Yes, Solebury is a school in the liberal arts tradition!

Size

This is critical, because the size of the school will have a direct impact on the type of education you receive. Smaller schools generally have smaller class sizes and a smaller student/teacher ratio. Larger schools will generally have more large lecture classes, but may have a greater diversity of course offerings. Think about this one carefully. Generally, colleges are categorized as follows:

very small: < 1,000 students large: 10,000 - 20,000 students

small: 1,000 – 3,000 students very large: 20,000+ students

medium: 3,000 - 10,000 students

Also, some universities divide their students into smaller "residence colleges" by housing different students with different interests together in environments that feel like small colleges in and of themselves. This way you can have the advantage of a large university and a very small college in one place!

Majors and departments

It is fine to select a college for a major if you are sure you know what your major will be -- most students do not. Try to select a college based on whether or not they offer departments and/or majors towards your strength and interests thus far. Remember that many students change majors -- don't limit yourself. If you are undecided, how will that college support you in finding your path.

Geography

Location is more important to some students than to others. Do you want to be near home? Do you hate cold weather? Do you want to have access to mountains? Consider travel costs when you are considering expenses.

Urban, suburban, or rural?

There are advantages and disadvantages to all three. For example, a city college may be wonderful if you like concerts, night-life, etc. -- but can you handle the distractions and will you be safe? A rural setting may offer more on-campus resources and fewer distractions, but you may feel isolated. Ask alumni and faculty about this and ask students at specific colleges, in addition to being honest with yourself about what's best for your success at college.

Co-ed or single-sex?

Again, consider it carefully and ask around. There are some outstanding single sex colleges that are situated very close to other colleges and may offer the best of all worlds. Don't discount them!

Competitive/Selective

Is it better to be an average student at a well-known, prestigious, and competitive college; or is it better to have an excellent career at a less well-known school? A really good question, isn't it?

Special Needs or Interests

Will I need a Learning Skills Center? Is campus religion important to me? What about medical or counseling services? Athletics? Social life? Remember . . . knowing yourself is the key to choosing a college.

Cost

Although most students will not pay that full amount (the sticker price), be aware of the tuition, room/board and fees.



SATs and ACTs

Do these tests really matter that much anyway?

The answer is yes and no. At very large institutions and very competitive institutions, SATs or ACTs are used as an important criterion for admission simply because of the large number of qualified applicants they receive. Meanwhile, at many other schools these tests may help you get in, but they won't usually keep you out. That is, smaller schools have more time to look at the whole student (i.e. at grades, essays, activities, and recommendations.)

We recommend that students take the SAT or ACT at least once during their Junior year (usually in the spring); many students will benefit by retaking the test again in their senior year (usually in October or November). It is not usually necessary to take these tests more than two times. Registering for the ACT and SAT is the student's responsibility.

Most colleges will look at the student's highest critical reading and math score as they evaluate the application, even if they are at different sittings. Other colleges will take the highest total score from one sitting. No school will average the scores or consider the lowest scores. Many colleges require an official score report directly from the College Board or ACT and it is the student's responsibility to order those score reports.

Solebury School will only provide transportation for boarding students to the nearest test center on select dates. Please check Scoir to see the full calendar. If a boarding student registers for any other test center, they will need to pay the fee to change their registration or provide their own transportation.



SAT Preparation

While we worry about the obsessive attitude that currently surrounds SAT test prep, we do feel that SAT test preparation is useful to help raise student confidence and performance. Solebury offers a test prep course that we feel is appropriately serious and effective. SAT prep courses are offered in the Fall and Spring. Parents of Juniors and Seniors are sent information about the dates of the courses and how to register for them. If our course is inconvenient or does not serve a student's particular needs, we do have information on other test prep companies.

Test prep can be very expensive and requires a significant commitment from students if it is to be meaningful. Families should be 1) wary of the claims of test prep companies about score increases and 2) realistic about how much time and energy a student is willing to commit to test prep.

Test Optional

Approximately 1,800 of the 2,800 four-year colleges no longer require standardized testing for all of their applicants. They recognize that this test is only one part of what an applicant brings to the table. For more information around the Test Optional Policy and to view a list of test optional colleges, visit [Fairtest.org](https://www.fairtest.org).





If colleges offer the option of interviewing (some schools don't interview at all), students should arrange them, particularly at the colleges they most want to attend. Not visiting and not interviewing could send a message to the college that you do not have a strong interest in their institution. The interview is not designed to trick or intimidate, it is simply a conversation, not an interrogation. It is a way for an admissions staff to get to know the applicant as a real live person. A college is more likely to accept someone they've met face to face rather than someone they've only seen on paper. Students should also not enter the interview as passive subjects; they should use their visit as an opportunity to "interview the college". Some colleges will want you to have a personal interview; some schools may have alumni interviewers that live in the vicinity of Solebury School. Contact each college to get the right information.

Tips for the Interview

- Dress neatly and be on time.
- Read about the college carefully before you visit.
- Be polite and respectful. Maintain eye contact to show interest.
- Do not ask questions easily answered on the website, but feel free to ask for more information. (See following page for ideas.)
- If your application is already in, be prepared to answer questions about and/or expand on anything that you have said.
- Take along an unofficial copy of your transcript.
- Parents: If you are asked to participate in an interview, please do not overshadow your son or daughter. Let the student do the talking.
- Send a thank-you note after the interview!

Be prepared to answer any of the following questions:

- Why do you want to go to college?
- Why have you chosen this college?
- What courses did you most enjoy in high school and why?
- Have you ever had a job? If so, was it a good experience or not?
- What do you do in your free time?
- What have you read lately? Did you like it? Why?
- What academic subjects would you like to study in college? What extra-curricular activities would you like to participate in?
- How do you get along with people?
- Why should we accept you? What can you offer us?
- If you could have a conversation with anyone living or dead who would it be?
- Describe yourself in one word. How would your best friend describe you?
- What would your best friend say is your main weakness? What would you say is your main weakness? Strength?
- Do you have any specific career goals?

If you attend a class, ask yourself:

- Are students interested in the material? Do they participate in class?
- Are students prepared for class?
- Am I intellectually challenged? Would I feel comfortable as a student in this setting?
- Is there good rapport between professors and students?

Be prepared to ask the interviewer any of the following questions: 10

- If I get financial aid, is that guaranteed over 4 years?
- I'm also looking at College X which seems similar to your school. What would you say are the differences between this college and College X?
- How good is campus security and how safe is the surrounding environment?
- Do you have information about what students from different departments do after they graduate?
- Will my courses be taught by professors or graduate assistants?
- If there is anything you could change about this school, what would it be?
- What are my chances of being admitted?

Be prepared to ask students any of the following questions:

- How many hours a day do you study? Is that typical of most students here?
- Do many students go home on weekends or live off-campus?
- Do many students work?
- Are fraternities and sororities popular?
- What do you like the most about this college? What do you like the least?
- How easy is it to get the classes you want at registration?
- If you had to do it over again, would you still choose this college?

The Essay

The college essay is an opportunity to make a personal statement -- to reveal something to the admissions committee about who you are. Do not think narrowly about the essay -- it does not have to look or to be like any particular thing. Liberate your thinking and recognize your differences and your strengths. Essays can be directed in any area that you have an interest, including math, science, art, hunting, holography, dance, music, et cetera.

While essays do not have to be about any particular thing, all good essays will reveal something about your attitudes, experiences, personal qualities, imagination, sense of humor and creativity. The why of something is always better than the what. Good essays will also indicate the clarity of your thinking and your ability to convey your thoughts in written form.

The First Draft

Write the first draft of your essay focusing on content. Only be concerned with getting your thoughts down on paper. Then set it aside for a day or two. After distancing yourself you can reread your essay with a fresh perspective and make changes. At this point you can begin to consider matters of organization, style, grammar, spelling and tone. Once you have written your first draft, you may wish to share it with your family, English teacher, advisor, or college counselor. (Always have someone very competent proofread the essay for writing mechanics.) They may be able to offer suggestions, but the final product should be your own.

The key to success with an essay is to give yourself enough time to do some serious thinking, writing and editing. As with any piece of writing of quality, you should expect to write many drafts of your essay.

DO's:

Do think small and write about something about which you know. Often it is the small moments that reveal the most about us.

Do reveal yourself in your writing.

Do show rather than tell. Give examples to bring your essay to life.

Do write in your own voice and style.

Do tell the truth.

Do present your essay neatly.

DON'Ts:

Don't write what you think others want to read.

Don't exaggerate or write to impress.

Don't use a flowery, inflated or pretentious style.

Don't neglect the technical part of your essay (grammar, spelling, etc.).

Don't ramble -- say what you have to say and conclude.

Senior Year

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September:

- Meet with Erin to review your college list
- Finalize a balanced college list with a maximum of ten colleges
- Register for the October SAT/ACT, if appropriate
- Take the September ACT, if appropriate
- Visit any colleges on your list that you did not visit over the summer
- Register for AP exams, if appropriate
- Know the application deadline calendar (see monthly newsletters)
- Meet with colleges visiting Solebury
- Complete your applications and writing supplements
- Continue to keep Scoir updated

October:

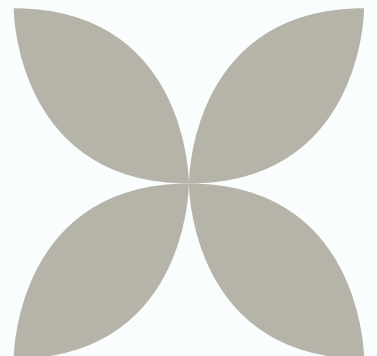
- Take SAT/ACT
- Register for AP exams, if appropriate
- Credential requests for applications with November deadlines are due
- Meet with colleges visiting Solebury
- Fill out Financial Aid Forms (FAFSA) with parents
- Complete your applications and writing supplements
- Continue to keep Scoir updated

November:

- Early Decision/Early Action applications are due
- Credential requests for applications with December and January deadlines are due
- Continue to keep Scoir updated as you apply
- Finalize and submit Financial aid Forms

December:

- Begin to receive Early Action/Early Decision letters
- Update Scoir with college decisions
- Talk to your college counselor about next steps
- February credential requests are due****



January:

- Credential requests for all remaining applications are due
- Continue to update Scoir on application and college decisions

February:

- Visit or revisit colleges where accepted
- Continue to update Scoir on application and college decisions

March:

- Utilize Spring Break to visit/revisit colleges
- Begin to receive Regular Decision letters
- Continue to update Scoir on application and college decision

April:

- Visit/re-visit colleges, as necessary to make enrollment decisions
- Decide where you will enroll
- Accept one offer of admission and send deposit
- Withdraw from colleges you decline, either through the college admission portal or by email
- If wait-listed, write to college to indicate your continued interest or to decline spot on wait-list on and college decision

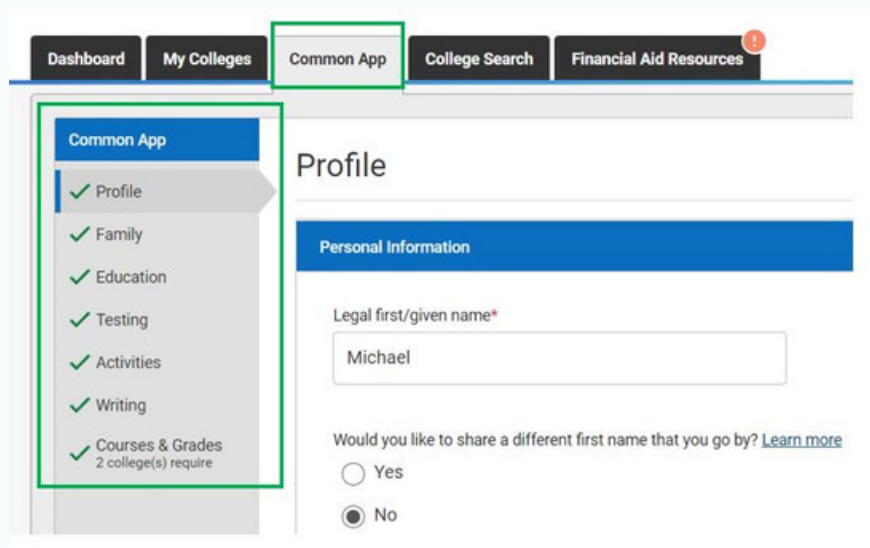


The Application

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More than 1,000 colleges and universities use the same application, known as Common App. Some colleges, such as University of California system and those in the UK, have their own application to apply to multiple colleges at once. And while you can apply to most HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) through Common App, there is also a separate application you can use. While some colleges only use their own institutional application, students likely will not have to fill out a separate application for each college!

Students will enter personal and academic information in Common App that is shared with all schools, and will then add colleges (up to 20) and answer questions specific to each one. Some colleges require supplemental writing, others do not. The process for each school is slightly different. We advise students to apply to no more than 10 schools, balancing their list with colleges that range in selectivity, and ensuring that each college meets their needs.



Click on the logos below to learn more:



Scholarships & Financial Aid

Before discussing the logistics of applying for financial aid, here are some notes:

Stay away from scholarship scams. Do not pay for a service that promises to deliver access to millions of dollars worth of financial aid. These scholarship services use search engines that are free and available to you. One of the best of these free search engines is www.fastweb.com. Scholarships are also available through sites such as: collegeboard.org, goingmerry.com, scholarships.com, and the scholly app.

There may be a scholarship out there for you, and there may not. The best way to limit college expenses (and your wisest use of time and effort) is to get the best possible financial aid package you can from each college. In order to do this, you need to understand how the financial aid game works...

Financial Aid Basics

While some colleges have scholarships based on merit (academic, athletic, artistic), most financial aid is based on need. Financial need is determined by a formula that makes an analysis of family income, assets, liabilities, size, age of parents, and other variables. The Student Aid Index (SAI) computed using information the parents supply on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile. Once the SAI is established, the college will try to put together a package to make up the difference between what you can pay and what the college costs. The package is usually part grant (award that does not have to be paid back), part work-study (an amount you must earn by employment with the college), and part loan (award which does have to be paid back).

Even though most financial aid is based on need, this does not mean that colleges meet the full need of all applicants. Many institutions give their aid to the students they want most that have need. Therefore, students usually get the most aid at schools where they exceed the academic profile of the average student.

It is also true that some of the most expensive schools in the nation are the most generous in giving aid, so students should not limit themselves to those schools they think they can afford. Often times, expensive private colleges turn out to be no more expensive than state schools because of the aid they can provide. Students should apply to any school they are truly interested in, and see how the chips fall. Students should also apply to at least one school that they are sure they can afford no matter what kind of aid they get.

Financial Aid Forms

THE FAFSA

Every college uses this form (The Free Application for Federal Student Aid) to help determine your need; it also qualifies you for consideration for all types of federal aid, including loans. The FAFSA must be filed online at www.fafsa.ed.gov.

File as soon after October 1st as possible.

The information you provide is based on the tax returns you and your parents have reported through the IRS.

THE CSS PROFILE

Besides the FAFSA, the other important form is the CSS PROFILE. If you are applying to any schools that use this form, send in this form as soon as possible (do not wait). You can register on-line at www.collegeboard.org

The first step is to register by filling out the simple "Worksheet" (it costs \$25.00 to register and \$16.00 for each school you apply to.)

Once they receive your registration, The CSS PROFILE will send you additional forms that you will have to fill out.

Additional Forms

Those colleges that don't use the CSS PROFILE may have their own form that they want you to fill out. Look in their literature or call each school to make sure you know what you need to do.

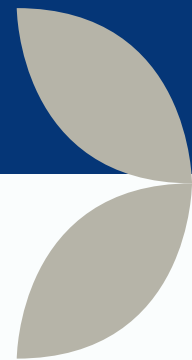
Deadlines

Every college has a different deadline for when these forms need to be filed. Please check with each college to find out what their policies & deadlines are. And remember, we are here for you every step of the way!



College Visit Form

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COLLEGE VISIT PERMISSION

Student's Name: _____

Date(s) to be away from school: _____

College(s) to be visited: _____

Class Missed	Teacher	Teacher's Signature
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Boarding Students: Dorm/Evening Study Hall _____

Approval from Erin: _____

Additional Notes:

Conclusion



The college search and application process can be a very exciting time for students and their families. It is a time of self-reflection, investigation and discovery. It is an opportunity to expand upon the interests you've developed during your time at Solebury as well as explore new opportunities at the college level. Dream big, celebrate your achievements, and know that there is only one you.

We hope that students can find a variety of colleges to apply to that will challenge them, support them and help them grow. College can be a very transformative and enriching experience if students embrace the possibilities that it provides. While some students may not get admitted to their top choice, we are confident that students will end up where they are supposed to be and ultimately be very successful both in college and life.

Best of luck in a very successful college search. You've got this!

Warmly,
Your College Counseling Team

