



College Counseling Handbook 2026-2027



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7th Edition

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Introduction

In my experience, most students and parents begin the process of applying to college already misled and unnerved by relentless waves of speculation and misinformation that persist online and in many social circles. The goal of this handbook is to provide readers with a fundamental understanding of the many aspects of applying to college. The information and recommendations contained herein are based on conversations with admissions offices and college coaches, as well as parents, students, various personnel at BMA, and research using credible, verifiable sources.

This year's edition has a several vital bits of new information: 1) A discussion of the NCAA's new age-based ruling; 2) An explanation of who submits what documents to colleges; 3) A section on Early Decision strategy; 4) How and when to consider using AI in college applications. Where possible, I have also shortened this handbook. Even if you have read this in the past, please read it again as doing so will allow us to have more productive conversations that center directly on your needs rather than general information about college admissions.

While I am not an advocate of direct college counseling in the earlier grades, throughout this handbook a certain theme will appear repeatedly: a college application is a reckoning of the past and, as such, the hardest work of any application to any college *comes in the years before a person applies*. For this reason, I encourage parents of younger students to read this entire handbook, and to use what you learn to help your child grow to his or her fullest potential during these special years.

Please note that the information contained herein is tailored specifically to the needs of the student-athletes at Burke Mountain Academy and, therefore, this handbook is very different from what you might encounter at a more generalist secondary school. Previous editions of this handbook have been written for the single purpose of parent education but I have incrementally been revising it to speak directly to applicants, too, as it is a good introductory text for them.

I hope you find this handbook informative and enjoyable to read.

Tom Bojko
Director of College Counseling

The Big Picture

I. Narrative Evaluations and Owning Your Success

A college application is largely an accounting of the past. As such, nearly all the work—*the hard work*—of a college application happens in the years preceding the actual filling out of a college application. A strong academic record and a respectable character cannot suddenly be invented or fudged once a student starts applying to college any more than low FIS points can be. In fact, filling out a college application is just one part of a long chain of decisions and actions that ultimately yield the options that will be available to you for college. This concept—that of your role in creating your options—is one that I will revisit repeatedly throughout this handbook.

Since the school's founding in 1970, narrative evaluations have formed the cornerstone of BMA's academic philosophy and practice but they also create the foundation of all college applications. If a student has utilized the resources at BMA to full advantage, the comprehensive nature of the narrative evaluations will work in the student's favor. Yes, some of our students struggle and, if they struggle during the year before they apply to college, this will likely appear in the summary of the narratives that we send to colleges. However, such narratives will also emphasize the student's attempts to confront difficulty and, therefore, a student who has struggled in some areas has every opportunity to give a positive impression to an admissions office.

Of course, the transparency of the narratives can cut both ways. Teachers should always write narratives that are encouraging and provide a pathway to growth, but that does not mean they are uniformly positive or flattering. **While teachers do the manual work of writing the narratives, in a broader sense these documents have already been written by the actions of the students themselves.** If a student has persistently refused to address shortcomings or ignored areas of growth this will be clear to admissions officers. A crucial factor in BMA's strong relationships with admissions offices is our open and honest communication.

Accompanying every summary sent as part of a college application is this message to the admissions offices:

Summary of Narrative Evaluations

Below is a summary of last year's narrative evaluations for XXX. Please note that college admissions is not under consideration when teachers write these evaluations. Therefore, they have the potential to be quite critical and reveal details a graded transcript does not. In exchange for our transparency, we ask admissions officers to focus not on the blemishes or periods of challenge but on a student's overall development, mastery, intellectual curiosity, and decency.

On a somewhat related note, BMA **does not** report disciplinary infractions to colleges. Given our desire to create the space for failure and the learning that should accompany it, our position is that disciplinary infractions are a part of learning that is not relevant to a college application.

II. Randomness & the Limitations of a Layperson's Perspective

Yes, fortune favors the prepared but no matter how wisely we manage our lives we must accept that admission to selective colleges has become far more difficult than in years past. The reason is simply that applicant pools nowadays are larger and deeper, and, at the same time, admissions offices have become attuned to the value of admitting a wider range of applicants than in the past; I would expect this to continue, despite any legal or political challenges to how admissions is conducted.

At the most selective colleges, *randomness* plays a role in the relative thimbleful of applicants who are admitted. **However, it is worth remembering that applicants are most vulnerable to randomness and variables beyond their control when they follow a narrow plan.** In other words, we do not recommend an approach that amounts to “Dartmouth or bust”.

One way of obtaining a stronger appreciation for randomness in college admissions is to make a rough calculation of the acceptance rate for individuals as opposed to the overall acceptance rate—after all, applicants are *individuals*; no one person is the overall applicant pool. Consider this: if a college has an overall acceptance rate of, say, 10%, the acceptance rate for any individual is going to be much lower than this. For starters, having a shot at being in that 10% isn't equally available to all applicants. If many applicants at BMA benefit from designated pull spots for alpine ski racing, so do applicants elsewhere who are chasing spots designated for other athletic teams. There is also the orchestra to consider, and a college may have some pressing development needs, or they want a few computer science whizzes. There are spots set aside for all sorts of institutional priorities. You must also figure that most colleges strive for a gender balance and most want to enroll students from every state—not to mention international students—as well as a mix of students from both public and private schools. While it is true that not all these categories represent independent variables, I hope this makes clear the point that **the published acceptance rate is not an accurate way of predicting one's own potential for admission.**

The randomness of admissions decisions—or something very like randomness—comes into play in other ways, ways that are very often misinterpreted. Let's say Student A is denied from Middlebury but Student B, whom some might regard as less suited, is admitted. This can indeed be a confusing scenario. In such moments, it is essential to remember that admissions decisions are not arrived at through linear assessments based on rigid, public criteria. As such, one's own notion of fairness or suitability—or *merit*, a word that seems to be bandied about with little critical scrutiny—bears little resemblance to the criteria used by an admissions office.

Another scenario I am often asked to explain: Student A applied ED to, say, Bates College and was rejected. Does this mean that Student A will necessarily be rejected in the next round by other colleges that, by certain publicly available (and often misleading) “measures”, are “better” than Bates? I invite you to consider the following: 1) Other colleges don't know nor are they influenced by the fact that she was denied by Bates and, therefore, Bates' decision doesn't have any effect on the decisions of other colleges; 2) Inventing one's own admissions criteria that is, with disheartening frequency, based on the rankings done by a news outlet is a deeply flawed approach for many reasons but, for our purposes here, I will simply say this: admissions offices make admissions decision whereas *US News and World Report* and their ilk publish material that is

designed to generate web hits and sell advertising, not determine where someone will be admitted to college.

It's also worth considering hard evidence. Over the years—at BMA and elsewhere—I have seen plenty of applicants denied by one college only to be admitted to a “better” one. I have also seen “stronger” applicants denied by a particular college and “weaker” ones admitted (Mind you, “stronger” and “weaker” are not characterizations I make but reflect what I hear around me.). **In short, it's essential to remember that none of us is on an admissions committee at any college and, therefore, our own conclusions risk being speculative and misleading.**

III. What Happens – and When – and Why?

Grades 9 & 10

There is no reason ninth or tenth grade students should think much about college; certainly, they should not be obsessing over individual colleges. Instead, it is essential that they develop the **discipline, planning skills, and emotional balance** to thrive in BMA's intensive environment, particularly during the race season. Rather than thinking about college, they should concentrate on learning the content of their courses, on developing effective study habits, on adapting to the physical and emotional demands of their training and travel, on making healthy relationships, on gaining an appreciation for the learning opportunities inherent in narrative evaluations and, crucially, they should concentrate on learning how to support others in their pursuit of excellence. Ideally, they will also internalize the life-long values of learning for learning's sake and of hard work, two of BMA's foundational values. Students in the lower grades must also learn how to manage periods of struggle and even outright failure. **Please re-read this paragraph and ask yourself if there is any need to add college planning to this already exhaustive list.**

Grades 11 & 12 or 11, 12, and 13

For the sake of convenience and clarity, I will refer to these different grades, however, in other communication and discussions around BMA you will likely hear students characterized by their year of graduation, not by grade.

Grade 11

By Grade 11, we would like to believe that our students have matured and are able to face their challenges as young adults. However, we must also recognize that this is the first year of FIS for most and it is entirely possible that some will struggle to adapt to the new demands on their time, bodies, and emotions. Historically, Grade 11 is any high school student's most important year for college admissions; for students who opt for the five-year plan, this shifts forward by a year and, thus, they buy themselves time to adjust to FIS competition.

Grade 12—Four-year plan

For several years, college advising was directly integrated into the schedules of all 12th graders in English 12, a course I taught, and during the October training camps in Europe. However, since the advent of our EU program, college advising occurs in small-group sessions with me. These sessions are integrated into the students' schedules until I relocate to Europe for the duration of the competition season. While there, I visit the October training camps to help refine, in particular,

the EA/ED/REA applications; after the camp, I also work with students via email and Zoom. Last year was our first year with this new model and it was every bit as successful as the model that preceded it.

Grade 12—Five-year plan

For students under this plan, Grade 12 becomes the most important year for college admissions. For these students, I will summarize their senior year narratives as part of the application, as opposed to the junior year narratives.

Grade 13 - Five-year plan

The plan for this group is the same as the one for Grade 12—Four-year plan but takes place in the 13th grade rather than the 12th.

A Note on the Timeline

At most private high schools, students begin college counseling in the second semester of their junior year—often sooner. However, we don't want our students fretting about college during the competition season as it risks putting counter-productive pressure on their performance and development as well as their overall emotional welfare. For this and other reasons we begin formal college advising in the spring of the 11th grade (or, for those under the five-year plan, the spring of their 12th grade).

You might wonder if this timing puts students at a disadvantage in college admissions—are students at other high schools getting ahead of them? Based on the quality of their applications and our admissions results (See Addendum IV), there is no reason to believe this is the case. In fact, it is tempting to suggest that by starting college counseling earlier in the junior year—to say nothing of in the lower grades—other schools simply prolong the process and, in doing so, confer extra stress *and no advantage* on their students. **Moreover, it seems counter to our educational philosophy to organize almost half of one's high school tenure to trying to get into college rather than focusing on being a high school student.**

IV. General Academic Advice

Your coursework—and how you approach it—is a crucial element in the string of choices you make that will largely determine the options you have for college. We believe that students should follow the pathway through high school that best suits their interests and abilities, as well as a full night's sleep. Every selective college wants applicants who, as a baseline for consideration, are not just academically engaged as vigorously as their circumstances allow and, for the most selective colleges, in some way intellectually distinguished even among other high-achieving outliers in the applicant pool. Therefore, all students at BMA need to take full advantage of the academic opportunities on offer. **Colleges are multifaceted institutions but, at their core, they are institutions of learning.**

Athletic pull spots are very limited so we discourage you from assuming this will be your primary avenue to acceptance, or from assuming that college coaches can override academic requirements, stated or implied. Yes, many of our students benefit from athletic pull

every year but this does not justify an academic strategy that assumes special athletic consideration.

Since part of every college application comes with an explanation of BMA's academic context, admissions offices can easily deduce when an applicant is or is not fully engaged academically. Mind you, not every student at BMA—nor at any high school—should be taking the maximum load of the most challenging courses. Not everyone is built for that—**but nor is everyone built to attend any of the most selective colleges.**

Our Advice

- If you are on **the four-year plan**, take a full academic load (5 courses) every year. It's that simple. You should also check the admissions requirements (or recommendations), specifically for foreign languages as these vary. If you are on **the five-year plan**, your course load is more flexible and, therefore, we suggest that you clarify your goals with the Academic Director and the Director of College Counseling.
- Some four-year students at BMA will be tempted to take neither a foreign language nor an additional elective in the senior year, which leaves them with a light load. While this might allow such students to meet BMA's minimum requirement for graduation, admissions offices, especially at the more selective colleges, will look upon this unfavorably as it falls short of full academic engagement.

Coursework outside BMA

As a small school with a small faculty, our academic options are limited compared to larger schools, though we continue to grow these offerings and match them with students' interests and needs; it's also worth pointing out that BMA currently offers more academic options than at any time in its history.

However, when the need arises, we strive to support students studying subjects of interest that lie beyond of our curriculum. **However, we do not issue transfer credit to students for core courses while a student is enrolled at BMA except in specific (and rare) cases where permission has been given by the Academic Director.** Maintaining this focus on our own curriculum not only supports our academic integrity but also corresponds with the advice of college admissions officers, who place far higher faith in BMA's in-person curriculum and therefore outside options could lower the admissibility of an applicant.

In fact, we have asked admissions offices for feedback on this topic and their responses were clear and universally the same: they do not look kindly as transcripts that have credits from outside the sending high school curriculum, particularly on-line credits. Their standard interpretation of such coursework is that it is academic "box checking" or "merit badge accumulation" and, at worst, a less generous interpretation is that students are circumventing a rigorous curriculum to find easier or faster ways to accumulate credits. This, of course, runs counter to any educational institution's values.

V. Standardized Testing

Standardized testing has clawed its way back from near oblivion. Dartmouth, Harvard, MIT, Brown and others insist that the [landscape data](#) that accompanies standardized test score reports helps them target low-income, high-achieving applicants whom they otherwise might not be aware of. Or, as Dartmouth put it: “[standardized] test scores represent an especially valuable tool to identify high-achieving applicants from low and middle-income backgrounds; who are first-generation college-bound; as well as students from urban and rural backgrounds.”

Unfortunately, rather than bringing clarification to the college application landscape, ongoing changes in testing requirements only muddies it further. For instance, most test-optional colleges will reveal the average standardized test scores (SAT & ACT) for an incoming class but will not publish the percentage of accepted students who submitted their scores. Furthermore, there is no consensus among admissions offices on the actual utility of test scores. Yes, some universities have re-instated a standardized testing requirement while others require *some* form of standardized assessment (e.g., they’ll accept AP or IB scores in lieu of an SAT or ACT score). Other places killed the requirement long before COVID and have not shown any (public) evidence of going back—but there’s nothing to say they won’t change in the future, nor how much weight is given to the test when considering applicants.

Compounding this messiness is the fact that high school transcripts, once the cornerstone of an application, have become so universally inflated that any self-respecting admissions office no longer considers them the reliable measures that they once did; in fact, two Ivy League colleges publicly stated this when they ceased being test-optional. ([This](#) aptly-titled article certainly hits the nail on the head but if you want to kill an afternoon learning how grades have landed us all in a jam, just pop this phrase into your search engine: “grade inflation college admissions”.)

There is a silver lining in all this: there is no grade inflation in narrative evaluations! In a world of inauthenticity and misrepresentation, BMA’s narratives remain transparent and reliable. While this might not work in everyone’s favor, it does make BMA as an institution an unusually reliable partner of admissions offices.

Of course, none of this helps answer a very reasonable question: “What is a good score for X college”? Clear answers to this question are in short supply. The best guideline I can offer is to find the middle 50% range for the SAT or ACT and make an honest assessment of where you fit in. You can often, but not always, find this information in a college’s [profile](#). If you seek guidance from third-party online operators, message boards, or other forms of divination, I hope you will do so with a grain of salt—I’ve seen too many inaccuracies online to take any information that that is not directly presented by a college itself with any seriousness. AI interfaces may prove more useful, as discussed in the section entitled Using AI in the College Admissions Process.

PSAT

The first test the students encounter is the [PSAT](#). While many view this test as a predictor for how well a student will score on the SAT, we prefer not to get too excited or anxious depending on the outcome. Admissions offices do not base their decisions on these tests nor is a student predestined

to failure or excellence based on their PSAT score. Nonetheless, it can be handy as a diagnostic and sitting for the PSAT offers a good opportunity to understand what it feels like to take a long, physically uncomfortable, contextually arcane examination. BMA therefore requires all 9th and 10th grade students to take this test on campus in the spring.

SAT/ACT

The tests that admissions offices will consider are the [SAT](#) and the [ACT](#). Admissions offices have no preference for one or the other. While some applicants stick with one test, others will attempt both before deciding which they prefer. The tests are [different](#) so it's a good idea to play around with both before committing to one. Options for doing so are [here](#) and [here](#).

VI. NCAA Divisions, the Ivy League, NESCAC, USCSA

While it's probably obvious that not all athletic conferences, leagues, governing bodies, federations, rogue factions are the same, the differences are often misunderstood. If you are already bored, feel free to skip to the section below, entitled *Do I really have to think about all this?* For those of you still with me, let's dive in.

The NCAA

We all know what the NCAA is, right? It's where all the best basketball games are played! Beyond that, it is an athletic conference *and* a governing body, meaning that not only must an applicant to an NCAA college be admittable by the actual college, they must also meet the requirements of the NCAA. BMA's graduation requirements guarantee that our applicants will meet the NCAA's academic requirements.

The NCAA is divided into three divisions and it's worth taking a moment to understand the differences and the motivations behind each one. After all, there is more to life for many applicants than D1.

Division I

D1 is the most demanding athletically. If you are on a team at a D1 school, it is assumed that athletics is at least as important as other aspects of your college life (coursework, internships, non-ski-racing socializing or networking). For many D1 college athletes, athletics is *more* important than these other aspects of their college experience. The NCAA permits D1 schools to give athletic scholarships although, as we will see, not all do. An interesting point about D1 ski teams is the variation in competitiveness across the group. As many of you already know, a handful of schools dominate D1 ski racing and these, not surprisingly, are the schools that offer athletic scholarships, many of which go to very high-level athletes from abroad.

Division II

DII is also very demanding athletically. If you are on the team at a DII school, athletics will be a major part of your life—just not quite as demanding as D1. Under the rules of the NCAA, DII schools are also allowed (but not required) to give athletic scholarships.

Division III

The demands of a DIII athlete are the lowest of the three groupings and athletics is just another aspect of their college adventure. DIII is also different in that there is no athletic scholarship money available and the individual colleges set their own requirements for athletes, rather than the NCAA.

Of course, this is alpine ski racing so there are always some confusing wrinkles. In the case of the NCAA, some ski teams that race D1 reside at DIII colleges. Bates, Colby, Middlebury, Williams come to mind as examples of this.

The USCSA

Like the NCAA, the USCSA is also a governing body but does not set academic requirements; the colleges in this conference set them independently. USCSA teams compete outside of the NCAA and, as such, have their own championships every year—looks like fun! The USCSA's history is interesting so let's have a quick look at it. Around 1970, several colleges in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan formed the Tri-State Collegiate Ski Association, which soon joined with another mid-western collegiate ski racing association. With what they believed was a critical mass of athletes and a strong desire to compete, the group petitioned the NCAA to allow more colleges to participate in national-level competition. The NCAA told them to get lost, and, eventually, the USCSA was formed (I've left out a few steps but you get the idea).

The USCSA membership of colleges is *massive* and you can examine the list of member colleges [here](#). There is wide variation across coaching, funding, and seriousness but for anyone who is unable to—or prefers not to—ski D1, the USCSA is absolutely worth considering. While everyone who enters BMA should aspire to race D1 or World Cup, their goals could evolve over the years and there are more than the obvious pathways to continue racing after high school.

The Ivy League

The Ivy League is not a governing body in the way the NCAA is but is, instead, an athletic conference of a handful of extremely selective private research universities in the Northeast. For our purposes, the most significant feature of this conference is that they will not offer athletic scholarships. All financial aid is need-based, according to their definition of “need”. Another feature I should point out is that the Ivy League's official website does not list alpine nor Nordic ski racing as sports. That is likely because there are not enough ski racing teams in the Ivy League to host a championship.

The NESCAC

Aside from being composed of different (and smaller) colleges, NESCAC is very similar to the Ivy League: it is its own athletic conference; the ski teams compete within either the NCAA or the USCSA; the NESCAC colleges have agreed not to offer athletic scholarships; they do not list ski racing among their sports, likely for the same reason as the Ivy League.

Do I really have to think about all this?

No. This is a new feature of the handbook that has appeared simply because a few people have asked for some clarification. Rather than becoming all twisted up over whether a college team races in this or that conference, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I really want to race in college?
2. Do I want ski racing to be an enormous priority in college or do I want a more balanced experience?
3. Based on my current FIS profile and academic history, what college coaches might be interested in having me on their team?
4. Do I need athletic pull to get into any of these colleges?
5. If so, is the coach willing to pull for me?

By making an honest assessment of what you want and what you offer, you will quickly begin to narrow down your options for college.

VII. Athletic Recruiting

Before delving into this topic, it would be helpful to get oriented with three crucial, often misunderstood points:

- 1. Admissions offices, *not* coaches, ultimately decide who is admitted to a college**
- 2. A coach's motivation is to build the best possible team based on who an admissions office will admit**
- 3. Coaches and admissions offices are motivated by what is best for *their* needs, not yours**

Let's take recruiting apart step by step, starting with the pre-read.

What is a Pre-Read?

If you haven't already heard this term, a pre-read is the process by which a college coach submits an athlete's *academic* profile to the admissions office with the goal of discovering if this individual meets the admissions office's basic academic standards for an applicant receiving special athletic consideration, or if they are admissible outright. However, a pre-read is not an actual application; it is preliminary exercise that gives a coach some understanding of the athlete's chances of admission.

As part of this process, the coach will supply the admissions office with the prospect's transcript and *full* set of narratives. Again, this is not an actual application and admissions officers are not admitting anyone during the pre-read—they are simply vetting *potential* applicants and letting coaches know who would likely be admissible. Once this process is complete, the coach assembles his prospects into a pool of admissible athletes.

College coaches can begin submitting pre-reads on July 1st. This does not mean that they are obligated to. Nor does it mean that the athletic liaison(s) in any admissions office begins tearing through these things on July 1st. It's much more likely that they are sticking their toes in the sand, refreshing beverage in hand, while taking the week off for the 4th of July. When these people return from their holiday they'll be greeted with a mountain of work (imagine doing all the pre-reads for a football team...). In other words, if you or your child is in for a pre-read, **please be patient and please do not, under any circumstances, remind the coach that you are eager for a response.**

Once the pre-read is submitted it is entirely out of the coach's hands. In fact, coaches generally take a deferential posture toward their athletic liaisons.

What is Pull?

Landing in the pool of admissible athletes is good news, of course, but this does not mean that the coach can get all these athletes admitted; there is a limit to how many athletes an admissions office will give special consideration to. Once a coach selects the athletes he or she wants from the pool, the coach will commit to them by offering to “pull” for them. What does this mean? The coach will tell the athlete to apply to the college and, basically, he will attach a note to the application requesting that the admissions office give this applicant special consideration—in other words, the coach will *pull* the application through the process. Sounds great, right? Sort of. Pull spots are very limited. Complicating matters further, no coach has a fixed number of pull spots from one year to the next—maybe it's four this year and two next. Maybe one. Furthermore, admissions offices differ in just how much they'll flex their academic standards to admit an athlete and this will surely influence who a coach will choose to focus on. **A common misinterpretation goes something like this: “So-and-so got pull and I'm faster or as fast therefore I should also get pull”. I strongly discourage this perspective since you don't know 1) the details of that person's pre-read; 2) the greater context of the athletic-admissions atmosphere of the year; 3) the options the coach had when recruiting that athlete.**

More on the Pool of Contenders

When a coach considers who among his or her pool of admissible athletes to commit a pull spot to, the coach knows that each athlete is very likely in the pool of at least one other college coach. This creates some dissonance in communication; as the coaches scramble for advantage, they ask themselves, *Who is going to be the best athlete for my team? Who is going to be a really good fit for this college? And will they actually come?* Because latecomers can be added to the pool, coaches often prefer to keep their options open for as long as possible, which can delay their decisions about whom to pull for. This is maddening for the athletes because, of course, they crave certainty and want to get on with their lives. They inevitably find themselves asking, *Who is actually going to pull for me? What do I do if Coach X wants to pull for me but I really want to ski for Coach Y? Why do I have to wait so long for an answer?* The anxiety is real but we are fully prepared to guide students through this uncomfortable period.

Nonetheless, there is no clear way to make this process smoother and the circumstances of recruiting will vary athlete by athlete and team by team. That said, one fact applies to all: **strong narrative evaluations open more doors**. Because pull spots are so valuable, no coach wants to get tangled up with an athlete who doesn't have at least a fighting chance of getting through the pre-read.

I hope this discussion makes clear the fact that recruiting is more about the needs of coaches and the degree of flexibility an admissions office is willing to grant than it is about your own desire to go to a certain college. **Put very bluntly, if you are interested in a college team, you must put aside your desire for a moment and make a hard assessment of your narratives, the likelihood of earning a second run in a Carnival, and understand the extreme competitiveness of landing a pull spot. Finally, no coach wants to hear these words: “My points don't represent my potential.”**

VIII. Age-based Eligibility for NCAA Division 1 Athletics

With the implementation of the NCAA's new [age-based eligibility model](#), age—not necessarily college enrollment—determines eligibility. In a nutshell, eligibility begins at age 19 or at the time of enrollment in college, whichever comes first.

So what does this mean for us?

The short answer is that no one knows for certain. We need to go through a couple recruiting cycles to see how it plays out.

In the meantime, if you are concerned this new ruling works against you, consider this: the NCAA may have just unintentionally shifted college skiing from a model based largely on finished products—often from overseas—toward one that may place greater value on developing domestic talent.

Of course, there are legal challenges to this new model and, yes, I could be deleting or re-writing this section in future versions of the handbook. For now, though, let's just calmly plan according to what's in place while also resisting the temptation to run to the other side of the ship and re-draw all our plans for college.

Since my vast array of assistants and interns in the college counseling office enjoy grappling with thorny conceptual problems, we've quickly moved on from dry policy to more interesting matters, specifically: is this ruling going to change the competitive landscape of college ski racing?

For years, the implicit pathway for many highly competitive alpine ski racers around the world has been something like this: 1) avoid college; 2) get stronger, faster, and more experienced; 3) hit "retirement" and earn an athletic scholarship for college in the USA. That model has served athletes well, particularly at the universities that have historically relied on recruiting older skiers. Since the new ruling restricts this pathway, it seems reasonable to ask two questions:

- Will all coaches begin recruiting from a younger, tighter age band of athletes—athletes who are developmentally more similar than in the past? If so, that's great for BMA's athletes
- Will international athletes become less attractive recruiting options? Again, if so, that's great for athletes who have spent their lives progressing through the domestic developmental pipeline

As we all know, we are hampered by a lack of teams that race D1—there just aren't that many out there. However, if the recruiting strategies of the coaches at the colleges that have been out of reach for eighteen- or nineteen-year-olds adjust to a younger and, potentially, more domestic pool, it could open more options for BMA's athletes. Only time will tell. The important thing is

not to burn a lot of energy speculating, but to pay close attention to how coaches adapt over the next several recruiting cycles.

Getting it Done

I. The College List

At some point in the not-to-distant future, you will choose among your options to decide where you will attend college. When I say “options” I am referring, of course, to the colleges that have admitted you. Until this happens, the college is not an option.

Rather than being a list of options, the college list contains *potential* options. In many high schools, this list is divided among **reach schools**, **target schools**, and **“safety”** or, **to use a word that, while somewhat inscrutable in this context, has become commonplace, “reserve” schools**. Suffice to say, “reserve” is a term assigned to those colleges that a student would unlikely be rejected from, the implication being that no school, really, is a “safe” bet.

At BMA, these categorizations don’t exist or, if they do, exist in a different way than at other high schools. The reason is simply that the core of the list will be significantly influenced by a merging of an applicant’s ski racing results, the needs of college coaches in any given year, and the competition among that year’s worldwide field of athletes. (For international families, there are a few other wrinkles and these are addressed in Addendum I.) Of course, academic performance is an essential part of this, but that’s true at any high school.

At some secondary schools, a college counselor might make a list of colleges a student should apply to. This approach strikes me as backward and patronizing as it assumes the counselor knows what’s best for the applicant. By contrast, our goal is to create a scenario in which you, the applicant, are able to make these decisions for yourself. **The best way to start is by asking yourself two questions: 1) What do I want in a college?; 2) Where can I get what I want?** As with other very straightforward situations in the noisy world of college admissions, the simplicity of these questions is often lost in the din of misinformation. If you find yourself on the receiving end of opinions that cloud your judgement, take a deep breath and anchor yourself with these two questions.

Methodology

Still, how does an applicant assemble a college list? While this is best done on a case-by-case basis, there is some general advice that applies to all:

- If a college ski coach is committed to supporting your application, this will help determine your top option. It’s entirely possible that more than one coach will offer support, which complicates the situation somewhat—but this is a complication we welcome
- If a student is in conversation with college coaches, the early feedback will generally be something like this: “Let’s keep in touch and see how it goes”. In these cases, just stick the college on the list. It doesn’t matter if any are your current first choices; **remember: your goal is to create options for yourself, not fixate on any one school**
- If a student wishes to select colleges based on considerations other than athletics, they must make an honest assessment of their demonstrated academic ability and

performance—not what they believe it could be—as well as what they offer a college community beyond their ski racing background.

- **Avoid making decisions based on the experiences or opinions of others.** Equally important, resist being attracted to or repelled by a college simply because so-and-so goes there or because you liked or disliked the student giving the tour
- For the great majority of applicants, **the college list will remain at least somewhat in flux until all the applications have been submitted.** This is natural and should cause no anxiety as we are quite prepared to handle this

II. Letters of Recommendation in Context

I'm going to say it again: **the actions and choices you make throughout high school will determine the options you have when it eventually comes time to choose a college to attend.** A very concrete demonstration of this is the fact that all students will eventually have to ask two of their teachers for letters of recommendation. In addition, I write an all-encompassing letter of recommendation for all applicants. **What we write in these letters directly relies upon the material that each student has given us through their actions.**

When I write my counselor's letter of recommendation for college applicants, some of my favorite sources to draw from are a student's performance on dining hall duty, or their civility in the tuning room, or the way they conduct themselves in airports, hotels or restaurants, or when interacting with service workers. Some other choices I consider: do they spend their idle time reading or chatting with friends or do they submit to the allure of their phones? How much fun are they on hikes, mountain bikes, or Hardcorientation? Are they good teammates? Do they take their term-ends seriously? Are they welcoming to newcomers? *All of this matters.* **In fact, given that colleges are inundated with applicants who demonstrate academic mastery, one might argue that contributions to one's community matters more now than it ever has, as does general civility.**

How should you talk about all this with your junior (or sophomore, or freshman)? Well, I would encourage that you take an oblique approach. Instead of talking directly about college, just talk to them about their lives in general. Ask about their relationships and help them understand the importance of being a reliable human being in an environment where other human beings rely on them. If using more concrete terms would help, I suppose having an open-minded, non-punitive discussion about their most recent academic and athletic evaluations would be a good place to start. However, I also encourage you to find ways to learn about their work on dining hall duty, about their lives in the dorm, about the ways in which they make life better for those around them in general. Ask them what they learn while training and how they help others grow. Ask them what role they play in the classroom—are they active participants? Do they encourage their peers? Do they make others feel more confident and better about themselves? Do *you*, as a parent, do this or do you indulge in trash-talking others? I often hear from parents that their children are not nearly as communicative as they would like but, on the other hand, as a staff we supply a wealth of information about how well your child is developing at BMA. We hope you will use it.

In short, if you would like to begin talking about college with your child, have a discussion about how they are making the most of the many opportunities afforded them, as well as how they are making their little slice of the world a better place. **Good letters of recommendation will follow.**

Who should the academic letters of recommendation come from?

It is preferable that the letters of recommendation come from teachers who have taught the student for a full year before they apply to college. Thus, if you are on the four-year plan, your letters should come from your Grade 11 teachers; if you are on the five-year plan, it would be ideal if they both came your Grade 12 teachers but due to the reduced courseload inherent in the five-year plan this might not always be possible. Regardless, admissions offices want to learn about the academic performance of an applicant that bears the closest resemblance to how these individuals will perform in college. They believe that the closer to the college years this recommendation comes from, the more accurate a predictor it will be.

Getting strong letters shouldn't be a challenge if you have absorbed the lessons of this handbook but it does tend to produce anxiety in some students. Here are some of the commonly asked questions I've received over the past several years at BMA:

I've heard I need a letter from a math or science teacher and a humanities teacher. Is this true?

No – unless you are applying to CalTech. Otherwise, admissions offices simply want the strongest academic recommendations an applicant can garner.

But what if I am applying to a specialized program?

The rule of common sense applies here. Let's say you are applying to an undergraduate engineering program. It would certainly make sense that you would have been a strong math student so why not have a rec from your math teacher? If you are interested in, say, kinesiology, it would make sense that you have excelled in the sciences and, it should follow, you would have a strong letter of rec from a science teacher.

Are some courses off limits for academic letters of rec?

Yes. Unless you are applying to an art or design program or a program that leans heavily on a foreign language, you should use choose from math, science, or humanities courses.

What if I struggled to master all the material in a class – is it still okay to ask that teacher for a rec?

Yes! Someone who struggles in a noble manner, who makes consistent progress, who is sincere about learning, who is engaged in the classroom, who seeks extra help outside of class should expect a strong letter of recommendation. While it's true that the most selective colleges expect mastery across the board, not everyone needs to apply to the most selective colleges.

III. How to Choose Recommenders

There is a simple answer to the question of which teachers to ask for letters of recommendation, one so simple that it is usually goes unnoticed: ***re-read your most recent narratives and the answer will reveal itself.***

If you need help with this, I am always available. Yes, it's true that you will not have your third trimester narratives by the time you make your choices but, let's face it, you will already know what your performance has been in that trimester by the time you have to ask for the letter.

As is often the case, the simplicity of a situation can be overridden by misinformation. Consider these assumptions:

A humanities teacher will write the best letters of rec because humanities teachers are naturally good writers—therefore, I really should get a rec from a humanities teacher. This is demonstrably false. Furthermore, an admissions office is not evaluating you on the literary qualities that your recommender may (or may not) possess; they are evaluating you based on the information in the letter. Furthermore, I read every letter and am fanatical about ensuring that the letter smoothly transmits the information contained therein.

I did well in [X course] but I didn't have that strong a relationship with the teacher so I don't think it's a great choice. This is also demonstrably false. Just as an admission office is not evaluating you on the literary merits of the teacher's writing, nor are they evaluating you on your perceived relationship with your teacher. It's also worth remembering that teachers are human beings, that human beings have varying personalities and, therefore, they exhibit varying outward expression toward their students. Don't overthink the relationship.

[Course/Teacher X] is known as being the most rigorous and, therefore, it is more impressive to get a rec from this course/teacher. Again, demonstrably false. While some courses cover material that is more challenging for some students than others, an admissions office is unaware of your perception of the rigor (or teacher) within our curriculum. While some might make the argument that, say, Calculus is more difficult than US History, this ignores the fact that plenty of students who might breeze through Calc struggle to demonstrate in essay (and other) form the factual, conceptual, sequential, and causal—or seemingly random—nature of events unfolding throughout time, while also applying a critical lens to this massive heap of information.

I suppose there are other fallacies floating about but rather than attempting an exhaustive list, I will simply reiterate what should be your guiding principle: **To choose the teachers who will write your letters of rec, re-read your most recent narratives and the answer will reveal itself.** If, after doing so, you are still unsure then let's talk.

IV. Who Submits What?

The **applicant** submits the The Common Application and standardized test scores from College Board or the ACT, if they are choosing to use them. In the case of recruited athletes, some colleges will require that potential recruits fill out a form.

The **college counseling office** submits quite a bit of information. Here's the breakdown.

Letters of recommendation

The majority of colleges require two academic letters (the ones from teachers) and one more comprehensive one (I write that for all applicants.)

School profile

This is a document that explains BMA in great detail.

Transcripts

I submit BMA's transcript. For **transfer students**, I must also submit the transcript from your previous school as part of your application. As such, it is essential that you provide BMA's Admissions office with an *official* transcript, in English, from your previous school. If you delay this until you apply to college, time will not be on your side.

Summary of the narrative evaluations

I summarize into one page the narrative evaluations from the applicant's year before they apply to college. Some colleges request the full, unabridged set of narratives from Grade 9 onward and we willingly comply.

Mid-year and Final reports

Mid-year report: This document is a brief summary of the applicant's academic performance up to that point in the year.

Final report: This verifies that the applicant has graduated from BMA in good standing.

Early Decision Agreement

After the applicant and one parent signs this, I also sign and submit it.

Pre-Read Documents

These include the full, unabridged narrative evaluations, transcript(s), school profile, and a cover letter in which I provide an introduction to the student-athlete.

V. Early Decision Strategy

Applicants have several opportunities to apply to college, but Early Decision is by far the most misunderstood. It's important to remember that colleges offer these different options not for your benefit but for theirs.

Early Decision and Early Decision II

The deadline for this is either November 1st or shortly thereafter, depending on the college. Many colleges are taking a larger chunk of their incoming class in the ED round than in the past. The reason is entirely self-serving: it locks in their yield and allows them to knock off some institutional priorities early on. If you apply ED and the college accepts you, you must immediately withdraw any other applications and enroll in this college. Why must you do this? Because a contract stating this accompanies all ED applications. The applicant signs this, a parent or guardian signs it, and I sign it on behalf of BMA. While this is not a legally binding contract you do agree to the terms of it when you sign; to go back on your word is, to be blunt, sleazy and it damages BMA's reputation with this college. Like it or not, this is [serious business](#).

Many applicants are seduced by the lure of ED for one simple reason: they are under the illusion that it's easier to be admitted in this round. The truth is less straightforward. As discussed elsewhere in this handbook, all colleges have certain institutional priorities in mind when assembling each incoming class and the admissions offices often snap up many of the applicants who fulfill these priorities in the ED round. Yes, some applicants are admitted ED *not* because they fulfill a niche that the college has identified but because they are "merely" strong applicants, their choice to apply ED demonstrates a strong commitment to the college, and the binding agreement serves the college's interests. So, with all this in mind, it can indeed be "easier" to be admitted to a selective college if you are academically viable and/or happen to fulfill one or more of the college's institutional priorities in any given year.

The problem is: How would you know? Aside from the annual grind of athletic recruitment, no college is going to advertise that they need to appease their alumni base or find new people to raise major gifts from or whatever the need of the year is. Instead, they'll just dig through their applicant pool and find it.

So who, then, should apply ED or EDII?

- A recruited athlete who *actually* wants to go to that college (remember—it's a binding agreement)
- A well-qualified applicant who is absolutely sure he or she wants to go to that college and who would be content to forego any other opportunities that might arise
- A well-qualified applicant who has learned through reliable channels (say, the Office of Advancement...) that the college would like to have them

You might have a couple questions:

1. **Are *all* ED or EDII spots reserved for special applicants?** The answer, fortunately, is no. But it's impossible to know how many non-specialized spots are available (no admissions office is going to give that away and the number likely changes year-to-year depending on the college's needs). **Therefore, it is essential to keep in mind that if a college accepts, say, 30% of its incoming class ED, these spots are not equally available to all applicants;**
2. **Can applying ED overcome academic or other shortcomings?** Sometimes—but probably only under these two circumstances: 1) Aside from a couple shortcomings, the applicant is reasonably strong and the college in question is not an especially selective place; 2) They are pulled into the university because they fulfill an institutional priority;

But if an applicant is simply tossing a hail Mary because they are under the impression that applying ED is “easier” they are probably just throwing away the opportunity to apply ED at a more suitable college;

3. **Why are there two rounds of ED (ED and EDII)? Why not just get it over with in one shot?** You might love, for example, Bates, but you love Middlebury just a bit more and you are a highly qualified applicant. Bates know there are loads of people just like you and they also know that most of you will be denied ED by Middlebury, or bumped into Midd’s Regular Decision pool, so they offer EDII to scoop you up when that happens. That’s one reason. Another reason is that a college might need to balance its competing institutional needs across more than one admissions cycle. This is especially prevalent in recruiting for ski racing; a coach might be given a recruiting spot or two for ED and another spot for EDII;
4. **Is this fair or, possibly, illegal?** Plenty of people will make the case that the binding nature of ED is unfair to applicants and there are lawsuits underway to figure out if this is the case. The reason for the legal dispute is that the binding nature of ED prevents applicants from comparing financial aid packages from multiple admissions offers. One might argue that these lawsuits lack merit because no one is compelled to apply ED. The situation is not quite that simple, however. For instance, if a coach uses one of a very limited number of recruiting spots on an applicant, that applicant will almost always be expected to apply ED or EDII, which means they will not be able to measure the affordability of that college across other offers.

VI. Using AI in the College Admissions Process

Many admissions offices now utilize an AI reader to help process applications, including the essays contained therein. They also use AI detectors to gauge authenticity. Should applicants also use AI?

Part of the value of laboring over a college application is doing the hard thinking—and writing—on your own, perhaps with a competent, experienced person to bounce ideas off. Used to its full potential, a college application can facilitate a significant step in any applicant’s understanding of themselves, what they want, and how to articulate that. It would be a shame to forego this opportunity to learn by outsourcing the thinking to AI. However, there might be areas where AI can help facilitate, rather than supplant, this.

It’s amazing that, wonderful as internet search engines were at their advent, they stood in a keyword-search holding pattern for well over two decades; the main modifications to this method were to attempt to optimize them for commerce, which led to the degradation of their utility for users. For our purposes, AI interfaces are a vast improvement over the keyword search model for two reasons:

1. AI interfaces can provide information that would otherwise cost us enormous amounts of time, frustration, distraction, dead ends and, perhaps, unintended purchases, if we were to use the keyword search model;

2. Whereas keyword searches are static, AI interfaces are incredibly conversational and respond well to follow up questions, or skepticism, or requests to reframe information.

With all that in mind ...

Research

The more robust (i.e., the paid ones) AI tools can be helpful for researching different colleges and, as of this writing, I strongly recommend their use for this purpose. However, they are most helpful—or, to put it another way, least potentially damaging—if you design your research inquiries *to help you think* rather than do your thinking for you. I have had great success using prompts such as:

- If I think I’m a good fit for X, Y, and Z colleges, what other colleges might be suitable and why?
- If I am rejected from X in the ED round—and I’m a viable applicant—what colleges that offer EDII might be worth considering and why?
- I’m having difficulty deciding between something and something else. Can you help me think this through?

I have also found that AI can be useful in providing information that is more objective—something keyword searches cannot do:

- Compare and contrast College X and College Y
- What is a competitive SAT score for X college?

The risk, of course, is that if you only know what your AI interface tells you then you could be misled. However, in my own experiments I was impressed that the AI interface that I use (ChatGPT’s paid version) didn’t simply give answers, but gave answers, explanations, rationales, asked some useful follow-up questions, and defended itself admirably when interrogated. Nonetheless, we must always keep in mind the disclaimer that resides on the bottom of ChatGPT’s window: ***ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info.*** In other words, AI tools are partners in a thinking or research process, not ends unto themselves.

Writing, Revising, or Editing Essays

I’ve used AI from multiple angles to see if it could be useful as writing partner and found that it is utter crap at this. Hard stop. It’s also insulting to your own intelligence and life experience to outsource your personal statement or supplemental essays to a machine, to say nothing of deeply unethical.

Brainstorming for Essays

It’s my job to help applicants brainstorm and write but I don’t think there is anything misguided or unethical about allowing AI to be another brainstorming partner. After all, it’s always available, no one needs to be embarrassed about tossing risky or “dumb” ideas into it, and it can be shockingly rigorous and logical in how it guides a user to think or approach difficult decisions.

The problem is when undisciplined users begin allowing the machine to do their thinking. That's why it is essential to tell the machine what sort of help you want. For instance, I had a fascinating and productive brainstorming session using this as the initial prompt:

I am interested in seashells and have collected them all my life. Very few people know this about me and so I think it might be a good essay for this prompt: "Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story." Can you help me think this through? I don't want you to give me answers, shape my thoughts, or interpret my ideas. I want more of a Socratic dialogue to help me figure out how to create my own story.

Evaluating a near-finished Common App

While it is composed of many sections of information, a college application has a way of cohering to give a pretty good idea of what person is like overall—on paper, anyhow. Nonetheless, it can be difficult for an applicant to consume all the information in their Common App in one gulp and objectively state the overall impression they are giving. In my experiments, I have found that, prompted correctly, AI is able to evaluate an application remarkably like an admissions office does.

- Applicant A is a mediocre student and lacks focus and passion more generally. Seems to have drifted through high school
- Applicant B is a high-level athlete with demonstrated passions beyond sports but struggles a bit academically. Decent person who thinks about others
- Applicant C is very community-oriented, academically solid, and a self-starter

You get the idea. It's important to remember that AI cannot evaluate an application based on a college's unique institutional needs in any given year, but neither can an applicant, their college counselor, or you. However, in the big picture, I suspect the machine's thoroughness, analytical strengths, and speed can be of use to us by offering a high-level characterization of the information contained in the application and help us decide if any tweaking might be advantageous.

VII. Visiting Colleges & Demonstrated Interest

Visiting a college can help you understand if you will fit in there, feel comfortable in the physical environment (e.g., urban -v- rural -v- suburban) and thrive overall. Ideally, our students will visit campuses when classes are in session. Summer visits are better than nothing but, really, life on campus just isn't the same when school is not in full swing. If you can spend a night on campus with a responsible student, we highly encourage doing so and, depending on the college, we might be able to help you arrange this as our alumni have proven to be very welcoming to hosting Academy students.

A visit to *any* college campus—not just your top choices of the moment—can be valuable because it will help you begin developing a framework for what you want in your college

experience. If a person comes away from, say, a campus in an urban jungle and feels overwhelmed, that's a sign that they should visit suburban or rural campuses. However, they might also find that this urban college has certain attributes that are attractive—perhaps it's the way the clubs are organized, or the college has a particularly intelligent approach to residential life—and by keeping these attractive points in mind they will be more inclined to develop a rational framework on subsequent campus visits. Again, our two guiding questions:

What do I want in a college?
Where can I get what I want?

Plainly put, after a college visit, we would like more nuanced feedback than, “I love it” or, “It sucked” or, “The tour guide was weird.”

Demonstrated Interest

Many applicants wonder if admissions offices take into account a phenomenon known as “demonstrated interest” when considering an applicant. The traditional—and most obvious—form of demonstrated interest is visiting a campus and signing up for one of their official tours/info sessions. However, as we shall see, the digital age has created new forms of demonstrated interest, such as attending webinars and, silly as it sounds, simply opening one's email.

How does an applicant discover if an institution takes demonstrated interest into account and, if they do, what type or types of interest they value? When I did a keyword search of the subject, I noticed that none of the top results came from actual colleges, even when I included their names among the keywords, but, instead, were from blogs, college prep businesses, and others of that financially-motivated ilk. When the name of a college did show up, buried among the links, I found that the colleges themselves so rarely yielded the information I sought that this endeavor wasn't worth the bother.

A more worthwhile line of inquiry, especially for contemporary times, might be this: why would colleges—especially the more famous and selective ones—shy away from utilizing campus visits as a form of demonstrated interest? There are at least two reasons for this:

- Admissions offices nowadays are hyper-aware of the idea of “equity”. Since free time and money are not equally distributed among college aspirants, it's reasonable to suggest that campus visits should not give an already-advantaged person further advantage
- A LOT of people visit college campuses. A LOT of very competitive applicants visit the same college campuses. If this is the case, can it really be a reliable differentiator?

On the other hand ...

Let's say a kid from, say, Brookline, Mass, applies to one of the many selective colleges in the greater Boston area but shows no evidence of ever having visited the campus. This can raise an eyebrow in an admissions office; if this person applied Early Decision, it might raise both eyebrows. Why? Well, wouldn't it seem odd that this applicant couldn't find a couple hours to learn more about the place he or she purports to be fully committed to?

Demonstrating Interest – Digitally

Whereas free time and travel require money and opportunity, opening an email does not. College applicants are inundated with robo-emails from admissions offices, some of these more intelligently targeted than others. The software that makes this possible also tracks the recipients' reactions to the email (Did they open it? How many did they open? When was the last time they opened something? How much time did they spend with the email open? Did they click through any links?). In conversations with a few admission officers, I learned that while opening an email does not necessarily make an applicant more likely to be admitted (if only it were that easy ...), *failing* to open emails surely makes it easier for admissions offices to deny an applicant—if the recipient can't be bothered to open an email then they clearly aren't interested in the college, or so the logic goes. Actually, let me flesh this out a bit more: if you don't open an email, you clearly aren't interested in the college; if you aren't interested then, even if admitted, you are unlikely to take up an offer of admission; if you don't take up the offer of admission, the college's yield takes a hit; if the yield takes a hit, this affects the college's ranking; if the college dips in the rankings then heads will roll.

[Webinars](#) are also track-able and can be used by an admissions office to gauge an applicant's interest in the program. Webinars are also excellent ways of learning about a college without the expense and disruption of physically visiting a campus.

In summary, I encourage campus visits when and if time allows but for the purpose of learning about the place, not because you think it will confer advantage on an application. I also encourage the use of webinars and other digital tools that colleges offer these days. Finally, please open and read your email. Sometimes, the simplest of actions yield significant results.

Addenda

Addendum I — General Guidance for International Families

While some international students might attend college in the US, regardless of their athletic options, it is more likely that they will return to their home country if they are unable to find ski racing options at a high enough level to justify the cost. This, of course, is up to each family to decide but we do understand that the enormous disparity of the cost of a college education in the US will influence many families.

For this reason, the college list for an international applicant might look very different from that of an American. Whereas most Americans will have some degree of “safety schools” on their lists, for an international student those schools will likely be back home. Fortunately, the applications for most colleges and universities outside the US are much more straightforward than those in the US so straddling two systems needn’t be a burden.

Something else that is different for applicants to non-US colleges is the transcript. We create a separate transcript that fulfills the requirements of other systems. **Please bear in mind that this transcript will only be sent directly to admissions offices or, as needed, other formal institutions and never to families.** If you will be applying to colleges outside the US, we encourage you to do some research on your own.

While we can help students with the actual applications, there can be wrinkles in the process related to scholarships, or off-kilter deadlines, and we ask that families themselves take responsibility for understanding any special requirements. This point applies to any additional paperwork or verifications that are required for applications. For instance, many colleges in Europe and South America require supporting documents to both notarized and then further verified with an apostille. This, in particular, is a very time-consuming process and we require advanced notice of a month prior to any hard deadlines.

Addendum II — Financial Aid (Domestic & International Students)

It's no mystery that a college education in the United States is ludicrously expensive and more people than ever require assistance of some type to cover the cost. Generally speaking, BMA leaves applications for financial aid to the families themselves, although the Director of College Counseling will advise where appropriate.

Domestic Students

The two main documents that facilitate a financial aid award are the FAFSA and the CSS profile. By submitting the [FAFSA](#), a family learns how much aid they can receive from the federal government in the form of subsidized loans. This option is not available to international students. The [CSS](#), by contrast, is the application for non-federal aid and helps colleges decide the amount of money a family should be able to contribute toward the cost of a college education, while the college itself subsidizes the balance. The deadlines for these documents vary according to state and institution but, as a rule, it's better to submit them as soon as possible after they become available in the fall each year.

International Students

For international students who seek aid, the CSS Profile is essential but there might be other options available depending on the college. Nonetheless, not all colleges offer aid to international students. While you can do an online search for “colleges that offer financial aid to international students” I don't recommend it as you'll just end up mired in clickbait. A better method is to look up this information for each college you are interested in. Rather than trying to navigate a series of confusing college websites, a quick keyword search will save you time and frustration—i.e., “Bates College financial aid international students.” Still, websites are not always all they are cracked up to be. If you can't quickly find the information you need, just pick up the phone and call the office of financial aid at the college(s) you are interested in.

Athletic Scholarships

As discussed earlier, many families are surprised to learn that the [Ivy League](#) and the [NESCAC](#) schools are restricted from offering athletic scholarships. By contrast, most state universities and many colleges outside the East can entice athletes with scholarships. If you have ever wondered why the powerhouse ski colleges out West have many older athletes on their rosters, it is simply because these retired professional racers, many of them European, are able to attend college in the US for free or at a greatly reduced cost.

Bang for the Buck

I am a big fan of the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* and keep several copies on hand should you ever wish to examine one. *The Fiske Guide* contains all the usual data about colleges but, more than any other compendium, it gives a sense of the culture of the colleges it covers. It also offers a few handy lists (not rankings), some of which help readers better understand ROI, debt, and affordable alternatives.

Addendum III — Post-grad Year(s) & Deferring Enrollment to College

Post-grad years are commonplace for ski racers but we expect that our new five-year option will decrease the need for one. Still, there are many reasons for the post-grad year: the college application timeline is badly out of sync with the race calendar; supply for spots on D1 teams surpasses demand; older athletes “retire” and head to college. The list goes on.

Historically, the deadline for making a final decision about which college to enroll in is May 1st. You must make your choice, inform the college, and submit a deposit. If you wish to take a post-grad year, you must still enroll in your college of choice by May 1st. The way to defer will vary from college to college so check with the admissions office of the college you are deferring from. Keep the following in mind:

- You will have to commit to attending that college before you can defer
- You will have to apply for the deferral—it doesn’t happen automatically nor is it guaranteed
- If you end up choosing another college down the road, the college you deferred from will keep your deposit (I’ve never seen a deposit higher than \$500)
- Some colleges prohibit you from applying elsewhere; nearly all prohibit you from taking college courses elsewhere during your gap year
- If you were admitted under an Early Decision contract, you cannot apply to additional colleges during your post-grad year as you are bound by contract to attend the college that admitted you (Remember: an ED application requires the signature of a contract by the applicant, the applicant’s parents, and a representative of BMA—**we are all bound by this contract**)

Gray Areas

As stated above, you can commit to a college and, while on a gap year, apply to more colleges. Is this too good to be true? Are there any exceptions?

Here’s what Middlebury has to say: *Like most colleges, [while on a gap year] we ask only that you not enroll in a degree-granting program at another institution and not apply to other colleges during your time off.*

The words, “we ask” will doubtless be interpreted by some as “you can still do it”. We discourage using this interpretation except under extreme circumstances that you should discuss with me so I can make the effort needed to maintain a good relationship with the admissions office in the event that you “still do it”. Also, the phrase “like most colleges” struck me as being intriguingly vague and invites some due diligence. [Colby](#) has some reasonable conditions of its own but does not appear to be among “most colleges”. Nor Bates. Nor DU. Nor Harvard. Nor MIT. After researching Babson’s website and conducting a variety of keyword searches all for naught I called them and learned, among other tidbits, that Babson, like many, are not among “most colleges”. Dartmouth, however, is. In fact, Dartmouth is very blunt about this: *Admitted students who postpone their enrollment may not apply to any other colleges or universities during their gap year.* Stanford is, too: *All students who defer their enrollment will be asked to sign a contract, stating that they*

will not apply to, hold a place at, or enroll full-time in any other college or university while holding a deferred place at Stanford University.

What Gives?

At first blush, it might seem that colleges restrict the options of those to whom they grant gap years out of a desire to protect their yield—but are that many people jilting Stanford and Dartmouth? Unlikely. After a couple conversations with admissions officers at extremely selective colleges, my impression is that while yield is always lingering in the air, the issue has more to do with the character of the applicant (they expect you to honor your commitment, just as they are willing to honor theirs...) as well the logistics of admissions more generally. After all, these institutions labor to bestow acceptances upon applicants of high character and they expect admittees to remain thus; they also make future enrollment decisions based on admittees' commitments.

But What About the Gray Areas?

If some colleges are very clear about their expectations and others—publicly, anyhow—have none, this ambiguity bothered me so I called around. Turns out, it wouldn't even occur to most admissions offices at highly selective schools that a person would accept their offer, defer, and then go hunting for a better option. To do so would be, to paraphrase, “unsavory”. While I understand this sentiment, I also know that there can be isolated cases in which a person is incentivized to create more options.

Thoughts & Recommendations

1. Many BMA graduates have committed to a college, paid a deposit, taken a post-grad year, and tried very hard to find what they feel is a better option. As long as they are not breaking any binding commitments with the college they committed to, this is fair game. It's not ideal for the college that is losing the admit, and, if a certain college is repeatedly burned, it will put pressure on BMA's relationship with them, which could affect future admits and we must take this very seriously. This is why it is essential that you communicate your plans with me;
2. In the case of Middlebury and any other college that makes their intentions clear but does not go as far as, say, Dartmouth or Stanford, I would ask that you respect their intent. However, if there is reason for doing otherwise, **I will want to know about it and help formulate a plan for communicating with the admissions office. It is essential that BMA maintains good relations with all admissions offices;**
3. If a university grants a post-grad year and flatly states that your end of the bargain is to attend that college after the post-grad year, then we expect you will be civilized enough to comply with the agreement into which you willingly entered. **If you choose to do otherwise, keep in mind that the supporting documents from BMA that must accompany any new applications will not be forthcoming unless you un-enroll from the college that you originally made your commitment to.**

Addendum IV — College Acceptances—Past 5 Years

2026 Acceptances

Bates College
Colby College
Colgate College
College of the Holy Cross
Fairfield University
Marist University
Middlebury College
Montana State University
New York University
Northeastern University
Providence College
St. Lawrence University
Trinity College
University of Colorado, Boulder
University of Colorado, Denver
University of Connecticut
University of Denver
University of New Hampshire
University of Nevada, Reno
University of Utah
University of Vermont
Williams College

2025 Acceptances

Babson College
Bates College
Boston College
Clarkson University
Colby College
Colby-Sawyer College
Dartmouth College
McMaster University
Middlebury College
Montana State University
Northeastern University
Plymouth State University
Queen's University (Engineering and Business)
Saint Michael's College
Saint Lawrence University
University of Calgary
University of Colorado, Boulder

University of Connecticut
University of Denver
University of Maine at Farmington
University of Nevada, Reno
University of New Brunswick
University of New Hampshire
University of Utah
University of Vermont
Vermont State University
Western University
Williams College

2024 Acceptances

Babson College
Bates College
Boston College
Colby College
Colgate College
Dartmouth College
Middlebury College
Montana State University
Northeastern University
Occidental College
Pomona College
Rocky Mountain College
Saint Michael's College
Scripps College
Saint Lawrence University
Trinity College
Univ. of Colorado, Boulder
Univ. of Connecticut
Univ. of Denver
UMass Amherst
Univ. of New Hampshire
Univ. of Nevada, Reno
Univ. of Utah
Univ. of Vermont

2023 Acceptances

Arizona State University
Boston College
Colby College
Dartmouth College
Harvard University

Middlebury College
Montana State University, Bozeman
SUNY Stony Brook
Saint Michael's College
Syracuse University
University of CO, Boulder
University of CO, Denver
University of Connecticut
University of Denver
University of New Hampshire
University of Utah
University of Vermont

2022 Acceptances

Babson College
Boston College
Colby College
Dartmouth College
Middlebury College
Montana State University
New York University
Saint Michael's College
St. Lawrence University
University of Colorado, Boulder
University of Colorado, Denver
University of Connecticut
University of Denver
University of New Hampshire
University of Vermont
Williams College