

Dear Students and Parents:

SMCC encourages you to find a college or university that will expand your horizons, challenge you, and engage you on many levels. Above all, we want you to find a quality school that best suits your personal, career, and academic goals.

This handbook is a valuable tool in the college search process. As you progress through the college admissions process, please remember there are many people here to help you - especially your College Counselor.

I look forward to helping you plan for your future! Have fun and good luck!

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COLLEGE PLANNING TIMELINE
Eleventh Grade

September - October

- ☐ Sign up to attend college rep. Meetings (SCOIR) and meet with college reps when they visit SMCC.
- ☐ Consider taking the optional PSAT at SMCC on testing day in October
- ☐ Attend MCCC College Fair
- ☐ Begin Utilizing Methodize
- ☐ If you are a potential college athlete and haven't already, register with the NCAA Eligibility Center. www.eligibilitycenter.com

November - December

- ☐ Attend Junior student and parent College Planning workshops
- ☐ Consider taking the December ACT so that you can take advantage of the ACT service called the Test Information Releases (after the test you will get all of the questions with an answer key to prepare for the spring ACT test).

January - May

- ☐ Consider taking the STARS ACT prep class
- ☐ Take the ACT (Optional in February. All Juniors will take during school in April)
- ☐ Job shadow in fields of interest
- ☐ Ask teachers for recommendation letters (complete the teacher rec letter survey on SCOIR)
- ☐ Schedule college campus visits for the summer

June - August

- ☐ Consider re-taking the ACT or SAT for a better score
- ☐ Visit colleges - schedule tours with Admissions offices
- ☐ Narrow down college choices (use College Comparison Worksheet & SCOIR)
- ☐ Begin completing college applications - especially for state universities
- ☐ Ask teachers for recommendation letters

Throughout the Year

- ☐ Continue to research colleges and careers (SCOIR)
- ☐ Research college scholarships on SCOIR, Fastweb, College Board BigFuture, and through local resources (businesses, churches, community organizations, etc.)
- ☐ Update your lists of accomplishments, activities, and services hours in SCOIR and continue to **STAY INVOLVED!**

COLLEGE PLANNING TIMELINE
Twelfth Grade

September – October

- ☐ Register for and take ACT or SAT if you plan to retake
- ☐ Meet with college reps when they visit SMCC and attend area college fairs
- ☐ Research freshman scholarship opportunities at each college
- ☐ If you haven't already, ask teachers for recommendations - they will need at least two weeks for them to complete
- ☐ Work on college applications - **Note application deadlines!**
- ☐ Finish your essay(s)
- ☐ Research scholarship opportunities on SCOIR, Fastweb, College Board BigFuture, etc.
- ☐ If you are a potential NAIA college athlete, register with the NAIA at www.playnaia.org

November - December

- ☐ Complete college application process
- ☐ Submit college applications by November 1st. If your application requires a counselor recommendation letter, please inform your college counselor at least two weeks prior to the deadline.
- ☐ Attend SMCC Financial Aid Night
- ☐ Complete financial aid forms/FAFSA as early as possible
- ☐ Continue scholarship search

January - February

- ☐ Continue scholarship search
- ☐ Update college acceptance outcomes in SCOIR
- ☐ Forward any scholarship information to your college counselor
- ☐ Write thank you letters to teachers who wrote recommendation letters for you

March - June

- ☐ Make second visit to top 2 or 3 schools to help make final choice
- ☐ Notify all colleges by May 1st of your decision
- ☐ Submit copies of scholarship awards to your College Counselor
- ☐ Notify College Counselor of college you have chosen to attend
- ☐ Enjoy Graduation!

Summer

- ☐ Attend College Orientation!

ST. MARY CATHOLIC CENTRAL
COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Go into your SCOIR account and fine-tune your list of colleges that are in your **"Following"** list. If you do not have any colleges in this list, now is the time to do that.

2. Request letters of recommendation from counselors or teachers (if required). Please ask for letters at least two weeks in advance to allow them time to write them. Verbally ask the teacher first and then send the request through SCOIR. Complete the Teacher Rec Letter Survey in SCOIR under the **"Surveys"** section. You should also update your **"Activities and Achievements"** in SCOIR. This will give your teachers helpful information about you to help them write your letter. If you are applying via the Common Application and a recommendation letter is required, you must request a letter from a core teacher who has taught you. Your counselor may also have to write an evaluation. Please do not request more letters than you need. Colleges don't like getting more than they request. Also, PLEASE DO NOT REQUEST ANY RECOMMENDATION LETTERS THROUGH THE COMMON APPLICATION (this will all be done in SCOIR instead).

3. Fill out college applications. Remember to save all usernames and passwords so that you can access your on-line application at any time. Pay close attention to all application deadlines! If you are using the Common Application, please add your common application ID to your profile in SCOIR. Ask your counselor if you have questions.

4. Your counselor is willing to review all application materials before they are sent to colleges.
   It is imperative that you meet all application deadlines. If you want your application reviewed, you should either request a meeting with your counselor or submit your application log-in information to your counselor **at least 2 weeks prior to the posted application deadline. All applications should be submitted by November 1st .**

5. Once you have submitted your college application, log into your SCOIR account and complete the following steps:
   - Go to your **"My Colleges"** section
   - Select the college you plan on applying to from your **"Following"** section and drag it to the **"Applying"** section. You can also click the **"Add a College"** button to add a school if it is not in any of your lists.
   - Once you move the college to the Applying column, you will be prompted to provide additional information including application type and method. To provide the application type, select the type from those available in the window. Then, click **"Save".**
   - By moving this college into the Applying column, your counselor will be prompted within their Scoir account to send any application-related documents, including transcripts, on your behalf.
   - Once you have submitted your application, move the college from the **"Applying"** section to the **"Applied"** section in SCOIR.

6. If required by the college, have your ACT/SAT scores sent directly from the ACT/SAT website.

7. Check SCOIR for updates on when your transcripts were sent.

8. Update college application outcomes in SCOIR

9. Submit a copy of all scholarship award letters to your college counselor for posting and tracking

INTERNET RESOURCES

College Search

College Board (SAT)`	http://www.collegeboard.com/
Princeton Review	http://www.princetonreview.com/
Peterson's College Planning	http://www.petersons.com/
Jesuit Colleges and Universities	http://www.ajcunet.edu/institutions/
Catholic Colleges	http://www.catholiccollegesonline.org/
NCAA - College Bound Athletes	http://www.ncaa.org/
Virtual Campus Tour	http://www.campustours.com/
Common App	http://www.commonapp.org/
Insiders Perspective on College Life	http://www.unigo.com/
Everything College	http://www.chegg.com/
Colleges and Scholarships	http://www.appily.com

Scholarship & Financial Aid Information

College Board Bigfuture - Scholarships	https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org
Fast Web - Scholarships	http://www.fastweb.com/
Scholarships & Financial Aid	http://www.finaid.org/
FAFSA - Financial Aid	https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa
Financial Aid - Student Loans	http://www.salliemae.com/
Scholarships	http://www.scholarships.com/
Scholarships	http://www.chegg.com/

Standardized Test Preparation

ACT & SAT Prep	https://methodize.methodlearning.com/login
PSAT, SAT	http://www.collegeboard.com/
ACT	http://www.actstudent.org/
Kaplan: ACT & SAT Prep	http://www.kaptest.com/
Toledo ACT Prep Class	http://www.starsprep.net/

Careers

SCOIR	https://app.scoir.com/signin
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics	https://www.bls.gov/k12/students/careers/career-exploration.htm
BigFuture by College Board	https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers

PLANNING YOUR COLLEGE SEARCH

WHERE AND HOW TO START

1. Begin by taking your own personal journey. You can make the ebay use of your time by knowing what you are looking for in a college search.
2. What college-related considerations are most important to you, and why? Make a list. Put aside concerns about money for the time being. Here are some (but not all) of the facts that you might want to consider.
    a. **Type of College**: Public, Private, Specialized
    b. **Special Affiliations:** Religious or Military
    c. **Academic Environment:** Very Competitive, Somewhat Competitive, Not Very Competitive
    d. **Major:** Does this school have any and/or all majors you are interested in?
    e. **Location:** Northeast, Midwest, West, South? How far do you want to be from home? In what climate do you want to spend four years? Can you afford travel expenses to and from the school? How often do you want to come home?
    f. **Surrounding Environment/City:** Rural, Suburban, Small town, Large city? Distance from the nearest big city? Things to do in the town/city?
    g. **Type of Student Body:** Co-Ed, Ratio of men to women, diversity
    h. **Student to Faculty Ratio**/Average Class Size
    i. **Size of School:** Do you want a large campus or a small campus?
    j. **Greek Life**: Number of Fraternities/Sororities? Percent of student body that is Greek? Is Greek Life the only social life?
    k. **Living Accommodations**: Commute from home? How many years are you required to live on campus? Co-ed residence halls? Suites available for upperclassmen? Freshman Residence Halls?
    l. **Extracurricular Activities:** Athletics - is division important? Organizations, Multicultural, Arts, Music, Theater, Service, Campus Activities, etc.
    m. **Expenses:** Talk to your parents and determine how finances could affect your choice. For now, however, do not automatically eliminate any school because of cost until you have investigated the financial aid possibilities at the school.
    n. **Job Placement:** Find out how many students within your major get placed within 6 months of graduation
3. Write down your own list, arranging items with the most important at the top.
4. Update and review your list every couple of weeks as you find your priorities changing.

PREPARING FOR YOUR CAMPUS VISIT

A little preparation can help you avoid headaches and make the most of your college visits. Here are a few tips to help you get the most out of your visit.

1. Register in advance! You can do this by phone or the college website. A weekday visit is often more informative than a weekend visit as classes are in session. The tour fills in the details that give each school its humanity.

2. The colleges are anxious to accommodate prospective students. If the student has a special request such as meeting a department chairperson, meeting with a coach, or sitting in on classes, the Admissions Office will make the necessary arrangements provided if they have sufficient advance notice.

3. Prepare a short list of questions you would like answered before you leave campus. Refer to page 12 for a sample list of questions to ask.

4. Assume it is going to take longer to find the campus and park than a map suggested. In particular, if the student is to be interviewed, he or she wants to arrive relaxed, not frazzled. Parking near the Admissions Office may be packed, so allow yourself extra time to find legal space to park. Do not assume that the tour starts at the Admissions Office. Allow at least 3 hour for your visit plus drive time.

5. Make sure to drive around the outskirts of the campus before heading home. This could be the student's home for the next four years; the surrounding area makes a difference. If the school is in a small town, is there a major city within a convenient drive? If not, does that really matter to the student?

6. The whole family should wear comfortable shoes. You will be doing a lot of walking both up hills and stairs. Dress neatly. If the student is scheduled for an interview, he/she should dress for the interviewer. It is human nature to judge people by their appearance, so an opinion is forming about the applicant before a word is said. If parents accompany the applicant, the student should introduce them to the interviewer before the interview begins.

DECIDING WHERE TO APPLY

1. Discuss your final list of colleges with your college counselor and your parents.
2. Apply to colleges with a range of selectivity for admission. Look for a good personal and academic match.
3. If you have a clear-cut first choice, consider applying Early Decision if that option is available. Make sure you talk to your counselor before applying early decision.

PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

1. Read and follow the instructions carefully
2. Proofread your essay, if one is required
3. Answer all questions. List all your activities, awards, and accomplishments
4. Be honest and yourself.

ADMISSION SELECTION FACTORS (varies by the selectivity of the school)

1. Overall academic record: GPA, course difficulty, any academic awards or accomplishments
2. Test scores: ACT and/or SAT
3. Recommendation letter(s)
4. Personal talents and potential contributions: athletics, leadership, artistic musical, community service, and employment.
5. Admissions office interview and other references.
6. Other factors: family legacy and special talents.

When deciding where to apply, consider the following types of schools:

Reach	You are competitive to apply to this school, but you know you will be one of hundreds or thousands who have similar credentials. This may be a school you are extremely interested in, but you know you may be on the bubble.
Competitive	You *should* have a very good chance of getting admitted to this school. Your credentials fall in the top to middle range of their selection criteria.
Safety	You should have no problem getting admitted to this school. Remember, a safety school should still be one that you would enjoy attending and provides you with opportunities and challenges.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR COLLEGE VISIT

By Cliff & Sami Kramon: Independent College Advisors (collegetoolkit.com)

High school counselors are forever urging their students to go out and visit prospective colleges. Websites and brochures are helpful, but actually walking the campus, listening to students, and checking out the surrounding neighborhood is the best way to develop a feel for each school.

Timing of your college visit:
Although summer might be the most convenient time to make such excursions, it is not the optimal time to experience a college; at many smaller schools less classes are in session, so students are not on campus as often. Residence halls are empty and devoid of all personal touches, making it difficult to envision oneself there. Bulletin boards, usually so revealing of the cultural and social opportunities of the college, are bare. The campus grounds, on the other hand, look neater and cleaner than they will look again the entire year. Try and visit a campus while school is in full swing to get an accurate picture of everyday college life.

What you should try to get out of the tour:
A college tour gives you a chance to see what is on the campus, what condition it is in, and what is missing. Is there a student center? How are the residence halls kept up? Is the library adequate? Check out the recreational facilities. Are the playing fields a part of the campus or a distance away? Where are the residence halls in relation to the main academic buildings?

The tour is also the best time to ask questions of someone who is both knowledgeable and candid. They are obviously pleased with the school (or they would not be giving the tour), but they are invariably honest about the drawbacks along with the positives.

- Don’t ask about the student-faculty ratio. Instead, ask about the typical class size for freshmen and then for upperclassmen. If the school makes use of graduate students as teaching assistants, find out in what capacity and how often they serve. All schools say their professors are accessible to the students. See if this means just scheduled office hours or home phone numbers and coffee get-togethers.
- Inquire about the academic support facilities. Is there a writing center? Is there a tutor center? Is there a fee for additional help?
- Ask if housing is guaranteed all four years. At large state universities, be sure to inquire about early deadlines to secure freshman housing. If the dorms are co-ed, is it by wing, floor, or every other room?
- Learn if there is a system of fraternities and sororities. What percentage of the student body gets involved? Do the Greeks have their own houses? When is recruitment? It can be as late as sophomore year or as early as a week before freshman classes begin.

Move beyond the facts:
Besides specific, factual information, seek out your student guide's personal opinions. How does he/she feel walking around the campus at night? How about the surrounding neighborhood in all four directors. What is the quality of faculty advising? How is the student turnout and spirit at sporting events? Is the student body diverse or does one type dominate? What happens on the campus on the weekends - does it empty out or is there plenty to do? Can freshmen have cars and are cars really necessary? What outstanding professors or courses might the tour guide recommend regardless of a student's major?

Some final thoughts:
If you are beginning your search, try to visit a large state university, a smaller university, and some liberal arts colleges with 1,000 to 3,000 students. Applicants frequently alter their preferences after visiting a range of sizes.

Do not let distance from home inhibit your choices. The United States has an extraordinary diversity of schools, and the college experience can be the best four years of your life. After you have made new friends, you will be amazed how the desire to come home diminishes. Additionally, please realize the colleges are seeking geographic diversity, and the more distant you are from the school, the more that demographic can work in your favor in the admissions process.

Best of luck in receiving nothing but acceptance letters!

About the Author
Cliff and Sami Kramon founded Collegiate Choice Walking Tours Videos (www.collegiatechoice.com). They have videotaped the student-guided campus tour at over 350 colleges, but they are the first to admit nothing beats visiting a college in person.

COLLEGE CAMPUS VISITATION
QUESTIONS TO ASK

QUESTIONS ABOUT ADMISSIONS POLICIES

1. What high school courses are required?
2. Is the ACT or SAT required? What range of scores is accepted?
3. Is their school test-optional? If so, how does that work?
4. Does the college require a certain grade point average?
5. Will my activities and involvement in high school be considered?
6. Is there an essay on the application?
7. Is there an early decision or early action plan? (What is the difference between early decision and early action?)
8. What decision making process is used?
9. Are personal interviews or letters of recommendation required?
10. Are there special requirements for certain majors?
11. What percent of applicants are admitted?
12. Can admission denials be appealed?
13. What are the application filing deadline dates?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COLLEGE

1. What is the surrounding community like?
2. What is the current student enrollment?
3. Does the college have general education requirements? What are they?
4. Does the college have special programs for transfer students?
5. What is the academic calendar?
6. Can freshmen have cars on campus?
7. Is there a medical facility on campus?
8. How safe is the campus and the surrounding environment?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDENT POPULATION

1. Where do the majority of students come from?
2. What types of activities are available?
3. Do most of the students commute or live on campus?
4. Are there sororities and fraternities on campus?
5. What athletic programs are available? Are they a major part of the social life?
6. Is the surrounding community supportive of the college?
7. Does the college have an overnight visitation program?
8. Is housing required for freshmen?

QUESTIONS ABOUT ACADEMICS

1. What is the average class size? Smallest? Largest?
2. How many students complete a degree?
3. What are the career opportunities and job placement after college?
4. How does registration work? Are classes guaranteed?
5. Do students graduate in four or five years?
6. What are the most popular majors?
7. Are students taught by full time-faculty members, teaching assistants, or a combination of the two?
8. What percentage of graduates are accepted to graduate schools?
9. Are counseling services available?
10. For which majors is the college/university best known?
11. Do students have an opportunity to study abroad?

QUESTIONS ABOUT FINANCIAL AID

1. What percent of students receive financial aid?
2. What are the financial aid filing dates?
3. Are on-campus jobs available?
4. What types of grants, scholarships, and loans are available? How is financial aid awarded?
5. What is the typical financial aid package for a freshman?
6. What are the notification dates for financial aid recipients?
7. Are there special scholarships for athletics, the arts, leadership and academic achievement?

COLLEGE FAIR TIPS

Before the Fair - Get Prepared

- ☐ Consider these questions for yourself:
    - Do you plan to attend a four-year university, two year college or technical school?
    - What do you need/want in a college education?
    - What criteria might you use in selecting a college - Size? Location?
- ☐ Before you attend a college fair, make a list of colleges that interest you the most. Then, visit the websites of the colleges on your list to try to find as much general information as possible. You can also get a great deal of information on colleges by looking at the college's profile page SCOIR. This will allow you to ask more in-depth questions when you talk to representatives at the fair.
- ☐ Prepare a list of questions
- ☐ Bring a bag for materials that you collect.

At the Fair - Be Efficient

- ☐ Review list of college reps in attendance. Circle any colleges you might consider.
- ☐ Pick up your map & head straight to the reps on your list.
- ☐ Be bold! Reps love students who are friendly, welcoming, and take initiative to ask questions.

After the Fair

Spending the day at the college fair can be exhausting. You'll probably come home with a bag or bags full of information. Here are some post-fair do's and don'ts to keep you on track:

DO: Relax when you get home. Take a break - you've earned it!

DON'T: Put the college materials in the back of your closet. Keep them on hand for when you're ready to review them.

DO: Look through the materials, and your notes, within the week.

DON'T: Keep everything. Weed out colleges that are not a good fit for you.

DO: Research colleges that interest you. Utilize SCOIR, explore college websites, request more information from admissions offices, and plan to visit.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. **Should I retake the SAT/ACT?**
   This question cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. The decision must take you, as an individual, into consideration, your scores and the schools to which you hope to apply. You should look at the profiles of the school in which you are interested and at the scholarship requirements as well. Ask yourself if your scores are consistent with the freshman profile, and assess if this was your best effort. Are your scores consistent with previous standardized test scores, and is there a particular area where you can do better with more preparation? Do the colleges on your list superscore, and if so is it worthwhile to take the test again? Is the college test-optional? If so, how does it work?

2. **When should I apply?**
   This question has more than one response. It is very important to read all directions carefully on your college applications. Give yourself plenty of time to complete an application that has a specific deadline. The college advising office suggests that transcript requests be submitted at least two weeks prior to a deadline to ensure that it is sent out on time. Please submit all college applications by November 1st. Talk to your college counselor if you think this will be difficult.

3. **Why does SMCC have a November 1st priority deadline for college applications.**
   SMCC has a priority deadline of November 1st for all applications. This is a helpful guideline because it gives you a date that you can make a timeline to reach this objective. It also allows ample time for the college advising office to collect all supporting materials. Many colleges consider you for academic scholarships if you meet admissions deadlines. November 1st almost always guarantees scholarship consideration. Finally, having all your applications in by November 1st frees you to enjoy the rest of your senior year. You can go into the holidays knowing that the stress of college application season is behind you.

4. **How many schools should I apply to?**
   There is no magic number of how many schools a student should apply to. Many experts will give numbers such as six or eight. Each individual needs to plan for his/her specific needs. Some students will apply and be accepted to only one school. Others may have multiple interests and apply to fourteen or fifteen different schools to keep all options open. Meet with your counselor early in the year. They may give you suggestions on ways to narrow down a long list or broaden a short list. It is essential that you carefully and thoughtfully decide on a list of schools and at least one should be a safety school.

5. **What is the difference between Early Decision and Early Action?**
   Early decision is a binding contract between the student and the university stating that the student has committed to attending that school if accepted. Early action is not binding, but it allows the student to apply early and receive a decision at an earlier date. Not all schools offer Early Decision or Early Actions.

6. **How do I know if Early Decision or Early Action is best for me?**
   This may be one of the most difficult decisions to answer. There are obvious advantages to receiving early admission notification. It is also good if you are definite about the school you want to attend and the chances of being accepted; applying early decision sends the message that you want to attend that particular school. Many colleges are filling a larger percentage of their class from early decision/early action applicants. However, there are drawbacks to this. Early decision is binding; you must be very sure of your level of commitment to that school because you can only apply to one school under the early decision plan. Some schools may also restrict you in the early action plan. The pool of applicants under early decision/action tends to be stronger in test scores and GPAs than the regular pool, so the competition for spots is greater. Many schools will not defer you to the regular decision pool if you don't qualify as an early decision applicant. Please talk to your college counselor before you decide to apply for early decision or early action.

7. **What is the difference between rolling admission and regular admission deadlines?**
   Schools with rolling admissions can process applications and make admissions decisions within a few weeks. Most schools with rolling admissions will also publish a priority deadline (usually in February). Schools with regular decision deadlines process applications after that deadline and have a notification date on which they inform applicants of the admission decision.

8. **How do I apply for scholarships and financial aid?**
   The vast majority of scholarship and financial aid comes directly from colleges and universities. You need to check with the individual school to determine their policy for applying for scholarships and financial aid. Some have separate applications for scholarships. For financial assistance other than academic or special scholarship (athletic, music, etc.), most schools ask parents to submit the FAFSA, available in early December. Some schools require parents to submit the CSS Profile as well. The CSS Profile is usually available in October of the senior year. While you may not meet federal guidelines for aid, you may qualify for grants and other monies from schools. Most colleges have financial aid estimators that you can complete now to give you some idea of your eligibility for funds from that institution. The best advice is to contact the financial aid offices of the schools that are of interest to you.

9. **What is a "safety" school?**
   There are three criteria for a school to be called "safe"
   a. You have the academic credentials to be admitted.
   b. You are sure the financial resources will be available to pay for tuition.
   c. You believe that the school is a good choice and feel you will be happy with your choice.

10. **What is a "reach" school?**
    Reach schools are those where admission is competitive. Applicants tend to have higher than average test scores and grade point averages. Reach schools also tend to have a very large number of applicants to fill a relatively small class resulting in low acceptance rates.

11. **How do I get accepted at very selective schools where the competition is so great?**
    Obviously, you must have outstanding credentials, such as test scores and/or an excellent grade point average. You also need to have a very strong transcript with the most challenging classes possible. Since many students who apply to very selective schools have these credentials, you need to sell yourself to the college through your application, your essays, resume, and letters of recommendation. It is important that you show your personality through your application so the school sees what sets you apart from other qualified applicants. You also need to keep in communication with the school and let them know your interest. Many outstanding students get denied admission at the most selective schools. It is sometimes difficult to understand admission decisions.

TIPS FOR WRITING ESSAYS

- Helpful Web Resources
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fuUS3FQPu8 - Brainstorming exercise
    - http://admissions.yale.edu/advice-putting-together-your-application#essay - great video on Yale's website on essays and other college application videos.
    - https://apply.jhu.edu/application-process/essays-that-worked/ - Johns Hopkins website gives examples of essays that worked.
    - https://www.khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/college-admissions/applying-to-college - tips on college applications and essay writing.
- Answer the question that is being asked in the essay prompt!
- Catch their attention within the first sentence.
- Write about YOUR personal experiences. You can write about a family member, coach, teacher, etc., but remember to incorporate your own thoughts or experiences. Colleges are looking to admit you, not your grandmother.
- Write about something that matters to you.. That gives others an idea of who you are… a glimpse into your soul… what you love doing… What do you want to do in 10 years… Show how your mind works.
- The rest of the application includes your accomplishments… the essay really gives you a chance to tell the admission reps about you.
- A story… not just a laundry list. Don't try to include everything - focus on one topic.
- Don't focus exclusively on the past - your essay should have a moment of revelation. How did it make you the person that you are today?
- The essay is not a speech - it's a conversation.
- Tell colleges who you are - not what you think they want you to be!
- They need to hear your voice in the essay! Don't worry about complex sentences or impressive vocabulary. Write naturally. Be you. Your essay can be funny if that is your personality.
- Avoid quotes if possible.
- What is it that makes you unique… what can you bring to the table (campus)
- Experiment with the unexpected. If it makes sense within the context of the essay, give your story a twist or reveal something unexpected.
- In the "story," what happened should account for only about 10% of the essay and why it matters should account for about 90% of the essay.
- Try to avoid service trip essays or any experiences that were purchased. Those are considered cliches. College reps read way too many of those.
- If you do decide to write about a service trip, don't just journal about what happened in Guatemala or Kentucky. Pick out a story within the trip to elaborate

on.

- Be conscious of hot topic issues and potentially controversial topics (politics, religion, war, etc.). If an opinion or idea is an important part of who you are, don't be afraid to write about it, but be sure to be respectful of both sides of an issue. Remember, regardless of your individual opinions, your essay is a professional document. You don't know the position of the person reading your essay.
- Do not summarize! Stay away from sentences like, "That's when I realized", "I learned", "My lesson was…". Let them read between the lines.
- Keep the four C's in mind: Content, Clarity, Correctness, and Creativity.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread!

INTERVIEW TIPS

Some selective schools may require an interview as part of the admissions process. The interview is usually done by an Admissions Counselor or an alumnus of the school. It can take place on campus, or sometimes they will come to you (either at SMCC or a local establishment). The interview can be a valuable information exchange; a chance for you to ask questions and talk about your specific interests or talents. Here are some tips on how to nail the interview:

- If you receive a request for an interview and it's optional - TAKE IT!
- Arrive for your interview early and don't bring a parent. You want to show them that you are responsible.
- Don't be nervous - it will show. Be the real you!
- You're going on an educational blind date. You want the interviewer to want to see you again. The topic of the interview is YOU – not physics or math.
- Dress to impress! Wear clothes that make you feel confident and comfortable. Nothing low cut, revealing or too tight. A nice dress pants and a sweater or button down shirt is recommended. Ties are optional but encouraged.
- Ask your interviewer 2-3 questions. Make it "flowy" like a relaxed conversation. Try to connect with them. You might want to prepare in advance what you want to ask them (for example, if your interviewer is an alumni of the school: Why did you choose this school? What is/was your major?). Don't get too deep though… The interview is about YOU!
- The interviewer will most likely not have your application, your GPA or your test scores.
- If an alumnus is interviewing you, the admission selection committee will most likely ask them how your interview compared to others they have interviewed. You want to stand out in a positive way!
- Read the local and national news - know what's going on in the world!
- You can bring your resume but you don't have to.
- Typical questions:
    - Why do you want to go to this college?
    - Do you know what you want to study? (Go on their website and make sure you do a little research on what you want to major in so that you have a background on their program)
    - Tell me something about yourself that is not on your application. (Tell them about your home life or an interesting experience that you have had)
- Ask Ms. Montgomery or Mrs. Johnson to do a mock interview with you a few days before so that you can practice.
- Send a thank you card to the person who interviewed you. It can be an e-mail so that it gets to them right away. In your note, make sure to bring up one thing that came up in the interview.

TIPS FOR PARENTS: MAKING THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS SMOOTHER FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD

By Risa Lewak, Independent Educational Consultant (collegetoolkit.com)

Is the cost of college giving you nightmares? Do you get anxious thinking about your child's chances of getting into a college of their choice? There are few things in life as stressful as having a son or daughter apply to college. Although the process is never easy, here are a few tips that may make the college admissions process smoother and more tolerable for both you and your child.

Tip #1: Let your child apply where he/she wants – even if it's not the school of your dreams.

Tip #2: If paying for school is an issue, have a candid talk about it. Explain that certain schools may not be within the realm of possibility because of prohibitive costs (but make sure you've researched all financial aid opportunities).

Tip #3: If you have real reservations about your child's choice of school, sit down and talk to your child about why the school is not such a good idea. If your fears are unfounded, then admit you're wrong (sorry, that one may be tough).

Tip #4: Do not buy the college bumper sticker for the car until your child has been accepted.

Tip #5: Be oblivious to where your neighbor's kid is applying, this has nothing to do with your child.

Tip #6: Remember that your child is not you. He/she has different tastes, preferences, and interests than you do. Respect your child's ability to make an independent choice.

Tip #7: Even though HPY – or Harvard, Princeton, and Yale – is an AP away from HAPPY, going to a super-selective school does not guarantee your child's future happiness.

Tip #8: If your involvement with your child's applications becomes obsessive, you might want to find a new hobby to distract you.

Tip #9: Do not say, "I know more about this than you do" no matter how tempting

Tip #10: There's a fine line between parental support and parental interference. You can support your child without exerting control over every part of the admissions process. For example, "Do you need help proofreading your essay?" is preferable to saying, "This won't get you accepted. It needs to be re-written."

Tip #11: The happiest parents are the ones who know their child will be happy wherever he/she decides to go.

Tip #12: Realize that your child's self-worth is not measured by the thickness of the envelope that comes in December or April.

Risa Lewak, MSEd, is the author of Don't Stalk the Admissions Officer, which offers both a practical and humorous look at applying to college. She also runs the website www.admissionsangst.com Because she still has nightmares about the college admissions process, Risa's goal is to alleviate the confusion and fear of those going through it.

I'VE BEEN ACCEPTED! NOW WHAT?

CONGRATS! You have been accepted! After receiving your acceptance letter, you will begin receiving regular mailings/emails from the college/university where you were accepted. What to do with all the information you receive can be overwhelming. DO NOT disregard any of those communications - there might be dated material that you need to follow up on! The Following is a list of email/mailings you can expect and what you need to do:

- Scholarship letters - you will receive a letter if the school is offering you any scholarships based on your application. The letter will include instructions for accepting the scholarship - this could include a form to send back or simply doing nothing at this time. Please make sure to give your college counselor your scholarship offers.
- Housing information - Housing usually requires a deposit and has a due date for the deposit. If you are still waiting to hear from your first choice school, you may deposit with your second choice and receive your entire deposit back if you notify the school of your decision to go elsewhere by May 1st. This is very important to note - May 1st is National College Decision Day. It is the date by which you should let all colleges know of your decision to attend. You should notify all the schools you were accepted to of your decision. Simply tell them (by phone or by email) that you have decided to attend XYZ University.
- You may receive a letter asking for a deposit to hold your spot in a class. Again, refer to the housing deposit information. You may deposit and get your money back as long as you notify them by May 1st.
- Financial Award Letter: If you have filed FAFSA, you will receive your financial aid award letter. Read this carefully and follow any instructions included to accept or reject pieces of the offer.
- You will receive various letters from officials/professors at the school congratulating you and telling you about their program or organization. Read these carefully to determine if the information is of interest. Call if you have questions and respond by the date indicated.
- You may receive information about their freshman orientation/registration program. This is usually a summer program and requires a response.

Keep a copy of all communication you receive in the file you created for the school when you applied. You may need to refer back to it at some point. This will also ensure you do not misplace any important information.

FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID

Be sure to attend our Financial Aid and Education Planning Presentations in the fall of every year for the most up-to date information on financial aid!

- Find out everything you need to know about Financial aid at: https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa

- Learn about the CSS Profile, which some universities may require for additional financial aid at https://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile

- To learn more about how to choose colleges with the best financial aid gifting formulas, how families can save for college without being penalized for financial aid and free gifting, how to lower out-of-pocket costs for college and the importance of filling out the FAFSA correctly, visit Educational Planning Resources at: http://www.epr123.com

- SMCC's EPR contact:

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