

College Selection, Admission, & Financing

THE PROCESS

- Getting to college is often a poorly guided & overwhelmingly stressful process with mine fields of rumors
- It's difficult to wade through all the info, keep up with all the changes, or even figure out where to start!

THE COMPETITION

- *Potential* college applicant numbers are at an all-time high because of population growth
- *Interest* in college is at an all-time high due to statistics equating college degrees with higher salaries
- *Ability* to attend college is at an all-time high due to higher household incomes and more financial aid
- *Number of applicants* is at an all-time high, aided by the ease of online and standardized applications
- *Selectivity* is at an all-time high since colleges haven't expanded enough to keep up with demand (former "safety schools" like UMCP are now competitive, & under 10% of *elite* students get into the top schools)
- *Academic competition* is therefore at an all-time high, with more academically qualified students than ever
- *Non-academic competition* is also at an all-time high since so many students are academically qualified
- *The bottom line:* you have to find a way to stand out in all aspects of your application package

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

Criteria

- Take responsibility for the selection and application process, but ask your parents for feedback
- There are many schools where you'd be happy and do well, not just one; keep this all in perspective!
- Don't choose based just on reputation, selectivity, former graduates or sports teams, but your preferences
- Use a book or online resources to compare 1) strength of academic programs, 2) core curriculum, 3) student-teacher ratio, 4) financial aid availability, 5) number of students, 6) size and location of the campus, 7) climate of the area, 8) student organizations, and 9) campus life on weekends. You'll be there for 4 years and lay the foundation for your adult life there, so choose a place where you'll be happy!
- Research the websites of schools you're interested in, check out their catalog, and take the online tour

College Fairs

- Get a list of college fairs from your guidance counselor & make a prioritized list of schools to visit
- Do research on each school's website and write down unanswered questions to ask the reps at the fair
- Dress business-casual to make a good impression with the college reps
- Bring a notebook & pen to write impressions & answers to questions, and a bag to put all the materials in
- Use the map of college table locations to find the most efficient route to visit the schools you want
- Talk with reps 1-on-1; be friendly, ask about their college experience & find out what you have in common
- Bring someone with you (preferably a parent) to attend info sessions while you visit more tables
- BONUS: Print out self-sticking labels with your name, address, phone #, email address, high school, year of graduation, intended major, & extracurricular activities to put on response cards and save time
- Sort through the materials at home and schedule visits to colleges you're interested in

Campus Visits

- Campus visits are SO important in the college selection process because schools are often completely different in person than in the marketing materials, so use the online tours merely to decide where to visit!
- Narrow your options to less than 8 schools and visit them your junior year and fall of senior year
- Don't visit in the summer: there are fewer students & classes, dorms are empty, the campus is usually under renovation, and it makes for a sweaty interview. It's not a true representation of campus life there.
- Visit a range of campus sizes, populations & locations – it may change your preferences!
- Schedule a visit/tour/interview as early as possible & request perks: to stay in dorms, attend classes, etc.
- Schedule your interview to follow the tour so you can go into it with more material for questions
- Find out where the tour leaves from & if there's a group info session; get there early for parking & walking
- *Ask about classes:* the average freshman class size, use of grad students as teaching assistants/professors, availability of professors, faculty advising, recommended classes/professors, etc.
- *Ask about facilities:* the student center, campus computer labs, library, dorms, physical education buildings, their hours, location of dorms in relation to other buildings – anything pertinent to daily life there
- *Ask about support facilities:* writing center, tutoring center, other free academic services
- *Ask about housing:* guaranteed all 4 years, coed dorm setup, floor vs. suite bathrooms, coed bathrooms
- *Ask about campus life:* how many go home on weekends, stuff to do, cars for freshman, event attendance
- *Ask about Greek life:* percent of students involved, housing, whether it's socially OK if you're not involved
- *Ask about campus safety:* whether it's safe to walk on campus at night, in surrounding neighborhood, etc.
- Attend freshman & junior/senior classes, *participate*, & take notes on the subject, teacher, & feel of class
- Meet with the dept. chairperson for majors you're considering and with the coach if you're an athlete
- Ask STUDENTS for their take on the college & pick up a student newspaper to read about campus issues
- If planning to live on campus, visit a freshman dorm, stay if possible, ask about the rules, & eat their food
- Drive around the neighborhood before you leave to get a feel for it
- Make allowances for rainy weekend conditions, etc. – don't eliminate a college b/c it was dreary that day!
- Choose a well-rounded college so your happiness isn't contingent on one aspect, which could change!
- Don't let distance affect your choice; homesickness diminishes, & you may be favored for diversity's sake
- Listen to your gut about how the school feels to you
- Apply to at least 3 schools, but less than 8 (to keep time investment and costs down)

FACTORS OF ADMISSION

Put yourself in the position of admission officers: they want the school to gain a good reputation through their students' accomplishments, and they want someone who will attend all 4 years!

Factors of Admission

How to Optimize Your Application

<p>1. Course Transcript</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows difficulty of courses, which indicates ability, ambition & commitment • Honors, GT, AP/IB, & college co-op classes show likelihood of college success • At least 4 English, 4 Math & 4 Science (including AP), 4 years of one foreign language, 3 social sciences (variety), 1 computer course, & 1 music/arts class • If behind, double up on subjects or take summer school/homeschool to catch up • Warning against "senioritis": your courses are the #1 factor for admission!
<p>2. GPA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows long-term commitment to excellence & multi-tasking/prioritizing skills • It's <i>slightly</i> more important for college prep courses, but must do well in ALL • Weighted GPA is important, so go to highest level & ace subjects you're good at • Issues: motivation, organization, class involvement, study technique, time mgmt • To compensate for past performance, show a big improvement and type a letter
<p>3. Class Rank</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows ability to rise to the level of the academic environment and compensates for differences between school grading, weighting & difficulty • May be based on weighted or unweighted GPA • Top colleges want top 10%, but the importance of class rank is decreasing

	because of the number of good students
4. SAT/ACT Scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show cumulative understanding & critical thinking in core academic subjects • Also provide more objective numbers by which to judge applicants since classes and schools differ so much from one another • Subtle differences between the SAT & ACT means you should take both! • PSAT/PLAN = good practice, NMSQT junior year, & Student Search for colleges to hear about you, so take them twice, prepare for them, & ace them! • Take the SAT in March & ACT in April of junior yr + Sept/Oct/Nov of senior yr • Colleges prefer to see no more than 3 of each test, but take the best score • PREPARE! It's a marathon/final exam for all of high school, so use the prep book published by the test maker (<i>Official SAT Study Guide</i> or <i>Real ACT Guide</i>) to study & take practice tests, & consider tutoring or a prep class for extra help
5. AP/IB Exam Scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show ambition, academic interest, discipline & maturity • Need a score of 3-5 (AP) or 5-7 (IB) for college credit; only 2/3 right is enough • This is a GREAT opportunity to save time & money in college, so study for it!!! • Whatever your score is, the class looks great on your transcript, helps your weighted GPA, & prepares you for the class environment & workload of college
6. Extracurricular Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show talents, skills, interests, initiative, time mgmt, & desire to give to others • Get involved early & convert academic strengths/hobbies to structured activities • Keep track as you do them or make a chronological list in spring of junior year • Make a "brag sheet" that lists your academic, athletic, artistic, club, community service, jobs, & summer activities with degree of participation, leadership roles, awards, honors, & accomplishments that didn't receive formal recognition • Place the most impressive activities & accomplishments at the top of each category; exclude informal activities unless they pertain to a possible major • Community service is huge; summer activities show initiative, interest, & energy • Best jobs: internships & longevity, which show interest, dedication, & maturity • They want to see consistency & leadership, quality vs. quantity: responsibility!
7. Application Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows attention to detail & neatness, interest & follow-through • <i>Finish</i> filling out applications in the summer before senior year • The Common Application is widely accepted, so use it! www.commonapp.org • PDF's & online forms make it easy to type applications, so use them! • Save it, print it, check it yourself, & have 3 others do so before you send it • Print the PDF and send the application with everything at once • Check for supplements to the application required by each specific college
8. Application Essays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show ability to organize thoughts & express yourself maturely on any topic • Colleges use them to evaluate your breadth of education, knowledge, experience and creativity, & to determine whether you have the potential to write the kind of quality papers that college professors demand • These have steadily increased in importance to colleges over the last 10 years • Download & begin writing them during summer (after July 4th weekend at latest) • Before writing, check www.exampleessays.com for caliber of writing expected • Spend WEEKS brainstorming and writing ideas; seek ideas & opinions of others • Plan, write, & edit separately (including by 3 adults), then transfer to application • Be focused, specific, & creative – if it's bland, it will HURT your chances. Your essay gets 1 MINUTE of reading time, so it has to stand out among 1000's! • Write a story for your personal statement; be authentic, don't force a moral, etc. • Maximize the good, minimize the bad; show desire to change and improve • The worst essay topics to choose are your romantic relationship (overused), religious beliefs (many can't relate), political views (too controversial), anything private or inappropriate (think, <i>Would I tell this to my math teacher?</i>), great SAT scores (too arrogant), or schemes for world peace (naïve)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The worst essay mistakes are an overconfident or arrogant tone; to review or congratulate yourself on your achievements; to write about something emotional, controversial, or risky; to use contrived or thesaurus vocabulary; to write more than the limit allows; and to write about yourself in 3rd person (using “one” instead of “I” because that’s what teachers always tell you to do) • Don’t write what you think they want to hear – another brag sheet, all the great things about their school, the commitment involved to become someone of your chosen profession, or the evils of terrorism – because they hate suck-ups • Develop your main idea with facts, experiences, reasons, and examples. Do your research if necessary to make your essay accurate. • Make sure you know the school well & give solid reasons for wanting to go there – colleges want evidence of reasoned decision-making for EVERYTHING, not emotional or random choices. • Find patterns and connections between aspects about yourself and your activities: was playing baseball really about the sport or the friendships? Did you take the job for the money or the love of the work? What other times have you endured hardship to gain what mattered to you? • Don’t be longwinded, resort to gimmicks, focus on the negative, or seek pity for a disadvantaged background • Avoid generic & predictable writing by using specific details & vivid descriptions • Give each essay a creative title, not “the ____ that changed my life” • To improve writing skills, start writing your best in everything you do – school papers, tests, even notes to mom and emails to friends • *CHEATING: Admissions officers see your SAT and ACT essays, so a red flag will go up if you submit amazing application essays after a low writing score!
<p>9. Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show your <i>intellect</i> (academic curiosity, achievement, potential, originality of thought, ability to express yourself in writing, effective class discussion), <i>work habits</i> (self-motivation, initiative, independence, discipline, energy, enthusiasm), <i>maturity</i> (sense of responsibility, self-confidence, leadership potential, reaction to setbacks), & <i>strength of character</i> (integrity, concern for others, warmth, respect accorded by faculty, capacity for growth, even your sense of humor) • You need recommendations from a guidance counselor (“school report”) & 2 junior or senior year teachers for the Common Application, so get to know them! • Get as many recommendations as possible, and choose a variety of people to illustrate the breadth of your skills (an English teacher, science teacher, soccer coach, school newspaper advisor, employer, youth leader, etc.) • Choose people you have a good relationship with – people who respect you, who really know you on a personal level • Get good recommendations by having a good attitude in everything! • Give a copy of your transcript, test scores, brag sheet, and a list of the colleges where you’re applying to each person giving you a recommendation • Ask for all recommendations at least a month in advance – people are busy, and you need to give them plenty of time to write a good one • Write a thank you note to those who give them – they’re doing you a favor! • Alumni recommendations: they <i>must</i> know you well; admissions hates suck-ups • Send the recommendations along with everything else, all at once
<p>10. Institutional Requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For specialized schools (art, etc.) and programs (engineering, pre-med, etc.) • Take these as seriously as everything else!
<p>11. Supplementary Materials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose and send the best work you’ve done throughout high school, especially if you’ve received awards or recognition for it. If you haven’t done anything really well, don’t send it – it will only detract from your application! • Try to send a variety of work demonstrating your interests, abilities & talents • The best way to package this is to scan & save/record everything to 1 CD

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use any opportunity to write an additional essay of your choice to explain glaring deficiencies you may have in your application (GPA, SAT scores, very little extracurricular involvement for awhile, etc.). This is one of your best chances to disarm any objections they have.
12. Application Deadline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows careful planning – there's no grace whatsoever on application deadlines! • Again, send a complete application package so it's not annoying • Be sure to reach preferred/priority deadlines • Follow up with the admissions office to make sure they received everything; keep a copy of EVERYTHING just in case it gets lost in the mail!
13. Applying Early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows extraordinary interest, which is why the best students usually do it • Read the details of Early Decision vs. Action vs. Single-Choice Early Action • Check on the school's website for special qualifications to apply early
14. Post-Application Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows sincere & continued interest • Schools can revoke admission if your mid-year school report is bad! • Sometimes even require high school exit exam, AP exam, and IB exam scores • Always call the admissions office to make sure they received all reports!
15. Campus Visit/ Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows sincere interest in the school and gives you an opportunity to demonstrate the intangibles that may not come across on your application: your confidence, charisma, social skills, manners, and interest in life and learning • Because so many students only take online tours, a campus visit and interview adds a personal touch that could be CRUCIAL to your chances for admission! • Practice & experience improve interviewing skills, so don't schedule your first-choice school as your first visit & interview. Don't schedule it last either, because you may begin to sound rehearsed by then. Schedule it in the middle. • Before you go, do your research on the college website and come up with a list of honest questions NOT answered by their publications about majors, campus life, campus improvements, financial aid, AP credit, school placement testing, class scheduling advisors, etc. If you find all the answers in your research or campus tour, let the admissions officer know that. • Know your transcript and be prepared to answer any questions about it. Review commonly asked interview questions and think about the content of your responses, but don't memorize answers or you'll sound like a salesman. • Videotape mock interviews with different adults & ask them to evaluate you honestly. You'll learn what you need to improve & begin to feel comfortable. • Dress appropriately, even for coaches: nothing should be informal or revealing. Guys should wear dress pants or khakis with a shirt and tie, & girls should wear a dress, pants suit, or nice slacks and a blouse. <i>Wear comfortable</i> dress shoes since you'll be walking around campus all day (women, no high heels!). • Arrive 10 minutes early to all interviews, and don't schedule anything else within 2 hours of it – you don't want to be rushed • Introduce the interviewer(s) to your parents when they first come out to meet you. Manners and simple social graces can go a long way. • Parents should hang back unless the admissions officer addresses them. Overly involved parents hurt a student's application because the interference takes away the student's voice, originality, and passion. • Relax & be confident. Don't fidget or do the restless leg thing; sit up straight and keep general eye contact without being rigid or staring the interviewer down. Answer questions briefly and to the point. • Confidence is key: you're interviewing them as much as they're interviewing you • Focus on your interests and accomplishments without bragging. If you think one of your extracurriculars is particularly impressive, think about how to bring it up and discuss it. Some good ways are to ask the interviewer if he or she is interested in the topic, whether the campus program is solid, or whether there

	<p>are other avenues of involvement in the off-campus community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be friendly and cheerful, but not overly intimate (e.g., don't share love life details or talk about partying). Be sure not to criticize anyone or speak about sensitive issues. Keep things a little formal. • If you have a deficiency in your application, bring it up during the interview and explain the reasons for it and that it's one of the reasons you wanted an interview. If you prove that you've turned things around, this could get you in. • If you finish an interview early, call the next one in line to see if you can start that interview early, but be considerate of the fact that they're busy. • <i>Be sure to send a thank-you note to everyone who interviewed you as soon as you get home! This can go a long way with interviewers!</i>
16. Demonstrated Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every college wants to admit people who will attend; they don't want to waste slots that other students could have filled • Declare an intended major and profession on your application. You can always change it later, but right now it demonstrates direction in life and interest in the school's programs. If you're not certain, declare your top choice and indicate on the application or in the interview that you need to find out more information about everything it entails before you can be absolutely certain. • Also indicate that you intend to participate in college extracurricular activities. Again, you can change your mind later about which ones to pursue, but plan to be involved and contribute to campus life outside of the classroom. • Select the option to receive your admission decision by email. This shows an eagerness to know whether you got in, which is a sure sign of genuine interest. • Be proactive and take initiative with follow-through, but don't pester them!
17. Legacy/Alumni Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many selective colleges still provide alumni with priority admission consideration for their children and grandchildren, so use that to your advantage. But this is only enough to give you the edge over someone with the same qualifications! • Colleges only offer preference to early admission legacy applicants since that is the best measure of sincere interest and loyalty. • Those with a relative or connection <i>on staff</i> at the school (particularly in a professorship or administrative role) enjoy a stronger advantage, so use it!
18. Other Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive state schools give preference to in-state students, while many private & international schools give preference to remote students. • Preference may also be given for ethnicity, gender, background, or interests. University means "unity in diversity", so schools often make a conscious attempt to increase diversity to try to unify people through knowledge and create a real-world experience. So even if you're thinking about an unusual major, mention it.

APPLICATION PROCESS SUGGESTIONS

- Start taking this seriously and showing significant improvement! Admissions officers notice this!
- Review your transcript with your guidance counselor to ensure its accuracy, then assemble each application package and send it yourself. This saves you the stress of wondering whether your guidance counselor sent it, and that's one more application the counselor doesn't have to handle.
- After calling to make sure your application materials have arrived, don't call the admissions office anymore unless something on your application needs to be changed. Calling to find out whether you've been accepted before decisions have been released won't get you an answer, and it will irritate the admissions officers.
- If you're deferred for early admission or waitlisted, type a *letter* (not an email) to the admissions officer you interviewed with. Update them on your grades, test scores, and brag sheet since you first applied, but also state why that college is your first choice and that you will attend if accepted. Again, since colleges want to admit students they are certain will attend, such a letter could be the final convincing factor in your admission.

FINANCIAL AID

- Pursue it as soon as you finish your applications, before you're accepted
- Families with incomes of \$100,000 are still eligible, & so much is available that much of it goes unclaimed
- Check the guidance office, then search online for scholarships & grants – local, then state, then national
- Search for ones that relate to interests, abilities, or qualities that others may not have (for black female athletes, Native American musicians, sons of Jaycees members, people with food allergies, etc.).
- Have your parents do their taxes in January so you can fill out & send your FAFSA as early as possible!
- Use your college application info, materials, recommendations and essays to apply to as many as possible. If you have to modify an essay at all, be sure to save both the old and new versions for future use.
- Save all your application records until the end of your sophomore year in case you need to reapply or transfer

ALTERNATIVES TO A 4-YEAR COLLEGE

- Go to community college for the first 1-2 years & then transfer; this saves a LOT of money on tuition for the same core curriculum, saves money on living expenses, provides a smoother transition to a 4-year college, and is a great chance to start over if your high school credentials weren't up to par
- Work for a year or two or join the military to save money and build motivation for college
- Work with a volunteer program (AmeriCorps, etc.) to build vision for what you want to contribute to the world
- These options don't give you an excuse to blow off high school though. Transfer applicants still have to provide their high school transcript & test scores, so at least show improvement until the end of your senior year, because transfer admission is 2-3 times as competitive as freshman admission at most colleges.

CONCLUSIONS

Which of the factors of admission can still be changed?

All of them, if you start applying yourself!

Which factors can be changed the fastest?

Everything, except your Course Transcript, GPA, and Class Rank. Among academic requirements, only the SAT, ACT, and AP scores can be changed quickly, so STUDY!!!