

University Christian High School

College Counseling Manual



UCHS College Counseling Manual

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I. Staying Organized

Maintaining organization is one of the best ways you can give yourself an “edge” as you apply to college. The college application process is exceptionally deadline-oriented; thus, keeping all your applications, forms, correspondence, usernames, passwords, essays, test results, and other documents in one location will help you meet all your deadlines and minimize mistakes. The following are some *strong* suggestions to help you along the way:

- Use the same name (your legal name) on all documents related to college applications.
- Apply to a realistic number of schools—**no more than 8**.
- Record ALL usernames and passwords for colleges and testing accounts in **one** location.
- Make or “ earmark ” **one** e-mail address to use for your entire college application process.
- Check your e-mail daily
- Purchase an accordion file folder or file box and label sections with each of the following:
 - **UCHS College Counseling Handbook**
 - **Notes on Colleges.** Include your personal notes on the colleges that you research, tour, and discuss with teachers or family.
 - **Test Records.** File ALL your score reports and make note of:
 - Tests you have taken.
 - Dates and scores received.
 - Colleges to which you have sent scores.
 - College Board telephone number: 866-756-7346. Web site: www.collegeboard.com
 - ACT Customer Service number: 319-337-1270. Web site: www.act.org
 - **Personal Forms**
 - UCHS Autobiography (senior year)
 - Résumé
 - College application information (e-mail, usernames, passwords)
 - **UCHS Forms.** Keep a copy of the following forms:
 - Counselor Recommendation Request Forms
 - Teacher Recommendation Request Forms
 - **Completed Applications.** Apply online, make photocopies, and file copies of all applications, financial aid forms, application fee check, and essays you submit.
 - **Confirmation Emails/Receipts/Correspondence.** Print and save all confirmation e-mails of online submissions and correspondence from colleges for your files.
 - **Interview Appointments.** Record dates and times of interviews, names and telephone numbers of interviewers, and directions to the interview site.
 - **Thank-You Notes.** Keep a record of *hand-written* thank-you notes that you mailed to individuals who interviewed you, submitted letters of recommendation on your behalf, or provided you with assistance during your application process. This is IMPORTANT!

II. Researching Colleges

Visiting College Campuses

- **Why Visit Colleges?** Take a tour; visit freshman classes; see the bookstore; read the college newspaper; eat the food. Consider arranging an overnight stay in the residence halls. The admissions office can help you organize your visit and arrange accommodations with students. While you are there, ask questions. Get a feel for the personality of the institution. Be sure to take notes.
- **Take an Official Tour, Attend an Admissions Information Session, Visit a Class.** For details about tours, information sessions, class visits, parking, directions, hotels, etc., check the school's web site. You may have to register for tours and information sessions in advance. Ask lots of questions. Do the following on your own:
 - Assess the upkeep of the campus. Are the buildings in good repair? Are the grounds well kept?
 - Attend a class or two to get a sense of the academic environment.
 - Visit a residence hall and assess the cleanliness, comfort, noise level, privacy, and safety.
 - Eat a meal on campus and rate the food and dining options.
 - Assess the college location and its surroundings.
 - Visit the library and labs. Assess the resources, equipment, hours, and helpfulness of staff. How modern is the technology?
 - Evaluate crime statistics and campus security policies.
 - Read bulletin boards and student newspapers for insight into current campus concerns and events.
 - Assess the range of services, products, and facilities in the college bookstore and student center.
- **Visit Special Interest Areas**
 - Libraries
 - Athletic facilities
 - Fine Arts facilities
 - Newspaper office
 - Specialty labs
 - Internship and Career Counseling Center
 - Extracurricular offices
 - Student bookstore
- **Talk to Current Students.** A coffee shop or snack bar might be a good place to find students willing to talk. Observe students and note:
 - Diversity
 - Appearance/attitude
 - Energy level
 - Intellectual level
 - Conversational topics and tone
 - Friendliness
- **Following your Visit, Ask Yourself:**
 - Were the people I met friendly? Would I like to get to know them better?
 - What is the quality of the instruction and academic atmosphere?
 - Would I like to spend more time on this campus?
 - What is distinctive about the college?
 - Is this an environment where I would feel happy and challenged for the next four years?

- **North Carolina Colleges and Universities.** Take advantage of the variety of colleges within a two-three hour drive of Hickory. Small liberal arts colleges, large research universities, technical and art institutes, public schools, and private schools are all readily accessible for UCHS students to visit. Even if you know you want to attend college out of NC, it is helpful to visit local institutions.
- **Visit Policy.** Juniors and seniors are allowed to take time from classes at UCHS for college visits. Please follow the School policy below:
 - You must arrange any college visits with Mrs. Hamblin who will seek approval from Mr. Willard.
 - You may not miss school to visit colleges during midterm or final exam weeks.
 - Making arrangements for college visits is your responsibility, but Mrs. Hamblin can assist with planning itineraries and visit details.

College Web Sites, Catalogues, and Brochures. While the single best way to research colleges is to visit different types of college campuses, a lot of good information is available through college web sites, catalogues, and brochures. In evaluating a college through its admission web site and literature, assess the following key areas:

Admission

- Requirements
- Courses & tests required for admission
- Admission deadlines and programs
- Profile of the incoming class for GPA and score ranges, demographics, and talents

Curriculum & Academics

- Course offerings in departments
- Freshman seminars
- Diversity of courses in your intended major area
- Liberal arts; pre-professional; technical curriculum
- Traditional philosophy or more experimental
- Core curriculum; course distribution requirements
- Workload; reading expectations; academic pace
- Average class size
- Honor code
- Internship opportunities

Degree Requirements

- Graduation requirements for majors of interest

The Faculty

- Colleges and universities where faculty members were educated.
- Diversity in background and research interests

The Calendar

- Semester, Trimester, or Quarters
- Vacation schedule
- Summer schedule

Costs & Financial Aid

- Cost of Attendance (COA)—tuition, room & board, fees, insurance, books, transportation
- Have open conversations with your family now about reasonable expectations and costs. If you know you do not want to take on hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt, do not let yourself “fall” for a school with a six-figure price tag. Be realistic, and talk to your parents about what a reasonable amount of debt is for you and for them.

Academic Facilities

- Library quality and accessibility
- Laboratories; computers; art studios; theaters
- Health/counseling services
- Tutoring services

Campus Literature

- Student newspapers
- Alumni magazines
- Literary/scholarly journals

Housing

- Percentage of students who live off-campus
- Types of accommodations—houses, dormitories, single rooms, doubles, triples, co-ed or single-sex housing
- Does the college guarantee on-campus housing all four years?

Student Services

- Academic advising
- Career advising and placement
- Graduate school advising
- Health services

Student Activities

- Clubs, student government, service
- Intercollegiate and/or intramural athletic programs
- Cultural groups
- Arts offerings
- Musical groups
- Church groups/Student Ministry Programs

Special Programs

- Study abroad
- Research
- Cross-enrollment in courses at other universities (for instance, Duke and UNC have cross-enrollment in certain departments)
- Independent study
- Lecture series

Postgraduate Preparation

- Admission statistics to graduate programs
- Career placement record
- Availability of career and graduate school counseling

General Information

- Total enrollment
- Alcohol & security policies
- Vehicle policy and transportation
- Freshmen orientation
- Public vs. private institution
- Religious life on campus
- Student diversity – ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, geographic, political, religious
- Campus safety
- Distance from home
- Interests, values, and appearance of students
- Personality and culture of college – each college is unique

III. Admissions Process Terminology

- **Regular Decision.** College application deadlines are generally from January 1 to March 1. Notification to candidates is in early April. All course work, grades and test scores through the first semester of senior year are considered.
- **Rolling Admission.** Mostly state universities use this application process where applications are reviewed as they are received. Decisions are usually made within a few weeks after the application is complete. Some colleges have a series of application deadlines with corresponding decision dates, e.g., file by December 1, hear by January 1. Students are well advised to apply early in the fall. The longer they wait to apply the more selective the school becomes as fewer spaces for acceptance are available.
- **Early Decision.** Students apply to a first-choice college early in the senior year (often by November 1, but sometimes as late as January 15). Notification is usually within four to six weeks. A handful of schools also offer “Early Decision II,” with applications due usually in January and a decision rendered in February. **Admission under an Early Decision program is a binding contract to attend that college.** Once admitted, a student must withdraw all other applications. Students who are ready to make deliberate and well-reasoned first-choice decisions may be good candidates for binding Early Decision plans. Only after thorough research by visiting and touring the campus, attending classes, and perhaps staying overnight in campus housing is a student in a position to apply Early Decision. Students who have never visited a particular college should not apply Early Decision to that institution. Applying Early Decision simply to avoid the anxiety of waiting until April is a big mistake, and students may regret the decision.

Many students need the fall of their senior year to fortify their academic profile for admission committees. Also, students who need financial aid are advised to apply under regular decision programs so that they may compare financial aid packages from different institutions. Early Decision applicants may be “deferred,” which means the application will be read with the regular decision applicant group. Any deferred applications become non-binding.

At some colleges, applying Early Decision may enhance the chances of admission if a candidate has a strong application. However, applying early will not turn a marginal candidate into a strong one, and such applicants may find themselves denied in the early round. In most cases, students not admitted early will be deferred and reconsidered with the regular applicant pool.

- **Early Action.** This plan is similar to Early Decision in that students file an application to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution’s regular response date. The big difference with Early Action is that **it is not binding**, and students are not required to accept the offer or to submit a deposit prior to May 1. Please note there are several variations of Early Decision and Early Action policies. It is critical to read and fully understand an institution’s policy.
- **Single Choice Early Action or Restricted Early Action.** This plan has been adopted by several highly selective institutions such as Stanford and Yale. Students file an application to only one institution under an early program. A decision is rendered by mid-December but it is **non-binding**. Students may file other applications and wait until May 1 to make final decisions. It is essential to be familiar with the policies of the colleges on your list.

- **Common Application.** The “Common App” allows students to fill out one application form and use it at over 500 colleges. Many schools require a supplement or additional information. The Common App is available online at www.commonapp.org, where it can be submitted electronically
- **Early Admission** (January/Spring Term Admission). Not to be confused with Early Decision or Early Action, this term refers to college programs that allow a student enroll earlier than usual—for example, following the junior year or if a student graduates a semester early.
- **Deferred Entrance.** Many colleges allow admitted students to delay or defer enrollment for a semester or year in order to travel, work, or pursue a special interest. A deposit may be required to hold the student’s place in the next entering class.
- **Selective Admission.** Colleges that receive more applications than spaces available practice selective admission.
- **Open Admission.** Some colleges offer admission to almost all students who apply. Such colleges usually have extensive programs designed to provide help to students with academic deficiencies.
- **National Candidates’ Reply Date–May 1.** The date by which applicants under regular decision or EA must inform colleges of their intention to enroll. Typically an enrollment deposit must be sent as well.
- **Tuition/Admission/Enrollment Deposit.** A college usually requires a student who has been admitted to verify intention to enroll by submission of a deposit to be applied to the student’s tuition charges for the upcoming academic year.
- **Double Deposit.** The colleges’ term for students who violate the ground rules by sending enrollment deposits to more than one college. If found out, students risk colleges revoking previous offers of admission. **Don’t do it!**
- **Wait List.** Students who are not initially accepted to a college are sometimes placed on a waiting list. If space develops later, usually between May 15 and July 1 of the senior year, the college may offer admission.
- **January/Second Semester Programs.** An increasing number of institutions are offering students the opportunity to start in January. It is a way for colleges and universities to manage enrollment, beyond using a wait list.

IV. What Colleges Look for in Applicants

In putting together your college list, it will help you to have a realistic view of your chances of admission. Understand what colleges are looking for and assess how your abilities, interests, and experiences fit into their admission requirements.

Academic Record. The most important aspect of any college application is the academic record. In evaluating a student's academic record, college admissions officers will look for evidence of intellectual spark, consistent effort, improving achievement, motivation to succeed, and scholarly risk-taking. The transcript is the formal document that provides the most insight into a student's academic abilities. Prepared and submitted directly to colleges by UCHS, the transcript details academic course work, course titles, grades, and GPA. The transcript is the most important document in any application. To be official, the transcript must be submitted from the UCHS directly to a college.

You will have several opportunities to check your transcript for accuracy.

Standardized Tests. Most colleges still require either an ACT or SAT Reasoning Test score for admission. The importance of test scores depends on the policy and selectivity of colleges. In general, your scores should be “in range” with the colleges to which you are applying. Carefully note which tests are required at the colleges to which you are applying. It is the student's responsibility to have official scores sent to colleges well in advance of deadlines.

In general, good grades in demanding courses are more important than standardized test scores. Carefully balance the time you spend on test prep with class work and activities.

See Standardized Testing for more information.

Essays. The essay is your chance to express what makes you unique and to distinguish yourself from the multitude of other applicants. See The College Application Essay for more information.

Extracurricular Activities. Depth of commitment, leadership, energy, and range of interests are important. Summer experiences, volunteer service, work, and special achievements can distinguish you favorably. Remember, the quality of your involvement, not the quantity, is what counts most.

Recommendations. People who know you well can provide insight about your intellect and personal qualities. Mrs. Hamblin will write your school recommendation, and you will ask two teachers from different subject areas to prepare a letter on your behalf. Sometimes a coach, club advisor, or employer may add a special letter. Be sure to check with Mrs. Hamblin before soliciting outside recommendations from family friends, alumni, or influential citizens. They are often unnecessary or undesirable.

Intangibles. Often subjective factors are difficult to measure. Qualities such as intellectual curiosity, motivation to succeed, and fit for a school can impact admission decisions. These qualities can be highlighted in essays or communicated in interviews. Furthermore, these qualities are often innate—it's hard to fake intellectual curiosity.

V. Assessing Chances of Admission

Predicting admission decisions at selective colleges or universities is tricky because so many variables are at stake, some of them quite subjective. While it is impossible to know with absolute certainty your chances of getting into a particular school, a general sense of your academic suitability can be assumed by comparing your test scores and grades with the statistical data provided in each college's published profile. Here's how to proceed:

Class Standing. Look at the percentage of enrolled freshmen at the college who come from the top 10% of their high school class. This figure shows the relative weight placed on grades by the admissions committee, as well as the level of classroom competition among those applying to and attending the college. Since UCHS and many other high schools do not compute class rank, you can only estimate how your grades will be viewed in comparison with students applying from less selective or much larger secondary schools. Not ranking students requires colleges to examine more closely an applicant's curriculum, grades, writing, and recommendations. Remember, the transcript—grades earned and rigor of course load—is the most important factor in college admission.

ACT/SAT Middle 50% Range. Using the highest combined critical reasoning, math, and writing scores you have achieved on the SAT or the highest composite on the ACT, check to see where the scores place you in relation to the middle 50% of scores of enrolled freshmen at colleges which interest you.

If your scores fall solidly within range of the college's middle 50% range or higher, then the college could be a realistic choice. On the other hand, if your scores fall toward the lower end or below the middle 50% range, then the college may be a reach for you in terms of admission and you will need a strong transcript and some other compelling qualities or talents to make up the difference. (The lowest 25% of test scores are often comprised of students who are of "special interest" to the college, such as athletes, legacies, or unusually talented students.)

Example: If a college's middle 50% for the SAT is 2040-2130, then 25% of students scored lower than 2040 and 25% scored higher than 2130.

Please note that many institutions will "super-score" your test results. This means that your highest subsections on the SAT or ACT from different test dates are considered in determining the score used for admission purposes.

College Acceptance Rate. Look at the acceptance rate for the college, which is the percentage of applicants who are admitted. While this figure (like any statistic) can be deceiving, it is an indicator of the number of students vying for limited openings in the class.

VI. The College List

In September seniors need to begin filing college applications. Working from a well-researched college list with an appropriate number of schools will help you stay organized and save valuable time. Most importantly, a solid college list will maximize your options in the spring. Here are some pointers for crafting your list:

Apply to a reasonable number of schools. Senior year is a busy time. Challenging classes, demanding activities, and social opportunities abound. Students must also apply to college, which includes taking standardized tests, visiting campuses, writing essays, and submitting applications. It is a time-consuming process made easier with a manageable college list of 8 or fewer colleges.

Applying to too many colleges is problematic. Students lose quality control and have a harder time staying organized. A list with too many inappropriate schools causes a student to waste time. So, keep highly selective “reach” schools to a minimum and do good research so that your list is appropriate. Successful college applicants file a reasonable number of applications that are personal and tailored to each school.

Let good research guide you. Visiting is the single best way to research a college. While it might not be possible to visit all the schools that interest you, try to visit some. Especially since you live in an area where there are a variety of colleges, visit as many colleges as you can to help identify what you are looking for in a college.

Online research is helpful too. Consult college websites to read the course catalog, take a virtual tour, review admission requirements, and compare your own statistics to those of the incoming class. Note the messages that colleges convey about their values and qualities. Blogs and college-related websites can be helpful too, but consider sources and understand that some information is factual and some is opinion. Remember that subjective sources reflect experience and bias that may not represent you.

The goal is to understand why you are applying to the schools on your list. In fact, some colleges will ask you to submit a paragraph explaining why you are applying and how you are a good fit.

Assess selectivity. A selective school is simply one that receives more applications than it can admit. Some schools are highly selective, admitting only a small number of applicants, while many colleges are only moderately selective and admit more applicants. Every college list needs to include schools of varying selectivity.

As you compile your college list, determine selectivity of the schools and assign them to “reach,” “target,” and “likely” categories. Applying only to “reach” schools is not advisable. The majority of your list should be target and likely schools that offer a better chance of admission.

What is the best way to assess your chances for admission? Start by comparing your numbers (GPA and test scores) with a college’s admission data. In general, if your numbers are higher, the school is probably a “likely.” If your numbers are on par, the school is probably a “target.” If your numbers are lower, the school is probably a “reach.” Of course, data comparisons do not consider subjective factors such as activities, rigor of high school courses, and recommendations. These assignments are guesses based on only two data points.

A college’s admit rate, or the percentage of applicants admitted, is another statistic to check. This suggests how many students are vying for a place in the class. The lower the admit rate, the harder to gain admission.

Avoid wasting your time and money on applying to too many schools that will not become realistic options. Rejection hurts and you will want options. Maximize good news and apply to target and likely schools that represent your probable college options.

Final Thoughts. Many colleges exist that provide excellent educational and social experiences. Have an open mind, dig into the research, and be wise about your list. The best guarantee for success is to make sure that every school on your list is one that you would happily attend.

VII. Standardized Testing

Definitions

The ACT

- **What is the ACT?** The American College Test is a curriculum-based test that has four main sections: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. There is also an optional Writing Test that students are encouraged to take since most colleges, including the UC system, require it if students choose to submit the ACT. Because the subtests are based more specifically upon your curriculum at school, some students who feel less successful with the SAT find that they prefer the ACT.
- **Scoring of the ACT.** On each section, scores range from 1-36 points. The composite score is the average of the four test scores. Refer to the Concordance Table in the Appendix for an equivalency between composite ACT and SAT Reasoning scores. The Writing Test will offer a subscore as part of the English Test. For more information about the ACT, sample questions, and preparation, please refer to the ACT web site at www.act.org.
- **Registering and Sending Scores for the ACT.** Register for the ACT and send scores online at www.act.org. You are responsible for contacting ACT to send official test scores to colleges to which you apply. The ACT score report lists only results from individual test dates and is not a cumulative report of every ACT test you have taken. UCHS's school Code Number is **340913**. You will need this number when registering for standardized tests.

The SAT and SAT Subject Tests

- **What is the SAT?** The SAT is a logical reasoning test with three sections: Critical Reading, Math, and Writing. Each section of the SAT is scored on a scale of 200-800 points. The Writing section includes a written essay that has a subscore of 2-12. For additional information about the content and sample questions, please refer to the College Board's web site at www.collegeboard.com.
- **What are the SAT Subject Tests?** These one-hour assessments cover a wide range of subjects including Literature, U.S. History, Biology, Physics, French, Spanish, and more. For many colleges, the SAT Subject Tests are used in conjunction with the SAT, the high school transcript, and other indicators to assess academic preparedness. A complete listing of SAT Subject Tests and sample questions are available at www.collegeboard.com.
- **Who should take the SAT Subject Tests?** Students should consult with teachers and Mrs. Hamblin, but in general students take these tests at the end of the junior year for the first time. Students are encouraged to take the SAT Subject Tests as soon as possible after completing the course in the subject.
- **How many Subject Tests should I take?** Take as many tests for which you feel prepared, in most cases two to three tests max. For the colleges that require them, subject tests must be taken in different academic disciplines. Talk to your teachers or Mrs. Hamblin if you have questions about appropriate tests for you.
- **Registering and Sending Scores for the SAT.** Register for the SAT and SAT Subject Tests at www.collegeboard.org. You are responsible for contacting SAT to send official test scores to colleges to which you apply. UCHS's School Code Number is **340913**. You will need this code number when registering for standardized tests. Also, you are required to upload a photo for registration.

SAT Score Choice

- **What is Score Choice?** Under this program, some colleges will allow students to choose which SAT Reasoning Test dates and which SAT Subject Test scores they would like to submit.
- **Which colleges allow Score Choice?** The list varies and it is critical to check with each college on your list. Some of the most selective colleges (the Citadel, University of South Carolina, George Washington and Georgetown for example) require that applicants submit **all** test scores. In effect, this requirement eliminates the Score Choice option for students applying to those schools.
- **Advice regarding Score Choice.** Because of the confusion caused by which schools use score choice, we suggest that students treat any SAT test as though it will be seen by all colleges. Students may think it is wise to take SAT tests often and earlier than recommended assuming that they can choose which scores to use in the fall of senior year. This strategy will backfire if a college requests the full report. It is best to assume that all colleges will require submission of all scores. Remember, to bolster their own testing profiles, some colleges will use the highest scores submitted (“super-score”), so we encourage students simply to send their entire testing record.

ACT vs. SAT Reasoning Test

- **Which one is better for me?** Students tend to prefer one test over the other. Since almost all colleges and universities accept either the ACT or SAT, students should experience both tests in the spring of junior year by taking either an official test or a sample test, and choose one to retake senior year. There is no need to prepare for and take both the ACT and SAT multiple times.

Helpful Testing Web Sites:

- **ACT web site:** www.act.org
- **SAT web site:** www.collegeboard.com
- www.fairtest.org provides a list of testing-optional institutions.

SAT/ACT Registration Information:

SAT Dates:

Test Administration Date	Regular Registration Date	Late Registration Date	SAT Tests Given
October 3, 2015	September 3, 2015	September 22	SAT Reasoning Test and Subject
November 7, 2015	October 9, 2015	October 27	SAT Reasoning Test and Subject
December 5, 2015	November 5, 2015	November 23	SAT Reasoning Test and Subject
January 23, 2016	December 28, 2015	January 12	SAT Reasoning Test and Subject
March 5, 2016	February 5, 2016	February 23	SAT Test Only
May 7, 2016	April 8, 2016	April 26	SAT Reasoning Test and Subject
June 4, 2016	May 5, 2016	May 25	SAT Reasoning Test

ACT Dates:

Test Date	Registration Deadline	(Late Fee Required)
September 12, 2015	August 7, 2015	August 8–21, 2015
October 24, 2015	September 18, 2015	September 19–October 2, 2015
December 12, 2015	November 6, 2015	November 7–20, 2015
February 6, 2016	January 8, 2016	January 9–15, 2016
April 9, 2016	March 4, 2016	March 5–18, 2016
June 11, 2016	May 6, 2016	May 7–20, 2016

VIII. Different Types of Applications

The Common Application and Institution-Specific Applications

The **Common Application (“Common App”)** is endorsed by many private colleges and some public universities. The Common App is weighted no differently than an institution’s own application. With the Common App you will fill out one set of forms and write one set of essays. You may then submit the application online to the colleges of your choice. Many Common App member institutions also require supplements that request information specific to those individual colleges. These supplements vary and often require additional essays. Access the Common App and supplements at www.commonapp.org or in some cases on the colleges’ web sites.

Institution-Specific Applications. Schools that do not use the Common App—mostly state universities and some private colleges—will have their own application that is almost always available online. Please note that some public universities require only a simple application form and a transcript, while others (i.e. U. of NC, U. of MD) will also request several essays and recommendations. What follows is a list of what usually comprises a college application, with some suggestions and guidelines on how to handle each of these components.

Personal Information Forms and Essays. The forms and essays that you complete are the best way for you to convey your character and personality to the reader. You have significant control over the application, and doing a careful, thoughtful job can increase your chances for acceptance. Through the application, strive to make the case for your fit to the college. Be sure to answer the question: “Why am I applying to College X?”

Consider your audience. An admission officer with hundreds of application folders to review will use what you have written to help determine whether you are a good match for the institution.

- Read directions carefully and follow them accurately.
- Be neat, thorough, and honest. Although others may want to help, you must do the application yourself.
- List your most important and recent accomplishments first, and avoid listing trivial activities or long-neglected interests. Playing the violin in the Eighth Grade means little if you have not pursued it since. If you detail many activities that your recommendations do not mention as significant, the college may question the authenticity of your claims. You should concentrate on your legitimate strengths.
- File applications online. Because it cuts down on errors and on paperwork processing time, colleges prefer online filing of materials.
- Always answer the questions you are asked to answer. In your eagerness to write about what you want to write about, be sure not to miss the point of the question.
- Try to fit all the information requested on the application form itself. Usually less is more, but an additional recommendation or other supplemental material (art portfolios, music tapes) can help personalize your application.
- Be yourself. You can lose your wits trying to figure out what you think a college wants to hear. There is seldom a right or wrong answer to a question on an application. A clear, honest answer is always best and most reflective of who you are.
- Give yourself plenty of time to complete the application. Last minute jobs usually reflect it.
- Print copies of everything you submit online, in the event that your application is lost.

The Secondary School Report. This report is comprised of an official transcript, counselor recommendation, and School Profile. All of this information is submitted by UCHS to colleges.

- **Transcript.** This is the formal document prepared by UCHS that details academic course work, course titles, grades, and GPA.
 - The transcript is the single most important part of any application.
 - It lists your semester and full-year course grades from freshman, sophomore, and junior years, as well as a list of your senior-year courses in progress.
 - An official final transcript will be automatically mailed to the institution you plan to attend after you graduate.

- **School Profile.** This document includes information about UCHS’s curriculum, grading policies, matriculation, accreditation, history, test scores, and grade-point averages for the senior class.

- **Counselor or School recommendation.** Your college counselor writes the school’s official statement about you and your presence in the UCHS community. It is based on reports from teachers and coaches, your senior autobiography form, your résumé, and personal contact with Mrs. Hamblin. The goal is to present you in the best possible light while remaining balanced, fair, and honest.

- **UCHS’s Secondary School Report Form.** This form accompanies the counselor letter and transcript.

- **Teacher Recommendations.** Most colleges and universities require one or two recommendations from teachers. You should ask sophomore, junior, and senior year teachers who have taught you in an academic subject (some colleges may specifically restrict your choices to teachers in your junior year or senior year). Ask teachers who know you well. The teacher who gave you the highest grade may not be the one who is likely to write you the best recommendation. The general rule of thumb is to ask one teacher from English, history, or humanities, and one teacher from math or sciences to provide a balanced academic recommendation about you. You should request recommendations from teachers by **early October**.
 - **Follow these guidelines:**
 - Ask your teachers in person and get their signatures on the designated form that indicates their willingness to write a letter of recommendation for you. You should not simply leave written requests on teachers’ desks or in their mailboxes.
 - The same two teachers will write all your academic letters of recommendations. If you are applying to a technical institution or indicating science or engineering as a proposed field of study, one of your teacher reports should be written by a math or science teacher.
 - Give your teachers your résumé and your senior autobiography so they can highlight your academic *and* extracurricular strengths in their letters of recommendation.
 - Always thank your teachers in writing for their help. Writing recommendations is a time-consuming task; often the only reward is your warm, genuine appreciation. Also, let your teachers know how things work out later in the year. They are interested in your future.
 - Give your teachers STAMPED and ADDRESSED envelopes to submit their recommendations if they must be submitted by paper. Otherwise, provide them with the online code the day you ask for a recommendation.

- **Supplemental Letters of Recommendation.** For the most part, extra teacher letters are a neutral factor; in excess, they can become an annoyance. Supplemental letters from coaches, club advisors, or employers who have something significant to say about you can be helpful. Letters from family members and family friends who are alumni of colleges on your list usually do not affect admission decisions. Any additional letters must add information that otherwise would not be in the folder. Think very carefully about whom you should ask

to write additional letters of recommendation, if any, and why these letters are necessary for your application. In many cases, they are not necessary.

- **Standardized Testing.** Your application at most institutions will require an official report of the SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and/or ACT test scores that you have arranged to have sent. Colleges will expect an official report from the College Board or ACT, which only you can order. Please make such requests well in advance of any deadlines. It may take four to six weeks for colleges to receive scores from testing organizations. PSAT scores are not part of your official test reports. You do not need to send AP scores as part of the admission process.
- **Personal Interview.** Interviews with college officers or alumni from the college can be a good way to personalize your application, provide new information, and demonstrate interest in a college. Few colleges require an interview, but some make it optional or even strongly recommend it. Therefore, it is important to research your colleges of interest to determine whether you should schedule an interview. Generally, the smaller the college the more important the interview. If a college requires an interview and it is not within easy traveling distance, the college will arrange for a local alumnus or alumna to interview you. In many cases, admission staff will also travel to select regions in the fall. Call any admission office or check online to schedule an on-campus or off-campus interview. It is important to schedule an appointment no later than early fall of the senior year. Appointments at some colleges are limited and fill up quickly. See The Interview Section for more information.
- **Art and Music Portfolios.** A great way to highlight a significant talent is to submit a portfolio of artwork or music. Even for students who wish to major in a subject other than art or music, a portfolio may increase chances of admission. For students applying to art schools or music conservatories, portfolios or auditions are generally required.
- **Additional Factors.** Beyond the usual criteria, factors that can impact admission decisions are strong family ties to a college, exceptional athletic ability, or artistic promise. Some colleges recognize the loyal support of their graduates by giving an edge to the children of alumni in the admission process. Being the daughter or son of an alum (or “a legacy”) has less or no impact for candidates who are well below the competitive level of the pool. But for strong candidates, it can sometimes provide the extra nudge that does help. Colleges vary in their approach to legacy admissions. The institution’s alumni relations office will know the legacy policy.

Athletic or artistic factors are tougher to call and usually come down to how much a college’s coach or department chair wants you. If you are high on the coach’s list and are otherwise qualified for admission, it can make a big difference. If a coach tells you that you are on “the list,” it might be a very long list and you might not be at the top. Always be sure to apply to a range of colleges that takes all of your talents into account. Sometimes there are factors that affect admission decisions that have absolutely nothing to do with a particular applicant. College priorities change annually, as does the size and competitiveness of the applicant pool. It is impossible to know with certainty one’s chances for admission. However, applying to a range of colleges will give a student options.

IX. NC Minimum Admission Requirements

Minimum Course Requirements

In addition to the requirement that students should hold a high school diploma or its equivalent, the UNC Board of Governors has, since 1988, established minimum course requirements for undergraduate admission. The requirements in effect in 2001-02 were first implemented in the fall of 1990, and continued until the fall semester of 2004, when a second language requirement was added. Effective in the fall of 2006, a fourth unit of mathematics was required for admission. These requirements are summarized below. They are based on actions taken by the Board on April 14, 2000.

Applicants Who Graduated from High School during Academic Year 2005-06 or Beyond:

Six course units in language, including:

- four units in English emphasizing grammar, composition, and literature, and
- two units of a language other than English.

Four course units of mathematics, in any of the following combinations (It is recommended that prospective students take a mathematics course unit in the twelfth grade):

- algebra I and II, geometry, and one unit beyond algebra II,
- algebra I and II, and two units beyond algebra II, or
- integrated math I, II, and III, and one unit beyond integrated math III.

Three course units in science, including

- at least one unit in a life or biological science (for example, biology),
- at least one unit in physical science (for example, physical science, chemistry, physics), and
- at least one laboratory course.

Two course units in social studies, including one unit in U.S. history, but an applicant who does not have the unit in U.S. history may be admitted on the condition that at least three semester hours in that subject will be passed by the end of the sophomore year.

Articulation with Graduation Requirements in the North Carolina Public High Schools

Following the board's change in minimum course requirements, the North Carolina State Board of Education revised the requirements for high school graduation by offering four courses of study: (1) career; (2) college tech prep; (3) college prep; and (4) occupational. These requirements are summarized below. Option 3 tracks the UNC minimum course requirements closely.

NC Course of Study Graduation Requirement

Minimum Admissions Requirements (for HS GPA and SAT Scores)

All applicants for first-time admission as freshmen must meet minimum high school GPA and SAT scores. The minimum combined SAT score (on mathematics and critical reading) for admission is 700 or a composite ACT of 15. The SAT (ACT) minimum score is effective for students entering in Fall 2009. The minimum SAT score will be increased to 750 or ACT composite of 16 for students entering in Fall 2011. The minimum SAT score will increase to 800 or ACT composite of 17 for students entering in Fall 2013 and beyond.

The minimum high school GPA for first-time freshmen beginning in Fall 2009 is 2.0. The minimum high school GPA requirement will increase to 2.3 for students entering in Fall 2011 and will increase again to 2.5 for students entering in Fall 2013 and beyond.

The maximum number of chancellor’s exceptions is limited to one percent (1%) of the total number of applicants accepted as new freshmen each year. A chancellor’s exception may be applied to the SAT minimum requirement and/or the GPA minimum requirement.

Year	Minimum GPA	Minimum SAT (Critical Reading + Math)	Minimum ACT Composite
Fall 2009	2.0	700	15
Fall 2010	2.0	700	15
Fall 2011	2.3	750	16
Fall 2012	2.3	750	16
Fall 2013 and beyond	2.5	800	17

Other Admission Requirements

All applicants for admission to any campus, except those exempted by current campus policies, must submit a standardized test score. The SAT I is preferred, but students may also submit the ACT.

Students applying for admission for fall 2006 or after, for whom standardized test scores are required, must submit either the new SAT I (which includes the writing component) or the ACT with the writing component. The ACT without the writing component will not be acceptable as a standardized test for admission after the spring semester of 2006.

Campus	Admission Requirements
Appalachian State University	http://admissions.appstate.edu/prospective-students/transfer-students
East Carolina University	http://www.ecu.edu/admissions/Transfers.cfm
Elizabeth City State University	http://www.ecsu.edu/admissions/transfer/requirements.cfm

Campus	Admission Requirements
Fayetteville State University	http://www.uncfsu.edu/admissions/transfer-students
North Carolina A&T State University	http://www.ncat.edu/admissions/transfer-students/transfer-requirements/
North Carolina Central University	http://www.nccu.edu/admissions/transfer.cfm
North Carolina State University	http://admissions.ncsu.edu/transfer-students/
UNC Asheville	https://www.unca.edu/admissions/apply/transfer-students
UNC Charlotte	http://admissions.uncc.edu/transfers/transfer-requirements
UNC Greensboro	http://admissions.uncg.edu/students-transfer.php
UNC Pembroke	https://www.uncp.edu/admissions-aid/undergraduate-admissions/transfer-students/t...
UNC School of the Arts	http://www.uncsa.edu/academicprograms/admissions.htm
UNC Wilmington	http://uncw.edu/admissions/transfer.html
UNC-Chapel Hill	http://admissions.unc.edu/apply/transfer-students/
Western Carolina University	http://www.wcu.edu/admissions/transfer-undergraduate/index.asp
Winston-Salem State University	http://www.wssu.edu/admissions/admission-requirements/transfer-student-applicant...

Applying to the U.S. Military Academies

For a four-year college degree you may consider one of the five military academies:

- U.S. Naval Academy (Annapolis, MD)
- U.S. Military Academy (West Point, NY)
- U.S. Air Force Academy (Colorado Springs, CO)
- U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (Kings Point, NY)
- U.S. Coast Guard Academy (New London, CT)

Students who are interested in pursuing the academies should begin preparations as early as the sophomore year. This is not a decision to be made lightly as entrance to one of the academies requires a five-year military obligation (post-graduation) as an officer in the respective service. Some of the benefits include: A first-rate education, full-tuition scholarship, and a unique college experience. Admission to a service academy is extremely competitive. Students must be in good academic standing with high grades and test scores, and advanced courses. Applicants must also be in good physical condition. All of the federal service academies, except the Coast Guard, require nomination primarily by a congressman. Most members of Congress do not accept requests for nomination after October of the senior year. Therefore, we encourage students to contact their congressmen in the spring of the junior year.

Timeline for Military Academy Applications

Sophomore Year

- Contact a representative of the Academy to learn about the application requirements.

Junior Year

- Research web sites.
- Contact your congressional representatives and request a nomination to the academy or academies of your choice.
- In the spring and summer, work on your Physical Aptitude Exam (PAE).
- In the spring and summer, take your medical exams.
- In the spring and summer, visit the academies and/or attend the summer programs.
- In the summer, work on applications.

Senior Year

- In the early fall, submit applications.
- Complete medical and physical aptitude tests if necessary.
- In November, interview for your congressional nomination.

X. The College Application Essay

Few parts of the application are more important or induce more stress than the essays. It is true that writing the college essay is designed to be challenging. But facing the task head-on and not procrastinating will position you to write a good essay. The best bit of advice? **START WORKING ON YOUR ESSAYS THE SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR!**

The best essays engage the reader by highlighting intellect and personality. A short, lively, and insightful essay can humanize the applicant by showing what is personally important to the applicant. Too often students waste opportunities with their essays. They focus on dull or superficial topics or exercise poor writing skills. Great essays often highlight an academic interest, book, topic, or experience. Colleges need bright students to fill their classrooms, and the essay is a great way to make the case for being a scholar (or for being one in the making)! When in doubt, write about something intriguing you learned in the classroom or other academic setting.

An exciting, well-written essay has the power to:

- Introduce yourself to the reader.
- Engage the reader more deeply with the application.
- Create a lasting impression.
- Reveal evidence of intellectual spark.
- Showcase sophisticated thinking and writing abilities.
- Elevate a student above the vast number of applicants with good grades and scores.
- Clarify questions in the application.
- **IMPROVE CHANCES FOR ADMISSION!**

The Writing Process

- **Brainstorm topics.**
 - Great topics don't have to be profound.
 - Focus on everyday tasks—running errands with mom, cleaning your room, family car trips, bathing your dog. Pull out the quirky and unique aspects of these tasks.
 - Think of stories in your life and expand upon what was learned and how these stories explain who you are.
 - Stay away from highly personal topics—this is no time for true confessions. You do not want the reader to pity or fear you!
 - Some institutions will require you to write on specific topics. Many other colleges and universities will accept the Common Application, which offers several broad topics. In any case, always follow essay directions carefully. Failing to follow directions almost always results in a denied application.
 - If answering a specific essay question, keep referring back to the question to make sure you stay on track.
 - See the list of questions below to help you with the brainstorming process.
- **Write a rough draft.** After brainstorming, choose an idea that excites you. In general, writing is a process which is helpful to keep in mind as you approach your college essay. Rarely is a good essay the product of one draft. Start by just putting all your thoughts down about your topic. Set the draft aside for a bit and come back to it with fresh eyes for the second draft. Look for the nugget that can become the heart of your essay.

- **When you revise:**
 - Tell why, not what.
 - Show, don't tell.
 - Focus the topic so that it's not too broad.
 - Mind your audience—college admissions professionals.
 - Write with a positive tone.
 - Eliminate vague language, passive voice, inappropriate and repetitive word choice, wordiness, clichés.
 - Proofread—spell-check is not enough!
 - Avoid the use of “plethora,” “myriad,” and “passion” which are overused in college essays.
 - Read the essay out loud. This will help identify confusing syntax (sentence structure).
 - Stay within length restrictions.
- **Solicit feedback.** Show your draft to a couple of people, but not too many since too much advice can be confusing and drown out your own voice. Ask these questions:
 - Do your readers learn something new about you?
 - Does the essay reflect your voice? Does it “sound” like you?
 - What will the readers remember about you from the essay?
 - Do you illustrate a sense of intellectual spark or how your mind works?
 - Do you instill confidence in your writing ability?
 - Does the essay leave the reader with any concerns or nagging questions?
 - **What is appropriate feedback/help?**
 - Helping to focus topic.
 - Finding typos.
 - Identifying confusing or inauthentic, or pretentious language.
 - Not having someone write or revise your essay for you.
- **Repeat as necessary.**

Toxic Topics—Stay away from these topics:

- Here's how I won the big game/beauty contest/canoe race/lead in the musical.
- I'm a CIT at the summer camp I've been attending for 10 years and it's really fun.
- The college admissions process is unfair.
- My favorite thing/book in the world is my blankie/Harry Potter.
- Here's a list of the reasons why I'm a really great applicant.
- I'm really in love/I had a big fight with my boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Here's how I overcame a major sports injury.
- The obstacles I faced during my two-week home-stay in France really changed my life.
- Playing computer games 20 hours a week is my most meaningful extracurricular activity.
- Let me describe my community service work (but what I really want to convey is how generous I am by giving my time to those less fortunate).
- “Death, Disease, Divorce,” per any Ivy League admission officer

Brainstorming Questions:

- What have you enjoyed the most about high school?
- What events or experiences have shaped your growth and way of thinking?
- What are your academic interests?
- Why do you want to go to college?
- What do you want to study in college?
- What do you choose to learn when you can learn on your own? (Consider interests pursued beyond class assignments.)
- What is your most stimulating intellectual experience in recent years?
- Are there any extenuating circumstances that have interfered with your academic performance?
- What activities do you most enjoy outside of school?
- How do your activities show any pattern of commitment, competence, or contribution?
- How would others describe your role in your school or home community?
- What do you most enjoy doing? What do you do for fun? For relaxation?
- How would you describe your school, family, hometown? How has your environment influenced your way of thinking?
- How have the expectations of your parents and friends influenced the goals and standards you set for yourself?
- What is the most controversial issue at your school or community and how does the issue concern you?
- What did you learn about yourself and others when you encountered people who think and act differently than you?
- What distresses you most often about the world around you and why?
- Do you have any current heroes or heroines?
- What books have you read that have changed your way of thinking?
- How would someone who knows you well describe you?
- Which relationships are most important to you and why?
- What kind of people do you associate with and admire?
- How are you influenced by others who are important to you?
- How do you feel about choices and making decisions for yourself?
- What is your greatest fear?
- Which would you choose: fame, money, friends, or love?
- What makes you rejoice or despair?
- If you skipped school one day, what would you do and where would you go?
- If you were an artist working on a masterpiece, what would your painting/sculpture/musical score/film/photograph be like?
- What is your most treasured possession? (Not your blankie....)
- What is your favorite journey?

Common Application Essay Prompts

Below are the instructions and essay prompts for the 2015-2016 Common Application.

Instructions. The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is

your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words.)

1. *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.
2. *The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success.* Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
4. *Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma—anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.*
5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

Whether you are required to write on a specific prompt or one of your own choosing, always follow essay directions carefully. Failing to follow directions almost always results in a denied application.

Examples of Personal Essays

Example #1: By Arthur Iula who attends Stanford University

The Gastronomic Art of Life

Since before I could reach the shining stainless steel stove in the kitchen of my childhood, I have had a zeal for cooking. It runs in my Italian family. From an early age, I would prepare meals standing on a chair, bathed in the warm glow of the kitchen lights. As the savory smell of chanterelle mushrooms or sautéed Maui onions drifted out the open window and into the fading dusk, I would look wildly around for another ingredient to add to my creation. My passion for cuisine has not changed since those times. My love of the gourmet even flourished as I attended culinary classes for six consecutive summers. From caramelizing the delicate crust of a crème brûlée to dicing an onion in five strokes, I learned the value of precision in my cooking.

Even so, I have also always loved the uncertainty of improvisation: when I am forced to use what is in the house to produce something edible, or, if I'm lucky, delectable. I shared this love of improvisation with the students while interning at a local cooking school, often stressing courage as an important attribute of a successful chef. I urged the children to listen to their instincts or whims in addition to their culinary knowledge. One of my family's best-loved dishes would not have been created had I not one evening devised a recipe with the ingredients at hand. Inspired by a local chef's technique, I lightly sautéed sage in olive oil to a delicate crispness. I tossed the sage in cappellini along with savory prosciutto, and complemented it with the sweetness of currants and the freshness of green peas. Still, the dish required a final embellishment. A light cream sauce evolved as I scalded the surplus cream from a previous culinary pursuit and flavored it with Marsala wine and Parmesan to create an ambrosial balance of richness and sharp flavor. What emerged that night has been served on many occasions since, perfect for brightening moods when the gray rain forms a splattering film on the windowpanes, or for reuniting old friends around an amiable table.

While eating my creations can be as gratifying as producing them, I do not cook solely for myself. There is little delight in serving a meal devoid of the jovial song of company's conversation. I fabricate my edible crafts in the hope of someone tasting my fare, of bringing joy or introducing a flavor never before experienced.

I often wonder why so many corporations are determined to make cookies just like our mothers did. The human sense of taste is powerful; tastes can take us back to times long past, unlock memories thought lost and release feelings we thought we had left behind in that brightly lit kitchen, on that chair by the stove. Food is a celebrated sine qua non of life, an art arisen out of biological necessity. Contained within food is the power to build and shape entire civilizations. It is no wonder then why food brings people together, because enjoying a meal with someone is an artful celebration of life itself. I cook because creating food is creating life, and, as in life, I learn from mistakes, take risks, and try not to waste any ingredients.

My Recipe for Cappellini Tossed with Prosciutto, Crispy Sage, Peas and Currants in a Light Marsala wine Parmesan Cream Sauce: (serves 2)

6-8 oz Cappellini pasta	1/2 cup green peas
1 cup heavy cream	1 package Prosciutto ham (sliced into one-inch pieces)
1/2 cup Marsala wine	10-15 Sage leaves
3/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese	olive oil
1/1 cup currants	salt

Cook wine in a small saucepan until alcohol has cooked off (test for alcohol smell) and add a small pinch of salt. Reduce heat and pour in cream, stir. Cook sauce until warm without boiling it. Add Parmesan cheese and stir until melted into sauce, set aside. Using a non-stick skillet, sauté sage leaves in a small amount of olive oil until crispy (1-2 min), set aside. Briefly sauté prosciutto to desired chewiness. Boil peas. Cook pasta al dente or to desired firmness in water with pinch of salt and drizzle of olive oil, drain. Toss pasta with peas, prosciutto, sage, and currants then pour warm sauce over top, serve immediately.

Example #2: By Emina Sonnad who attends UC Berkeley

When my dad impulsively bought a ukulele from a sleazy salesman in Las Vegas, I was mortified. What middle school aged girl wouldn't be? I'd just acquired the unfortunate burden of having my 45-year-old Indian father follow me around, strumming 70's hits and singing off key with disconcerting enthusiasm at airports, shopping malls, and even some school events. I was the new girl at this point, and I was already having enough trouble fitting in and making friends. My one man entourage was embarrassing, to say the least, and I feigned complete disassociation with him. When he offered me my first lesson, however, I accepted grudgingly, not wanting to hurt his feelings. I was initially reluctant even to hold the instrument, but something clicked into place when I plucked the strings and felt the vibrations on my fingertips for the first time. I smiled, liking the way the sound rang and echoed within the golden wood. It sounded cheery and bright. My dad looked at me expectantly. I looked back and asked, "Can we name her Sunny?"

I'm pleased to say that I have now found my niche. I am 'that ukulele girl.' Music has always been in my veins, and I've played a variety of instruments in my life, but nothing comes close to the satisfaction that Sunny brings me. I've found that ukulele is easier than guitar and much more portable than piano. I can bring Sunny with me wherever I go: to school, to friends' homes, to parties, and it takes only a few minutes for me to learn new songs per request. I often used to feel awkward in social situations; I didn't know whom to talk to or what to do with my hands. But now I have a purpose, a conversation starter, and a means of preventing moments of uncomfortable silence. I've also learned that singing while playing a ukulele is one of the easiest ways to make friends. There is really no explanation needed.

I practice almost every day now. I love proving wrong the people who think that ukulele is always simple. I've developed complex strumming and picking patterns, as well as a feel for some very tricky chords. I love writing my own songs and stretching my creative limits. Music also keeps me close to my dad. Although his work has kept him faraway most of the time in these past years, ukulele holds us together. Whenever he's home, we play duets. We busk in the streets of our town, and we harmonize together at airports. I've even taught my little sister to play, so it's become a sort of family enterprise. Now, I'm not ashamed of my family; I love our quirks. I'm proud of our talent and dedication. And if anyone is mortified by my dad's high pitched rendition of "I will Survive," I offer to teach them a chord or two. After all, it could change their life.

Example #3: By Meg de Recat who attends Wesleyan University

Grasping my camera in both hands, I slowly sink about two feet below the coral structure, and look up to see where I'm positioned. Glancing around, I measure the amount of light streaming through the water, and where it's hitting the coral, and I triple check my white balance. I gently press down on my shutter release to focus on the bottom of the coral, and I continue to hold my breath as I gradually ascend until I am directly in front of the coral. Click.

Scuba photography is my utopia. Capturing the simple beauty in seemingly trivial objects while floating eighty feet underwater is the most peaceful and silent escape I can find. No cars, no sirens, no talking, only the sound of my rhythmic breathing and the muted click of my camera shutter. Since I was young, I have been told how spectacular scuba diving is, but I could not wait to experience it for myself.

For my family, scuba diving is a form of religion. Having never practiced any recognized religion, the ocean is my church, and my parents' scuba stories are my sermons. I grew up hearing stories of colossal manta rays in the Maldives, and barracuda in Australia, and knowing that when I grew up, I was going to have amazing stories of my

own. I was taught how to regulate my breathing, how to balance my buoyancy, and how to see the beauty in both the smallest polyp and the biggest sunfish. My sister and I both got our certifications when we turned twelve, but we diverged in our specialties, with her focusing on night diving and me on photography. My younger sister is a firm believer in the rapid form of scuba diving. She's the diver who stays at the very front of the group, seeing the big picture, whilst ignoring the minute details thriving below her. I'm the polar opposite. For me, diving is a marathon, not a sprint. I'm the diver who gets left behind because I am overly focused on some tiny little polyp on the side of a rock, so absorbed in taking the picture that I don't realize how far behind I have fallen. Most people would ignore that polyp. But to me, that one polyp can create the most beautiful picture I have ever captured, and I'm going to take however long is necessary to take it.

Through scuba diving, I have learned to focus on what is in front of me, and see the beauty in the smallest objects. It has taught me how to stay calm, and focus on something so completely that the rest of the world falls away. The big picture may be spectacular at first glance, but even more beautiful are the seemingly insignificant objects hidden on the side of a rock or tucked into a crevice. Breathe, focus, and wait for the right moment to take my picture.

Example #4: By Charlie Fries who attends Pomona College

As the youngest of four, hand-me-downs constitute the majority of my wardrobe. My closet is composed of tacky ties sewn before I was born, the soft, worn-in leather of countless used cleats and a constantly growing pile of highlighted and annotated textbooks. These are much more than simple gifts of necessity; they are my birthright. My siblings and I attended the same school. When I was in kindergarten my brother was already a senior, class of 2001. Teachers still reminisce about how cute it was to see him lead all the siblings together, hand in hand, across the school's parking lot.

Before I hit puberty, my brother Nick had already started a very successful career in investment banking and my sister Alex garnered a D1 athletic scholarship to UCI. In my last year of middle school, my sister Roxanne had entered the ranks of our school's Cum Laude society. Growing up in a family of overachievers can be as daunting as it is inspiring. My coaches expected me to play like a D1 athlete, my teachers expected me to be a scholar, and my parents expected me to integrate these achievements, positioning myself for a lucrative career. Each successive accomplishment established a new normal in my family.

The success of my siblings was like a powerful locomotive, driving us all forward. I could not simply be an athlete any more than I could only be a scholar. So, I focused my energies on doing both to the best of my abilities. Fortunately, my siblings were always supportive of me, teeming with advice and suggestions. My brother insisted that I regularly read the Wall Street Journal and biographies of successful people, while my sister Alex taught me how to keep my head in the game. Roxanne imbued me with the methodical "nose to the grindstone" attitude.

With the wealth of their experience invested in me, I matured and created my own path of personal development. Athletically, I pursued both football and lacrosse, becoming the first member of my family to participate in either. Rather than becoming lost on this unexplored turf, the combination of my siblings' stable support and my own dedication culminated in All-CIF recognition, amongst other awards. Academically, I vied for success across my school's curriculum, but found my true niche in English. My efforts were recognized with a departmental award, gifted to the most notable English student of the year. A combination of effort and support helped me realize that my unique skill set is exceptional in its own right.

Wanting to withstand scrutiny was just the beginning of my drive to succeed. Now, with my brother recently married, I will soon have an important task: to advise and inspire the next generation of Frieses. And when the time comes, that collection of tacky ties might just inspire them as it did me.

Example #5: By Evan Bernstein who attends the University of Chicago

Always Yes And. That’s one of the first things I was taught as a seven year old taking comedy improv classes in an old 99-seater in the middle of North Hollywood. The basic concept behind Yes And is that, in improv, it is imperative to keep the scene going; to always up the ante; to perpetually raise the stakes. Saying No just stops a scene cold and, to keep it interesting, it is crucial to add new information.

Yes-Anding was ingrained in me as a child and I’ve found it’s had an effect on the way I lead my life. For me, to say Yes And to something is to not only continue to do it but to add to it and make it my own. Yes-Anding has been especially important in my education because it allows me to take things I’ve learned in the classroom and adapt them to the real world.

In seventh grade I took an Introduction to Computer Programming course and, since I enjoyed it, I advanced through the program until I took AP Computer Science last year. Taking classes in school was the Yes part, but to truly Yes And my programming knowledge I took this skill and applied it outside the classroom. I started learning how to make iPhone apps a couple years ago and, just this year, I created an app for my fellow students to help them organize their classes and assignments. By Yes Anding I was able to take a class in school and turn it into a possible career for myself, a helpful tool for my peers, and, most importantly, have fun with it in a way that I never could have otherwise.

In Film class last year, my classmates and I studied episodes of The Twilight Zone, learning about story structure, Dutch angles, and reversal of expectation. It was all very interesting to me so I decided to Yes And it. One night after an especially inspiring lesson, I went home and wrote my own Twilight Zone episode about what would happen if someone met God in an elevator. I brought that script to class and, after weeks of planning, shooting, and editing, we had our very own Twilight Zone episode. By Yes-Anding, I was able to take a lesson in class and transform it into a script, a short film, and an experience my classmates and I will never forget.

Yes-Anding is about taking ordinary situations, adding to them, and producing something new and exciting. When I apply this methodology to my life, I am able to take my education and use it for more than just receiving a good grade on a test. Just like Yes-Anding in improv took my scenes to the next level, Yes-Anding in high school took my education to the next level. I look forward to Yes-Anding in college and beyond to take my life to the next level.

Example #6: By Samantha Williger who attends Columbia University

I am running around the stage covered in fur from beaver costumes, carrying buttons in my hands and threaded needles between my teeth, yelling, “I have the unicorn tail!” No, this is not a bizarre dream. This is my job.

I am the costume designer for Young ACTors Project, a non-profit children’s acting company. In the three years I have worked with “YAP”, as the company is better known, I have costumed a variety of characters, from the classical to the bizarre. I have dressed Alice in her classic blue dress and a group of toys – including a teddy bear, Barbie doll, glow-in-the-dark worm, and a yo-yo – who fear a monster under the bed.

My favorite part to costume was “Bonnie and Clyde” this past spring, because, unlike “Alice in Wonderland” of the previous year, there was no public preconception of what the characters should look like based on a Disney adaptation. All costume ideas had to come from me and, well, Miss Bonnie Parker and Mr. Clyde Barrow.

I took to the books; I read several biographies about the most famous outlaws of the Great Depression. I researched fashion of the 1930s and reviewed what I learned about the time period from history class. I rented Arthur Penn’s 1967 Bonnie and Clyde starring Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway and fell in love with the work of costume designer Theadora Van Runkle. I went to multiple vintage stores and rummaged through racks and racks of blouses and slacks. It took weeks of hangers screeching against metal bars as I slid unsatisfactory garments back and continued to flip through every single piece of clothing until I made it through every rack in each store. I felt a rush of excitement when I found the perfect burgundy fit and flare velvet skirt for Bonnie, the plaid three-piece suit with 1930s-cut lapels for Clyde, and the ultimate creamy-yellow belted and collared dress for Blanche.

Seeing my costumes on stage is phenomenal. I am amazed how weeks of fabric scraps, sequins, and hot glue become an entirely different world on opening night. A world I created, brought suddenly to life. A world in which a wolf wearing a top hat is no more unusual than a grey-haired granny he is eating.

My conventional thinking is challenged when I have to design a costume for an alien Named YA-WI who must battle a team of sassy cheerleaders. I am forced to think outside of what is ”normal” in order to sew garments that tell an interesting story. I love working with the kids, listening to their ideas, and making those ideas happen. I feel like a superstar when I walk into the greenroom and hear, “Sit next to me!” “No! Sit next to me!” “I love my costume! Can I keep it?” “I don’t know when you are going to wear that beaver costume again, but sure, you can keep it.”

Example #7: By Erica Kitchin who attends the University of Texas

For seven days at the end of my summer, I live in a wood cabin and wear a laminated strawberry shaped nametag around my neck. I spend my nights under the stars, listening to the laughter of campers and the strums of an acoustic guitar, while engulfed in the smell of burning embers and S’mores. My campers are children who grew up and still live in domestic violence shelters and homeless shelters around Los Angeles. And my job for these seven days, other than singing songs about “Fudgy the Whale” and making as many friendship bracelets and dream catchers as possible, is to leave a lasting effect on their lives by providing an escape from their everyday reality for one short week.

Last summer, on the last night of camp, I was sitting in the dining hall engulfed with the smell of grilled cheese and tomato soup, while the loud clashing of forks and knives and the chatter of young voices filled every corner of the room. I had a camper sitting on both of my legs, purple jewel stickers lined up my cheek, and an eclectic collection of temporary tattoos on my arms. My red nose, a victim of the same sun that stamped the tops of my shoulders, and the raspiness of my voice illustrate that camp is near its end. A camper of mine, “Monster”, came over and asked me to take her to the bathroom. As we were walking out of the dining hall, her small hand grabbed mine, pulled me down to her level, and whispered that she didn’t actually have to go to the bathroom; she just wanted to look at the stars. I smiled and said let’s do it. We sat outside on a bench that was flaking with years of layered paint, while the summer breeze tickled our bodies, and we both began to stare up into the 9 o’clock sky. As we sat there, and as I gave her an impromptu astronomy lesson about all the “special stars”, she interrupted me and whispered that she’d never seen something so beautiful. This four-foot nothing eight year old, with long, tangled hair and the biggest chocolate brown eyes gave me chills that sped up my spine. She replied “Where I live the stars

always hide.” “Monster” went on about how all the stars only come out at Camp Harmony, because at camp there is no “badness.” “At my house”, she continued, “I have decided that the stars don’t come out because we don’t deserve them to come out. My mom told me it’s because there are a lot of lights around our house, but I know she’s lying, she always lies.” I could not respond. I just squeezed her with all my might and told her how much I liked looking up at the stars with her.

This is the campers’ one vacation of the year. A vacation not only from their typical everyday lives, but also from anything and everything that holds them down and prevents them from seeing the stars. I felt compelled to do something. To pull “Monster” away from the constricting darkness that hangs overhead. I became a part of the leadership program through Camp Harmony and started to plan monthly events for the campers to show them the galaxies of opportunities that exist beyond the midnight sky their eyes are habitually seeing. I have been a camp counselor for years, from day and swim camps to sleep away camps. But, when I disappear for these seven days, and fall completely under the radar from my friends and family, both the pressure and the reward of creating a haven for these campers soar.

Example #9: By Emma Spielfogel who attends Occidental College

Reading is boring. I feel disappointed in my generation when I hear those three words, that gerund, verb and adjective. Whoever nonchalantly mumbles that sentence has clearly never ventured into the imagination, experiencing lifetimes while in Neverland, or escaped from the arduous tasks of daily life by reveling in the make-believe. Whoever disparages reading never sat on the floor of a Barnes and Noble as a child like I did, reading chapter book after chapter book and looking longingly at *Treasure Island* and the other lengthy novels which I wasn’t yet old enough to read.

Before my childhood self could devour assortments of books, I had to learn how to read, and I was beyond desperate to do so. It seemed to me that my older sister got to do everything that was cool first, and reading was no exception. I became practically obsessed with studying letter sounds and blends at the tender age of 3. Before I knew it, I was reading more and more advanced books like *The Last of the Mohicans* or stories by Charles Dickens, and all the while I endured the ever-increasing complaints of my friends about the waste of time that was reading or the lame alternatives to television that were books. I knew they had never stayed up late at night because they just had to know whether or not Tom Sawyer was going to do the right thing, and I thought maybe it was because, unlike me, they had never felt hungry for literature or like they had lost a friend when they flipped over the last page of a novel.

The summer before my junior year, I decided that I could no longer stand idly by as thousands of children every day opted to watch *American Idol* while their books accumulated dust. I began volunteering at the local library’s summer reading program for children, which offered small prizes to kids who wrote down the books they read each week. For the first time, I considered that not everyone had an older sister whom they wanted to emulate—these kids needed an incentive to read, and I was thrilled to provide that for them. I listened to children enthusiastically relay the plot of *Llama Llama Red Pajama* or brag about the “bajillion” books they had read yesterday. I watched their eyes light up each time I rewarded them with a purple glow-stick or a dolphin sticker for their hard work and felt validated in my belief that reading is not boring. I knew beyond a doubt that the human imagination is so much deeper than a flat screen television.

Soon after, I resolved the reading-related disappointment I had in my own generation by joining a committee of teenagers who volunteer their efforts to encouraging other teens to go to the library. I found that while I had been reading at the bookstore, many of these teens were doing just the same in a corner of the library.

In discussions with this committee, I realized that I needed kids to pour over Alice in Wonderland and teens to loathe O'Brien from 1984 just like I had because books have molded the person that I am. They have taught me life-lessons from the safety of my living room and prevented me from rolling my eyes when my English teacher assigns ten chapters of reading in one night. I love reading because it is an activity that preceded my lifetime by thousands of years, and when I survey the library floor and see a little girl with wide eyes and blond pigtails tirelessly turning the pages of Charlotte's Web, I am confident that it will last as long as humanity

Examples of “Why College X” Essays

Example #1: By Jasmine Tang who attends Emory University: I was unsure of what to expect when I visited the University of Michigan this summer; Everyone I knew had told me that I would simply fall in love with both Ann Arbor and the university. As I walked through the tree-lined paths of the University, I discovered that everything my friends and family had told me was true. From the moment I stepped onto the university’s campus, I knew that it was a place I wanted to live for the next four years. Michigan surpassed all of my basic prerequisites—very large school, located in the suburbs—with its spectacular academics, distinguished professors and strong alumni association.

I go to a small private school and have always known that I want to attend an extremely large university with incredible academic programs. Ever since I was a little girl, I have been fascinated with neuroscience, particularly with how the human brain works and how humans absorb new educational material. However, due to my full course schedule this year, I was unable to take AP Psychology, a class I have wanted to take since freshmen year. Therefore, I am looking forward to taking Learning and Memory with Professor David E. Meyer, which would allow me to supplement my current knowledge of the human brain from my AP Biology class by allowing me to further understand the neuropsychology of memory. Furthermore, I plan to continue my study of art history at Michigan. This year I was able to take AP Art History and have quickly become enthralled with the way in which social and political movements have influenced artists like Michelangelo, Paul Cezanne and Andy Warhol. I hope to pursue a minor in history or art history during my time at Michigan. I would ultimately like to study marketing and Michigan’s strong undergraduate business program would allow me to pursue a degree that combines three of my interests: psychology, art, and business. By taking classes such as Consumer Behavior and Strategic Marketing Planning, I will be able to tailor my schedule to combine the subjects that I enjoy. Although I do not plan to pursue an art major or minor, art is something that has always been very important to me and something that I would like to continue throughout my life and during my time at Michigan.

I would also like to go to a school with surplus of school spirit like the University of Michigan. As a former cheerleader, school spirit is very important to me and I look forward to becoming a Wolverine and attending Michigan’s football games. When I visited campus this year, I saw several alumni decked out in “Go Blue!” gear, screaming at their rivals from Ohio State. These alumni demonstrated the true devotion and sense of community that are a major component of life at Michigan. Michigan’s combination of a spirited community, highly regarded professors, and strong alumni association are main reasons that I would like to join the Michigan community next fall.

Example #2: By Rebecca Farkas who attends Wellesley College: My life has been built around dialog. With an 8:1 student-to-faculty ratio, it is no surprise that dialog between students and teachers forms the basis for not only classes but also close student-teacher interactions. I recall one evening where my English teacher and I were so engaged in engrossing conversation that a security guard had to ask us to leave campus because the school was closing for the night.

I would have that at Swarthmore, except that facilities open 24 hours a day so my intellectual energy would only be curbed by my own ability to stay awake. Living among such a diverse and quirky group of students, however, would probably make it hard to fall asleep without resolving some debate with dorm-mates on the logical inconsistency of “cogito ergo sum” or without figuring out what exactly makes Dustin Hoffman in “The Graduate” tick. Hopefully, though, the frequency of such late-night erudite escapades is tempered by a need to be rested to tackle Swarthmore’s challenging curriculum. I plan to pursue the Honors program, so I better fix my sleep schedule before I head off to college. What particularly draws me to the program is the Oxford-style tutorials, ending in an examination from an outside expert. The experience would be my first taste of engaging in the actual intellectual community of my field, with my expertise being honed not by frequent examinations but by my own personal drive to acquire knowledge. In addition, Swarthmore is a unique liberal-arts school in that it offers engineering but does not bind students to that choice. While I have expressed interest but not insistence in that field, the college’s academic freedom ensures that I will find the area of study that is right for me to pursue. Overall, I will find Swarthmore to appeal not only to what I am comfortable with, but from there will continue to challenge me in ways that will help me develop as a scholar, and as a person, through possibly four of the most formative years of my life.

XI. The Interview

Once you have created the list of colleges to which you will apply, check the various college web sites to see if an interview is required or recommended. Each school will have different requirements. Some may have you sign up online, others may contact you once they receive your application. Interviews may be conducted with a graduate of the college (an alumni interviewer), a college admission representative, or a current student.

Whatever the setting or type of interview you have, take advantage of this opportunity to learn about the college and express your interest in it. Think of the interview as both a conversation and a chance to learn. If you do some homework by investigating the college and its catalog beforehand, it is likely you will make a positive impression. Be prepared to do 75% of the talking!

PREPARE Review your résumé and transcript prior to the interview. Go over sample questions and think about or even write down your possible answers. Also, think about the key points you want to get across during the interview. If not asked directly about one of your key points, you can always add at the end of the interview, “There is something else I’d like you to know about me...” This may be the only way the admission office learns about a summer art scholarship or a role in an upcoming musical.

EXPLAIN The interview is a perfect forum for you to explain anything that may not be self-explanatory in your application. Do not assume the college will read between the lines – explain yourself. If health or family difficulties have affected you, they should be explained succinctly during an interview.

BOAST While we have always been taught not to, a bit of bragging is necessary in a college interview. Admission officers welcome it. This is your opportunity to tell them why they should admit you over the thousands of other applicants applying to the school – use this to your advantage! For example, if asked about a chemistry class, it is fine to say, “I was proud of the fact that I got the highest grade on the final” or “The teacher picked me to help with a special project.”

EXPOUND Offer detailed answers, not broad general statements. Students should do the majority of the talking. Take the question and expand on it, possibly tying in other aspects of your life.

QUESTION You will be asked by the interviewer if you have any questions. You should always have a question to ask, even if you have memorized the course catalog and been to campus numerous times. An interviewer may interpret a lack of questions as a lack of interest, but you should not feel compelled to ask silly questions such as, “How many books are in your library?” Questions say a lot about the person behind them. The student who inquires about research opportunities in Physics is bound to be viewed differently than the one who wonders if the dorms have cable.

STYLE Dress appropriately and take the time to be presentable. That does not mean wearing a suit or an evening gown, just something nice and comfortable. Business casual is perfect – nice slacks and a collared shirt for guys and a skirt or nice slacks with a button down shirt or sweater for girls.

GRATITUDE Always send a thank-you note. This is a thoughtful gesture that reflects maturity and grace. The best notes are hand written, but an e-mail will suffice. Keep the contents of the card simple, honest and clear.

Sample Questions:

- What three adjectives describe you?
- What have you enjoyed most about your high school? Least?
- Tell me about your strengths. Weaknesses.
- Which course(s) have you enjoyed the most?
- Which course(s) have you found the most challenging/difficult/easiest?
- Which of your extracurricular activities have you enjoyed the most?
- Do you have any hobbies or special interests?
- How did you spend your summer vacation?
- What political and social issues interest you?
- What are you reading right now?
- Are there any books you have read in the last year that have significantly affected you?
- What is your intended major? Or what subjects do you intend to study in college?
- What do you want to do after college?

And the most important question:

- Why are you interested in this school?

Questions to ask the Interviewer: Most importantly, do your homework, go to the web site and know the main bits of information such as how many students attend, what majors they offer, what sports they have, etc.

- Did you go to X college?
- What did you like most? Least? (If they did not go to that school: What do most students like most? Least?)
- What is housing like? (If you have not already seen the dorms.)
- Do most students live on campus?
- What do students do on the weekends?
- What happens at freshman orientation?
- What are some of the major issues that students discussed or faced on campus this year?
- What do most students do/where do most students go after they graduate?
- What are you most proud of about your college?
- How is the school spirit at your college?

And the most important question for you to ask:

- Do some research online about the school, find out about a program that interests you, mention it and ask an informed question.
- Example: I see your microbiology class with Prof. Smith has research opportunities with the local hospital, can you tell me more about that? Even if the interviewer doesn't know the answer, they know that you have done your homework!

XII. Financial Aid

Broadly, there are two kinds of financial aid: need-based financial aid, as determined by the federal government; and merit scholarships awarded for academic excellence or athletic prowess, through competitions, or from religious or community groups.

Paying for college is an enormous concern for most families. College costs increase every year and policies are always changing. In general, colleges and universities expect you and your parents to contribute as much as you can to the cost of your education; however, they will do their best to bridge the gap between what you can afford and what the college costs. If you and your family cannot support the full cost of your education, you should apply for financial aid. At many colleges, more than fifty or sixty percent of the students receive some financial assistance. Many students and parents wonder if applying for aid will hurt chances of admission. Most colleges still try to make “need-blind” decisions, but as federal funds shrink, some colleges will take financial need into account in making their decisions.

Many colleges are able to make decisions without taking need into account, and the amount of financial aid you need will not usually affect your chances for admission to a college. However, you should inquire about each college’s policy in this regard. Not every college can meet the full financial need for every student.

Be wary of any company or scholarship that requires a fee for scholarship searches or eligibility. Unfortunately, there are many scams and a good rule is never pay money to get money. Contrary to the myths, there are not great untapped piles of money available to most students for obscure reasons. There are many free and user-friendly resources to assist you in researching and applying for financial aid and scholarships. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is! Do not let the cost of a college—especially a private college—deter you from applying. Financial aid may make attendance at a more expensive school affordable, and the quality of education you receive may well be worth the money you save at a less expensive institution.

Terms

FAFSA. Free Application for Federal Student Aid. A detailed form that is the first step in applying for federal aid, offered by the U.S. Department of Education. Only one FAFSA needs to be completed each year, and these forms are available online at www.fafsa.ed.gov.

CSS PROFILE. College Scholarship Service PROFILE. A supplemental need analysis document used by some colleges and private scholarship programs to award their non-federal aid funds. The PROFILE does not replace the FAFSA. PROFILE registration forms are online on the College Board web site at www.collegeboard.com.

Grants. Money given to a student that carries no stipulation of repayment. Eligibility tends to be based on need; when need is high, the grant aid tends to be high as well.

Loans. Loans include any program that requires repayment, usually with interest, to the source of the funding. A variety of repayment plans are available, and sometimes payment can be deferred while the borrower is enrolled in school. Some banks offer loans not based on financial need that help stretch the family’s budget over the years of schooling.

Federal Work-Study (FWS). A part-time work program awarding on- or off-campus jobs to students who demonstrate financial need, FWS positions are primarily funded by the government but are partially funded by the

institution. FWS is awarded by the college as part of the student's financial aid package. FWS awards are based on the student's financial need, the number of hours a student can work, and the amount of FWS funding at the institution.

Merit-Based Aid. Financial aid based on academic, artistic, athletic or other merit-oriented criteria (not financial need).

Demonstrated Need. This is the amount determined by subtracting the Estimated Financial Contribution (EFC) from the total cost of attendance (COA) for the college (tuition, room, board, fees, books, and sometimes transportation).

Estimated Family Contribution. The EFC is the calculated amount the student and his/her family are expected to pay. This is determined by:

- Amount the student's parents can pay from their income/assets
- Amount the student can contribute from earnings and savings
- Amount that is being contributed as a non-payable gift from any source The student and parents are responsible for paying what they can. Financial aid is a supplement to the EFC.

Cost of Attendance (COA). An institution's COA is usually expressed in a yearly figure that includes tuition, fees, room, board, books, supplies, and transportation.

Award Letter. The official letter from the college financial aid office that lists all the financial aid awarded to the student.

Financial Aid Package. The amount of financial aid a student receives, including grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study.

Promissory Note. The Promissory Note is the binding legal document you sign when you get a student loan. It lists the conditions under which you're borrowing and the terms under which you agree to pay back the loan. It will include information on how interest is calculated and what the deferment and cancellation provisions are. It's very important to read and save this document because you'll need to refer to it later when you begin repaying your loan.

Need-Based Financial Aid

The Department of Education determines financial need and recommends an award to the colleges based on the financial information reported by parents in the FAFSA. The individual college will then put together a financial aid package designed to meet any demonstrated need. At most colleges, a package will include some combination of grants, loans, and work study.

Students who think they need financial aid should apply for it. Some college scholarship programs only consider students who apply for financial aid. If nothing else, applying for financial aid will give families access to some of the lowest interest-rate loans that may be unavailable at local banks and credit unions. Some families who do not qualify for "need-based" aid may like to take advantage of these low interest-rate loans as a way to leverage their overall financial strength.

Students and parents applying for aid at any college or university, public or private, will have to complete the following forms:

- **FAFSA.** This form needs to be filed as soon as possible after January 1 of the senior year. It will call for figures from the previous year's tax return due on April 15, so parents may have to prepare taxes earlier than usual. The U.S. Department of Education processes the form and sends it and the "need analysis" to the colleges and scholarship programs you have designated. Complete the FAFSA online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. A FAFSA worksheet is available for use prior to January 1. Please note: The student and one parent must request a separate online PIN as part of the registration process. The PIN will be e-mailed in 5-10 business days and is required to access the online FAFSA form.
- **CSS PROFILE.** Many private colleges require students to use the CSS PROFILE in addition to the FAFSA. A fee is charged to register the information on the PROFILE with each college. Usually, the PROFILE is sent by the college with its application materials. Register for the PROFILE online at www.collegeboard.com. Click on the "Pay For College" tab under the student or parent pages of the College Board web site. You should register at least two weeks before the earliest priority filing date specified by your colleges and programs.
- **Income Tax Return.** A student's and parents' tax returns for the previous year are considered when determining need and before finalizing any aid awards. Never miss financial aid deadlines awaiting tax return preparation. Use estimates until the actual returns are available for submission.
- **School-Specific Forms.** Some institutions have additional forms of their own that students are required to complete in order to apply for financial aid. Read carefully the financial aid information on college web site for more information.

Scholarships

Merit. Aside from the National Merit Scholarship program and a few competitive scholarships sponsored by businesses and community service organizations, merit (or no-need) awards are generally awarded by an institution specifically for use at that institution, or are sponsored by a variety of entities such as religious groups, clubs, and businesses.

Students should inquire from colleges about merit scholarships. Alumni associations, for example, sponsor merit scholarship competitions for outstanding students. Some excellent private colleges have a small number of no-need scholarships for outstanding students. The key to accessing scholarships is to start researching in the junior year, search regularly, and stay organized. Applying for scholarships takes significant time and work.

Students who make a concerted effort and commitment to researching scholarships and the application process are more likely to be successful than those who do not. Colleges and universities that award athletic scholarships have a limited number, and unless a student is among the coach's top recruits, he or she is not likely to be awarded an athletic scholarship.

ROTC. The Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) Scholarship programs are offered through the military branches of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps for use at more than 1,000 colleges and universities throughout the U.S. Scholarships are offered in different amounts and cover combinations of tuition, room, board, books, and stipends. These scholarship programs change periodically. For the most current information about eligibility, applications, and deadlines, contact the ROTC department at the college you wish to attend, or the branches directly.

Army ROTC
1-800-USA-ROTC
<http://www.goarmy.com/rotc>

Navy (and Marine Option) ROTC
1-800-NAV-ROTC
<http://www.nrotc.navy.mil>

Air Force ROTC
1-866-423-7682
<http://www.afrotc.com>

Financial Aid Q & A

When should I apply for financial aid?

First check to see what forms are required by colleges on your list—CSS PROFILE, FAFSA, or other forms. If colleges require the PROFILE, register for the customized PROFILE Application after September 15 of your senior year. If the FAFSA is required, file it as soon as possible after January 1 of your senior year. In the fall, use the FAFSA Worksheet. You need not wait for your parents to complete a current income tax form before submitting the form to colleges. Use the previous year's estimates until current tax returns are prepared and can be sent to the college. Remember to pay close attention to deadlines; each institution has its own deadline, usually after the application deadline. Missing the financial aid deadline jeopardizes your chances for financial aid.

Is financial aid available only to people with low income?

No, but you must prove need. Financial need is the difference between what it will cost you to attend college and the amount you and your family can contribute toward meeting those costs. Usually you are eligible for financial aid equal to the amount of your financial need. Since the amount you can pay stays the same whether the college costs are high or low, you would be eligible for different amounts of aid at different colleges.

Does financial assistance apply only to tuition, or are other expenses considered?

Most schools consider your total anticipated expenses, including tuition, room, board, books, supplies, transportation, and personal items when preparing your aid package. College Counseling Handbook 2013-14 - 43 - Do I have to apply for financial aid every year? Yes. At most colleges you must apply every academic year. But applying for financial aid is easier the second time around because there is less paperwork and you are more familiar with the process.

Will I receive special consideration if I have siblings who are continuing their education beyond high school?

Generally speaking, yes. Your parents cannot be expected to contribute as much to your college if you have brothers and sisters in college whom they are also assisting. The determined EFC will be divided equally among you and your siblings.

What if my parents can't afford the EFC as determined by the colleges?

Call the financial aid office at each college to discuss the situation. Many schools can make payment plans available or provide loans.

My sibling was turned down for aid last year. Should I still apply this year?

Yes. College costs, institutional policies and your family's financial circumstances can change from one year to another. The only way to know for sure whether you are eligible for financial aid is to apply. My parents are divorced or separated.

Who should fill out the FAFSA and CSS PROFILE?

The parent with whom you have lived for the longest period in the last 12 months should fill out the FAFSA and PROFILE with you. If you didn't live with either parent, or lived with each parent for an equal number of days, the

FAFSA and PROFILE should be filled out by the parent who provided the most support for you in the last 12 months. Support means money for things like housing, food, clothes, car, medical and dental care, and college costs. Most colleges require a non-custodial parent form as well.

My stepparent doesn't feel a responsibility to support my education. Is a stepparent expected to complete the FAFSA and PROFILE?

Federal programs and most colleges expect stepparents' information to be included on the FAFSA and PROFILE.

Other Tips for Financial Aid Applicants:

- Do not initially rule out a school because you think it costs too much. Apply for admission and financial aid and see what happens. Most colleges can meet your demonstrated need.
- It's important for students and parents to talk openly about how to pay for college.
- Research each college's aid policies to find out what forms to submit and when to apply for assistance. Establish relationships with financial aid officers at the colleges on your list.
- Make copies of everything, including your FAFSA and PROFILE forms. In April, carefully check the financial aid package you receive from the college. Make sure the offered package accurately reflects your family's situation. It is possible to receive new aid awards if new financial information is submitted.
- Rely on individual financial aid officers rather than costly scholarship search organizations or "experts" who solicit your business through the mail.
- Don't just look at the bottom line of your aid award. Compare packages. One college may give you more grant money than another. Make sure you understand how much of your package is divided between loans, grants, and work-study.
- Avoid assuming too much loan debt. Massive loan debt severely limits options after graduation.
- Get ahead of deadlines! Colleges are serious about them, especially where financial aid is involved.
- Investigate school-specific scholarships

XIII. National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

The NCAA was founded in 1906 to establish rules on athletic eligibility, recruiting, and financial aid. It regulates many college sports for men and women. There are three membership divisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III. Colleges are members of specific divisions depending upon the size and scope of their athletic programs, and whether or not they provide athletic scholarships. If you are planning to participate in Division I or II athletics as a college freshman, you must be certified by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse.

You must register with the clearinghouse by completing the registration process found at: www.ncaaclearinghouse.net . While there is no deadline for registering, you must be certified before you receive an athletic scholarship, practice, or compete at a Division I or II institution.

Early spring of the junior year is the ideal time for athletes to contact college coaches. Students should draft an athletic résumé and cover letter to college coaches, and create a DVD or online video of current games to demonstrate playing ability. These items should be sent to a wide range of college coaches no later than the end of the junior year. Shortly thereafter, students generally receive information in the mail about various college athletic programs. Personalized correspondence and phone calls can indicate a stronger interest level from some college coaches over others. Students are encouraged to follow up promptly with coaches if additional information is requested. At the same time, students are strongly encouraged to maintain communication with college admission offices as the admission office always has the final decision with regard to college admissions, not the coaches.

For further information about recruiting and the NCAA and eligibility, contact:

NCAA Clearinghouse: Customer Service, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Central Time 877-262-1492

www.ncaaclearinghouse.net or www.ncaa.org

www.collegiatedirectories.com

XIV. Resources

Helpful Web Sites

Financial Aid Web Sites

- **FAFSA:** www.fafsa.ed.gov File for PIN registration, complete, and file the FAFSA on this site. The FAFSA worksheet is also available.
- **CFNC:** https://www.cfnc.org/paying/schol/info_schol.jsp Great website with information for NC students about paying for college.
- **FinAid:** www.finaid.org This site brings together lots of information on financial aid and scholarships. It also has a calculator to estimate expected family contribution.
- **United States Education Student Aid:** www.studentaid.ed.gov The Federal Student Aid programs are the largest source of student aid. Links to apply for, fund, and repay financial aid take families through every step of the process.
- **Fast Web:** Free Scholarship and College Searches: www.fastweb.monster.com The largest and best-known free online database of private sector sources of financial aid.
- **Scholly:** <https://www.myscholly.com/> Great website that narrows down scholarships by your own demographics and interests—also an app.
- **EDFUND:** www.edfund.org One of the nation’s leading providers of student loan services under the Federal Family Education Loan Program. This site provides advice on applying for financial aid, borrowing, and managing student loans.
- **Sallie Mae:** www.salliemae.com Nation’s leading provider of education loans.
- **Federal Trade Commission:** www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/scholarship Learn more about scholarship scams.

College Research/Standardized Testing Web Sites

- College Board: www.collegeboard.com Register and send scores for SAT and SAT Subject Tests online. This site also has good information about planning and paying for college. It provides a financial aid tool to help families calculate their “expected family contribution.” Register for and complete the CSS PROFILE here.
- ACT: www.act.org Register and send scores for ACT tests online.
- Peterson’s: www.petersons.com Practice standardized tests, financial aid information, college and scholarship search tools, and more at this site. The scholarship search provides access to more than 1.6 million scholarships, grants, and awards.
- CFNC
- Princeton Review: www.princetonreview.com Access college, scholarship, and financial aid information.
- Fairtest: www.fairtest.org This site provides an extensive list of colleges that do not require standardized testing for admissions.
- eCampusTours.com: www.ecampustours.com “Virtually” tour hundreds of college campuses and access campus maps.
- Common Application: www.commonapp.org Many institutions use the Common Application.

Career and Interest Inventory Web Sites:

- **Career Explorer:** www.careerexplorer.net An online assessment test enables you to learn your “career personality” and identify careers that most likely match your personality.
- **16Personalities:** <http://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test> Find your personality type and read about what types of careers would be good fits.
- **CareerOneStop:** www.careeronestop.org Free access to many services including an extensive list of interest and personality inventories, careers, and occupational requirements. Click on the “Students/Learners” tab for information to assist educational decisions.
- **MyRoad:** www.myroad.com College Board’s college and career planning web site that includes a database for exploring careers and interest inventories. Individual membership costs \$20 a year.

Other Helpful Websites:

- www.Collegeproowler.com
- www.Unigo.com
- www.Collegedata.com
- www.Cappex.com
- www.Collegeconfidential.com

XV. Tips For Parents

A Parent Should Be:

A mentor. Help your child learn who he or she is and realize what he or she does well. Encourage the child to grow and to take advantage of opportunities. Work hard to maintain a balance between optimism and realism. Keep the lines of communication open. Listen more than you talk.

A counselor. Ask questions, gently challenge assumptions, and always put the emphasis on the child, not on the name and prestige of the college. Probing is very important. Assess the factors that make College A a better fit than College B. Would he or she do better in a class of 30 or 300? Would a “gap year” be a good idea to explore, especially if maturity is a factor?

An honest information source. Even though the child should be in charge of the process, a college choice affects the whole family. Have a frank talk about expectations early on. Your student should know what you can afford and your other concerns about aspects of the process.

A partner. You have the student’s best interest at heart. Remember that you both want the same thing: a college that offers your child the chance to learn, grow, make friends, and be happy. Keep in mind the words of Benjamin Mays, former president of Morehouse College: “It’s not where you begin that’s important, but where you end.”

A Parent Should Not Be:

A crutch. When it was time to select high schools, you as the parent probably did much of the work and the decision-making. But once it is time to choose a college, it is the student’s future — and it should be his or her effort. Students should download application materials, make tour appointments, register for tests, fill out applications, and write their own essays.

An added source of pressure. The more anxious the parents are, the more anxious the student will be. Students feel enough pressure as it is without having to manage their parents’ anxiety as well. Try to maintain perspective.

A rumor-monger. Don’t mistake what you hear in the community for the gospel truth. Don’t rely on perceptions formed two (or 25) years ago. And don’t believe everything you read in U.S. News & World Report or other popular college guides. Always call or e-mail Mrs. Hamblin if you have questions or concerns.

*Content summarized from pages 7-8, *Surviving the College Search*, published 2002 by the National Association of Independent Schools.

Tips for Parents**:

- **Avoid becoming a “helicopter parent!”** College admission offices have coined a term for some overbearing parents. “Helicopter parents” are parents who constantly hover over their sons and daughters, ready to swoop in and help whether or not their children want help. These over-involved helicopter parents exhibit behavior that goes beyond what many consider normal and appropriate. Recognize the fine line between helping and smothering your children.
- **Seek reliable sources.** Eliminate from your language, “I heard that...,” “People say...,” “Colleges never...,” Seek reliable sources to answer questions and confirm or dispel rumors. Contact the College Counseling Office, specific colleges and universities of interest, and other reliable sources. Much of the anxiety that

families experience in this process results from listening to or contributing to a rumor mill that is frequently inaccurate.

- **Don't compare your child's college process with another's.** Everyone is unique and it is virtually impossible to compare your child to someone else in the hope of any reasonable projection of what will result with their applications. Even when you think you know the whole scenario surrounding another student's acceptance, deferral, or denial, you only know a fraction of the actual picture. Instead of expending energy on comparisons, focus on your child. Your time, energy, and love will translate into more successful results. Be judicious about discussing your child's personal information, such as test scores, GPA and college list.
- **Start early, but not too early.** In the first two years of high school, students should be acclimating to academics, pursuing extra-curricular activities of interest, making friends, and seeking meaningful summer activities. If the student is ready and interested, it is fine to visit some colleges during family trips early in the high school career. Encourage your child when ready to dedicate time to researching and visiting colleges.
- **Define a reasonable measure of success for the college admission process.** While some parents consider their child to be successful if he or she is admitted to a highly competitive institution, others believe that their child will be successful if he or she is happy with the college acceptances and are confident that they found a great college match.
- **Participate in the research process.** Most people would not purchase a car based on photographs and limited text. Assist your child in researching college opportunities not only through guidebooks and web sites, but also with concentrated campus visits. Encourage your child to sit in on classes for a day, stay overnight on campus, and talk to as many students as possible. If a campus visit is not possible before applying, be prepared to visit later if the student is admitted.
- **Be forthright about limitations right from the start.** Is the college's cost going to be an issue for your family? Discuss financial realities in advance of the application process, not after admission letters are in hand.
- **Keep an open mind for yourself and for your child.** Most families initiating the college search process for the first time have a limited view of what colleges exist. It is only natural for you to encounter many colleges unknown to you. By focusing only on recognizable names, you will surely miss out on a wealth of great colleges for your child. Because you are unaware of a given college's name does not mean that it can't be a great fit for your child.
- **Steer your child away from the "First Choice" college label.** There is no one perfect college for each student. By limiting themselves early on to a first-choice school, students tend to reduce their college research process and fail to identify other wonderful options. Students also tend to compare all other colleges to their first choice school. That inevitably results in disappointment because nowhere else can measure up.
- **Be assured that your child will have many college options.** As long as students do their research, take care of business, and work productively with UCHS's resources, they will have wonderful choices

**Content summarized from pages 25-26, *Surviving the College Search*, published 2002 by the National Association of Independent Schools