

JUNIOR/SENIOR POSTGRADUATE PLANNING TIMELINE

SPRING 2017

- Use Naviance to develop prospective list of “*Colleges I’m Thinking About*” (<http://connection.naviance.com/walpole>).
- Research colleges and universities online via *Naviance*, general and school-specific sites.
- Attend College Fairs (Note: TEC College Fair – March 22, 2017 6:30pm, at Westwood HS www.tec-coop.org)
- Visit college campuses

- Sign up for **Junior Meeting** with School Counselor
- Register to take the **SAT I w/Writing** (March/May/June) and/or **ACT w/Writing** (April/June)
www.collegeboard.com www.act.org
NOTE: Use Khan Academy for SAT/ACT test preparation
- Distribute **Teacher Comment Sheets** to three (3) teachers
- Complete **Counselor Recommendation Request Form**
- Request **Teacher Letter of Recommendation** from one (1) academic subject teacher

SUMMER 2017

- Continue to refine prospective list of “*Colleges I’m Thinking About*” through additional research and visits.

- View applications online and note deadlines, requirements, essay topics, etc.
- Set up Common Application account (via commonapp.org).
- Draft or complete initial college application and essay(s)
- Register for October SAT and/or September/October ACT
 - Early candidates should test no later than October.
 - Send scores to colleges directly through Collegeboard.com/ACT.org
 - There may not be time for you to preview your scores before deadlines.

FALL 2017

- Finalize list of colleges you are applying to
- Attend college rep visits at WHS
- Confirm the specific application requirements for each college.
- Sign up for **Senior Meeting** with your school counselor
NOTE: Students applying EA or ED should be meeting with their counselor by mid-October.
- Complete your application(s)**, including essays
- Register for November or December SAT/SAT II (if desired) or the December ACT (if desired)

Looking Ahead...FINANCIAL AID considerations

- Check specific school requirements for financial aid.
NOTE: Requirements and deadlines may vary.
NOTE: CSS/Financial Aid Profile and/or school-specific forms may be required (and with earlier deadlines!).
- Preview and plan to complete Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) via fafsa.ed.gov.
- Check (via college financial aid websites or phone) for school-based scholarships.
- Check *Naviance* listing and school announcements for local scholarship listing and details.

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT COLLEGE

The college selection process is tough enough. Don't let the myths about college scare you away from a college or university that might be just right for you.

Myth #1 - It's better to get good grades than take challenging courses.

When you have even modest success in advanced or accelerated courses it indicates that you can handle challenging courses – like those you will find in college. A challenging college preparatory program or some advanced placement courses will help you get into more selective colleges.

Myth #2 - The standardized tests (ACT, PSAT, & SAT) are more important than your high school grades.

Colleges know that your performance in high school is a better predictor of college success than the standardized tests. That does not mean that most colleges will ignore your SAT or ACT scores. Some state institutions with far more applicants than they can assess fairly may use scores to determine if you are eligible.

Myth #3 - If I haven't heard of a college or university, it can't be very good.

You may not hear about many of the nation's finest colleges until you are well into your adult life. Athletics on television is how most colleges get to be known, but many great colleges do not get that kind of exposure. Some of the nation's finest colleges don't play big-time athletics. Judge a college on its own merits.

Myth #4 - The quality of the academic program in which I am interested is the most important characteristic of a college.

About two out of five students change their major fields of interest before they actually enroll in college, and about one of two changes the major field once enrolled. Look for a college that has your current field of interest but is also strong in all its areas. It's worth noting that the research on success in graduate school and in employment after college suggests that the best way to master a major field is a combination of learning theory and active, hands-on-learning by doing. What's more valuable is having the opportunity to do research on your own or to work side by side with a professor on a project rather than simply taking more courses in the field.

Myth #5 - Your life will be ruined if you don't get admitted to your first choice college.

Thousands of students each year do not get admitted to their first choice college and most are happy, healthy individuals today. Yes, rejection is hard on your ego, but you will not be alone. Additionally, the vast majority of students who settle for an alternate choice end up happy at that institution. Remember, college admission, especially at the more selective colleges, has to be subjective. With thousands of applications and only a small staff, it is impossible to assess each applicant objectively. Some applications stand out. Some don't.

Myth #6 - Liberal arts colleges do not have good science programs.

The "liberal" in liberal arts means "broadening" and "freeing" – as in freeing one's mind from narrow thinking. The term "liberal arts" is a shortened version of the full title: liberal arts and sciences. Most liberal arts colleges have been emphasizing science for all students for a century or more. Since the best way to learn science is by doing science, small colleges with small classes and fewer students in laboratories often have an advantage. Proportionally, far more physicians and Ph.D.s have undergraduate degrees from small liberal arts colleges than from large universities.

Myth #7 - State-supported institutions offer more financial aid than private colleges do.

State-supported colleges and universities offer very little of their own resources for financial assistance. As the name suggests, state-supported institutions are subsidized by their respective states and that allows them to charge less. However, state institutions are also more likely to offer only loans to students who do not have a high need.

Myth #8 - The federal government provides most of the financial aid.

Government funds comprise only a very small proportion of the grant aid available, that is money that does not need to be paid back. Most federal aid is in the form of loans. Private colleges, especially, supply the largest portion of grant aid.

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Community colleges were developed, and still exist, for two major purposes. The first is to serve as a bridge from high school to college by providing courses for transfer toward a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) or Bachelor of Science degree (B.S.). Four out of 10 college-bound high-school graduates start their college education this way. The second function of community colleges is to prepare students for the job market by offering entry level career training, as well as courses for adult students who want to upgrade their skills for workforce reentry or advancement. Here, then, are some reasons why you might attend a community college:

- **You're Tight on Funds:** Community colleges cost significantly less (particularly for state residents) than state or private colleges and universities. They can be a cost-effective way to complete the first two years of college. The money you save by living at home and going to your local community college can help pay for your last two years at a four-year college or university.
- **You're Not Sure about College:** Maybe you'd like to begin by aiming for a two-year associate's degree and assess as you go whether you want to pursue a bachelor's degree. Taking classes toward an Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree, for example, would give you a feel for the type of education you'd get at a liberal arts college.
- **You Aren't Sure What Kind of Program You Want to Pursue:** Many people enter college without a clear idea of what they want to focus on. At a community college, you can explore different subject areas before committing to a program, without having to be so concerned about finances. To assist with the career decision making process, many community colleges offer intensive school counseling that can help you assess your abilities, interests, and educational options. Plus, you may actually be able to take a wider array of courses (including both liberal arts and career-oriented) than at a four-year institution, making it easier to check out many different options in one place.
- **Your GPA Isn't so Great, and You Want to Build Your Skills Before Transferring:** Whereas many four-year colleges and universities have selection criteria for attendance, such as a minimum required GPA, community colleges are open to everyone. If you want to pursue college-level coursework but aren't academically ready, community colleges offer classes and one-on-one tutoring to help you strengthen your basic skills. The average class size is also significantly smaller than at four-year universities.
- **You'd Like a Career-Oriented Degree, Such as a Fashion Design or Computer Certification Program:** Programs like these are often not available at four-year institutions. If you're thinking of seeking employment after finishing up at community college, there are several routes you can take. You can earn an associate degree. These degrees take about two years to complete. However, if you want to take courses in a specialized area of study but don't want to spend the time necessary to earn an associate's degree, many community colleges have certificate options that provide intensive training in a specialized field like computer-assisted drafting, food service technology, or paralegal studies. These certificates usually take six months to a year to complete.
- **You Work, or Have Commitments, and Need a Flexible Schedule:** At four-year colleges, course schedules are geared primarily toward full-time, traditional students who take classes during the day. At community colleges, course schedules are developed with attention to the variable needs of both part-time and full-time students, so classes are usually offered throughout the day and evening, and sometimes on weekends. Many of these colleges also offer online courses.

Adapted from <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/csearch/where-to-start/8169.html>

COLLEGE VISITS

Things to do before the tour:

- Visit the college's website to find out what programs they offer. There is no reason to tour a campus if they don't offer the program you are interested in.
- Read about the school on their website. Familiarize yourself with the college and prepare a few questions to ask in case they aren't covered by the tour guide. Examples are:
 - Where do most students come from (in state, out of state, international)?
 - If I live on campus, can I choose my roommate? How are roommates assigned?
 - How active is the campus on weekends? What are the big events on campus every year?
 - What if I want to double major or design my own major?
 - Who do I see if I am struggling in a class?
 - What is security like on campus? Will I feel safe?
 - What are the transportation options on campus? Off campus?
 - How does academic advising work? Will I meet with an advisor in the first semester?

Things to do when on the tour:

- Get there early. Plan to arrive early so you can take in the neighborhood around campus and even take a walk around campus on your own. Be sure to check in and register with the appropriate person when you arrive on campus.
- Make a good impression. Every interaction you have with a college representative reflects on you as a potential student. Remember to make a good first impression on your visit.
- Ask questions. If you have a question, don't be shy. This is your chance to get an answer from someone who works at or goes to school at the college you're interested in.
- Take a few pictures. You will see and hear a lot while on the tour. Pictures can help to refresh things in your memory once you return home.
- Take in your surroundings. This is your chance to think about what it would be like to live and go to school on that campus for four years. Notice the students as you move around campus. Check out bulletin boards to see what groups and organizations are active on campus. Ask yourself if this is somewhere you see yourself living.
- Eat lunch. If you're allowed, eat lunch in the campus dining hall. Check out the social scene and how students are interacting with one another. Remember, you will be eating a lot of meals there if you live on campus.
- Talk to students. Stop and ask questions to students you see on campus and in the dining hall. Ask students their impressions of the school and campus life.
- Get information. Admissions should have lots of brochures and written information to take home with you. Make sure you take a brochure, application, and try to get a copy of the student newspaper.

Things to do after the tour:

- Take a few notes. It may be a while before you reconsider this school and decide if you are going to apply here. Notes about what your impressions were can help jog your memory.

THE COLLEGE ESSAY

The essay helps admission officers discover:

- More about you as a person, including who you are beyond the “numbers”
- Your history, attitudes, interests and creativity
- Your values and goals
- It’s part of the application but not the most important element. Colleges may use it in different ways, depending on their evaluation process

Your essay is evaluated on three levels:

- Is your writing mechanically sound? Is your writing style comfortable? Can you write a good sentence, a good paragraph? Do you address the question asked?
- Can you form a thesis? Can you discuss a theme? Is your argument logical? Can you get in and out of the essay with some finesse?
- Do you write with style, nuance and creativity? Do you write with a distinctive voice?

There are no “bad” topics. However, be careful about the following:

- Winning or losing the big game
- Death of a pet
- Boyfriend/girlfriend or friend problems
- Religious or philosophical epiphanies
- Telling troubles to a journal
- Anything that suggests you don’t want to see the world beyond high school
- Oversimplified solutions to world problems
- Any topic in poor or questionable taste
- Complaints about parents, siblings or teachers
- Lists or gimmicks
- Cynicism almost never plays well

Advice:

- Narrow your topic. Be as specific as possible. Be sure to answer the question!
- Choose a topic that appeals to YOU, not what you imagine admission officers want to hear.
- Add details to make it richer and more interesting.
- Avoid sophisticated words when simpler ones will suffice.
- If you are going to take risks, know your subject matter and audience. Poetry, for instance, can be risky.
- Use quotations wisely. If it’s window dressing, you probably don’t need it.
- Start early!
- Brainstorm – scribble down everything you can think of about your chosen topic. Pick out the good stuff and work it into a brief outline.
- Remember: a college essay is not a research paper. You are often asked to evaluate a significant experience or achievement that has special meaning. That’s a personal question.
- Write a rough draft. Read it. Read it again, out loud.
- Ask yourself: Have I focused on the topic? Have I answered the question? Is it specific and detailed? Have I written in my own voice?
- Be careful with sentimentality and use it sparingly.
- Humor can be effective if you’re a funny person.

- Be concise. Have you avoided repetitiveness? Have you made your points directly and without a lot of unnecessary padding?
- Ask a teacher, parent or friend to read your second draft. Ask: “Is it interesting from the start? Does it sound like me? Was it fun to read?” Listen to what they have to say, but don’t let someone else rewrite the essay for you.
- Be mindful of the length of your essay, especially if there’s a recommended length.
- Avoid the trap of writing casually, especially when you submit your essay online.
- Don’t “borrow” essays from the Web...we’ve seen them all!
- *Always proofread* before producing the final draft. And let someone else proof it. Check for spelling errors..
- Check your word choice by reading out loud. What looks good on paper may sound awkward or say nothing.
- Make sure that if you are including the name of the college in the essay, it’s the correct school. *Wesleyan* doesn’t want to know that you’ve always wanted to go to *Smith*.
- Show; don’t tell. Make your writing come alive to the reader with examples and anecdotes.

Karen Kristof, Senior Associate Director of Admission Smith College

USEFUL DEFINITIONS

SAT	The SAT is a standardized test used for college admission. See College Admissions Testing hand out for more information.
SAT II	Scholastic Aptitude Test II or “Subject Tests” – One-hour tests which measure acquired knowledge in specific subject areas.
ACT	American College Testing Program – Assessment test accepted by colleges as an alternative to the SAT. The ACT is not an aptitude test like the SAT, but is curriculum-based and measures skills in Reading, Math, English and Science.
EARLY DECISION	A type of college application in which you commit yourself to one particular college should you be accepted there. Early Decision applications are due in the fall of senior year. Acceptances are based on the first three years of high school and are announced in mid-December. This is a BINDING application: you may apply to only one college as an Early Decision applicant and you agree upfront to attend that school if you are accepted.
EARLY ACTION	A type of college application in which you apply and are notified of acceptance early. This is a NON-BINDING application: you may apply to more than one college as an Early Action applicant and you do not have to commit upfront that you will attend that college if you are accepted.
SINGLE CHOICE EARLY ACTION/ RESTRICTED CHOICE	A type of college application in which you apply and are notified of acceptance early. This is a NON-BINDING application: you do not have to commit upfront that you will attend that college if you are accepted. However, you may apply to only one college as a Single Choice Early Action applicant.
ROLLING ADMISSIONS	A college admissions process in which the college reviews each application when it is received and notifies each applicant as soon as an admission decision has been made. This differs from the standard college admissions process in which the college reviews all applications after the application deadline has passed and then sends out admission decisions to all applicants at one time.
CSS/PROFILE	The CSS/PROFILE is a financial aid application service offered by the College Board. This service is used by many colleges and scholarship programs to award non-government student aid funds.

FAFSA

Free Application for Federal Student Aid; required form for all federal grants, loans, work-study and some institutional merit aid. File electronically at www.fafsa.ed.gov.