

# THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS - College Planning

For Students and Parents: Junior and Senior Years

Getting admitted to college should be exciting. It is important to keep the following thoughts in mind as you work your way through the application process:

- College admissions staff members want the admissions process to work for you. Not only are you a student, you are a customer.
- There are many resources to help you get the information you need to apply to the colleges that can help you achieve your educational goals.
- There is help available that can make college affordable.

## FIND YOURSELF BEFORE FINDING A COLLEGE

Think about yourself first:

- Who are you? Take a careful look at yourself— your interests, abilities, attitudes, likes and dislikes.
- Examine your own:

**Learning style** Discussion-oriented classes or more lecture style?

**College program options** Liberal arts, sciences, engineering, or technical study, business or a professional program? What degree are you seeking: associate, bachelors, graduate, professional?

**Extracurricular and social activities** Where do you want to live, work and play for the next two to four years? Academic and social balance?

**Academic support needs** Libraries, computer/science labs, other assistance in your areas of interest?

**Enthusiasm for knowledge** Level of academic challenge desired?

**Independence** Comfort factors, college location and atmosphere—urban, rural, size, etc.?

**Readiness for college** Individual preparedness.

## RESOURCES



*Selecting the college that is right for you, P. 15*

Plan Ahead. Visit colleges early and take a tour to get a feel for the campus. Meet with current students and/or professors. Schedule an interview with admissions. Make notes after your visit about what you liked and didn't like about the school. You can always go back for another visit after you have been accepted.

### Selective colleges are colleges where:

- A course every year in each of the five academic areas is essential, including grade 12, even if you have already met the entrance requirements.
- Courses at a demanding level are favored over "softer" programs.
- The better your grades, especially during 11th and 12th grades, the better your chances of being accepted.
- You are not being measured only on your qualifications, but how well you compare with all the other qualified candidates.
- Good grades may not be enough. Some colleges want to see dedication beyond academic work. Get involved and become committed to those things that interest you. Sports, theater, band, student government and publications are obvious avenues, but work or social service outside school is just as important.
  - An active commitment is always more important than limited involvement in a larger number of activities.

### College Search Sites

[www.princetonreview.com/colleges-majors.aspx](http://www.princetonreview.com/colleges-majors.aspx)

[www.unigo.com](http://www.unigo.com)

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

[www.mesfoundation.com](http://www.mesfoundation.com)

## TWO- AND FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

At some institutions, admission will be simple and available to qualified students at any time of year. At others, acceptance is not automatic and there is an Admissions Calendar. The courses recommended here should meet or exceed the requirements of such schools as far as content is concerned. Performance is another matter; that is up to you and it will have an effect upon the admission decision. At some colleges, however, there are more qualified students applying than space available. For these selective institutions, only the students who are best qualified are the ones who are accepted.

## MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Maine Community Colleges provide both one- and two-year programs that offer everything from transfer opportunities at four-year degree-granting institutions to two-year associate degrees, two-year technical degrees and one-year certificate programs. The cost is relatively low and community colleges typically have more flexible calendars allowing students to enter most programs at different times during the year. Agreements with the University of Maine System, and others, make it possible for students to move to other institutions, including four-year degree programs, without loss of time or credits (**Articulation Agreements**).

## DO YOUR HOMEWORK EARLY: KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

### NET PRICE CALCULATOR (NPC)

All undergraduate schools must now post an NPC on its website that uses school data to provide estimated net price information to current and prospective students. The calculator is designed to give you an indication of how much and what types of financial aid you might qualify for if you were a college freshman enrolled full-time in the academic year indicated.

As you use the calculator, please remember:

1. It is not an application for admission or financial aid.
2. The results will only be as reliable as the data you provide.
3. The net price calculator will provide an estimate of your net price and aid eligibility, based on the current parameters used for a first-year student entering college. You will see estimates of what you might be eligible to receive, if you enroll at that college.
4. Because you will need to answer some basic questions about your parents' financial situation, it might be helpful to have recent tax forms or pay stubs on hand before you begin.

# SELECTING THE COLLEGE THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

1. What size college would you like to attend?

Large (over 10,000)    Medium    Small (under 3,000)

2. What setting do you prefer?    Urban    Suburban    Rural

3. How far away from home do you want to be?

Same state    Different state    Different coast

4. Where do you want to live?    On-campus    Off-campus

5. What do you want to study? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What off-campus opportunities are important to you (volunteering, museums, outdoor recreation, public transportation)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What academic opportunities are important to you (travel abroad, internships, honors program, independent study)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What diversity are you looking for in the student population (geographic, ethnic, racial or religious)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What extracurricular and social opportunities are you interested in pursuing (clubs and organizations, fraternities and sororities, athletics)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What other aspects of a college are important to you?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Let's face it, cost is an important factor in today's economy. Have you checked out the Net Price Calculators included on every college website? Use the worksheets on page 35 to compare.

## MAKING GOOD USE OF YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR

When parents, students, teachers, school counselors and the colleges work together, everybody wins. A school guidance counselor works closely with students to help them make realistic career plans, plan a program of study in high school and assist with college admissions. Counselors welcome parent involvement. While parents can, and should, meet with the counselor, much information is distributed through the high school website, email, hand outs, mailings, and parent evenings.

## COLLEGE ENTRANCE TESTS

While opinions and arguments about college admissions testing vary, there are some common understandings around college admissions testing you should know:

- Most colleges require or accept tests from either the College Board (SAT I and SAT II) or the American Testing Services (ACT).
- The results of the test(s) are used to estimate the student's readiness for college and sometimes they are used for course placement.
- The influence that admission testing bears on admissions decisions varies from college to college. Remember that the high school transcript is by far the most important piece of information the college will use to grant acceptance. ***By themselves, tests don't get you admitted to college, and they don't keep you out, either!***
- To learn about the tests, start with your school's guidance office. It has valuable material for students and parents.
- Testing programs can be adapted for special needs, but you must contact the testing company early in the process; your guidance counselor can help you.
- Preparation programs are available and may help raise test scores. There are many school-sponsored programs. The State of Maine also provides for online courses from the College Board and PrepME.
- Tests such as the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQST), which are given in grade 10 and early in grade 11, will help you with college tests and give both you and your guidance counselor an early indication of how test results may fit with your academic performance in school.
- You have two or three chances to take the SAT or ACT, and you should get better as time goes by.

## THE COLLEGE SEARCH AND VISITING COLLEGES

This process has to begin with you. It comes from the inside out, based upon the interests and requirements you have established. It can start early on, but you should be narrowing your choices during the 11th grade.

- Make use of computer searches such as the College Board's College Match Maker, [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). All colleges have a website that you can access.
- Make good use of college fairs and school-sponsored trips.
- Request information provided by colleges directly through their websites.
- Research colleges that interest you before you visit.
- Take a college tour when you visit. Contact the admissions office to find out about discounted motel rates and other cost-saving options, or spend a night on campus and eat in the dining halls.
- Check with the college to find out if an interview is required and schedule an interview when you visit, or request names of local alumni(ae) who can interview you in your area.
- Speak with students and professors in the major you are considering.
- Carpool with other students visiting the same colleges or combine college visits with a family vacation.

## WHEN YOUR VISIT IS OVER

Write down your thoughts of the college while they are still fresh in your mind. Students who have done this, particularly if they visit several months before making their final college decision, have found their notes valuable when it comes time to choose a college. Whatever you decide about a particular college, send the admissions officer a note of thanks for the time and interest in you. If you are particularly interested in the college, say so; colleges like to admit students who want to be there.

### **Selecting the College That is Right for You**

*If you have developed a clear idea of what you want, the criteria for choosing and comparing colleges will present themselves naturally. Use the selection criteria here as a starting point, but be sure to add whatever else is important to you.*

- Program of study (major)
  - Location (climate, urban, rural, etc.)
  - Distance from home
- Size (small, medium, large)
- Class size and teaching style (lecture, conference seminar, etc.)
  - Female/male ratio
- Admission requirements—do you meet them?
  - Cost of attendance
- Financial aid—available? Available all four years?
- Housing arrangements—first year, upperclass years, special living options
  - Food
- Student clubs and activities
  - Sports programs (varsity, intramural, recreation leagues, facilities, etc.)
  - Campus health services
- Academic support services (study skills, tutoring career services, writing center, etc.)

A visit is important, at least for the one or two schools you are most serious about. If you wouldn't buy a car without a test drive, why would you choose a college without one?

2011-2012

**Common Application  
Essay Topics**

- Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
- Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
- Describe a character in fiction, historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
- A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
- Topic of your choice.

Work hard on any required essay. College admissions officers actually read them and draw conclusions about you and your language abilities.

**TIPS FOR THE APPLICATION**

- Apply only to schools that you would attend if accepted.
- Narrow your list of colleges. Make sure it includes colleges that are competitive, colleges that are moderately safe bets and those that are sure-things in terms of admission.
- The number of applications is up to you: two to five applications is sufficient for most; five to ten applications may be needed if you are seeking admission to selective colleges, or if financial aid is a significant concern.
- Most schools now use the electronic version of The Common Application or the school's individual online application electronic applications, which are available in guidance offices and on the web at [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org).
- If you are using The Common Application, tailor your comments, essays, etc. to each particular college (that's the beauty of computers). Colleges may also expect you to complete their own supplement to The Common Application.
- Individual applications should present the same "picture" of you. Don't include anything you cannot back up.
- Make sure your essay truly reflects who you are, not who you think the college wants. Write it yourself; **do not** let someone else (including your parents) write it for you!
- If important information is not requested, or you run out of space, include additional pages (mark them clearly with your name and SSN or birthdate).
- Show interest and enthusiasm on all applications.
- Read the application before filling it out and follow directions carefully.
- Your application should be neat and readable. Many schools allow you to do it online, but if not, typing is preferred. If you write, write legibly.
- Develop a rough draft before you complete sections.
- Check grammar, spelling and punctuation! (Yes, this really counts).
- Re-read your application and have a second person proof-read it before submission. Remember, your application is your way of marketing yourself to the college.
- Coordinate your application with the guidance office so they can send all the required forms, recommendations and information together.
- **Keep copies of everything!**

# THE COLLEGE INTERVIEW

## THE BASICS

A college interview is a chance to show that you're more than just test scores and grades. It's an exchange of information—you learn about the college and the college learns about you. It can last anywhere from 30-60 minutes.

## THERE'S MORE THAN ONE TYPE OF INTERVIEW

Interviews vary depending on the school, student, and particular situation. You could find yourself interviewing with an admissions officer, a student, or an alumnus. Other, less formal, interview situations include group information sessions with admissions staff and current students, and high school and local college fairs. If you plan on attending a music, drama, or dance school, plan on performing an audition or submitting a portfolio.

## SPECIAL-INTEREST SESSIONS

If you plan to pursue specific interests in college, such as sports or clubs, you might find it helpful to talk to current students and faculty members.

- **SPORTS:** If you're an athlete and want to play on a college team, arrange a meeting or a phone call with the coach. Bring your scrapbook, statistics, or other information that will help give a clear picture of your talents. Consider asking your high school coach to send a letter to the college on your behalf.
- **SPECIFIC FIELDS OF STUDY:** Talk to students who are majoring in your desired field and make an appointment with a faculty member or advisor in the department. If you schedule a campus visit, be sure to sit in on a class.
- **ACTIVITIES:** If you plan to participate in an activity, such as the newspaper, band, or radio station, speak to students who take part. It's a good way to find out what the people are like and what your chances are of getting involved.

## WHY YOU SHOULD INTERVIEW

The interview is one of many factors in the admissions decision. Most colleges don't require an interview; however, there are many benefits to meeting face-to-face with an admissions officer. For example, perhaps you:

- Feel your college application can't possibly convey your warm and shining personality.
- Are interested in the college, but want to learn more about its study abroad opportunities, science program, or whatever else interests you.
- Want to explain why your grades slipped.

## INTERVIEWS AND THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

The interview is just one of many factors in the admissions decision. Admissions directors usually say that the interview is rarely the deciding one. Still, if a borderline student turns out to be impressive, the interviewer has the authority to write a letter in support.

## NERVOUS? DON'T BE.

It's not the third degree and there's no pass or fail. Unless you show up in a t-shirt and cut-offs and spew profanities, chances are the interview is not going to make or break you. As long as you've prepared and practiced, you'll probably make a good impression.

## BE YOUR OWN BEST ADVOCATE

The staff learns about you from a slew of papers: your transcript, test scores, and application. While your essay and recommendations can offer an impression of who you are, words on paper can reveal only so much. The interview is your chance to be your own advocate by talking positively about your interests and enthusiasms, to show your personality, and to boost your chance of admission.

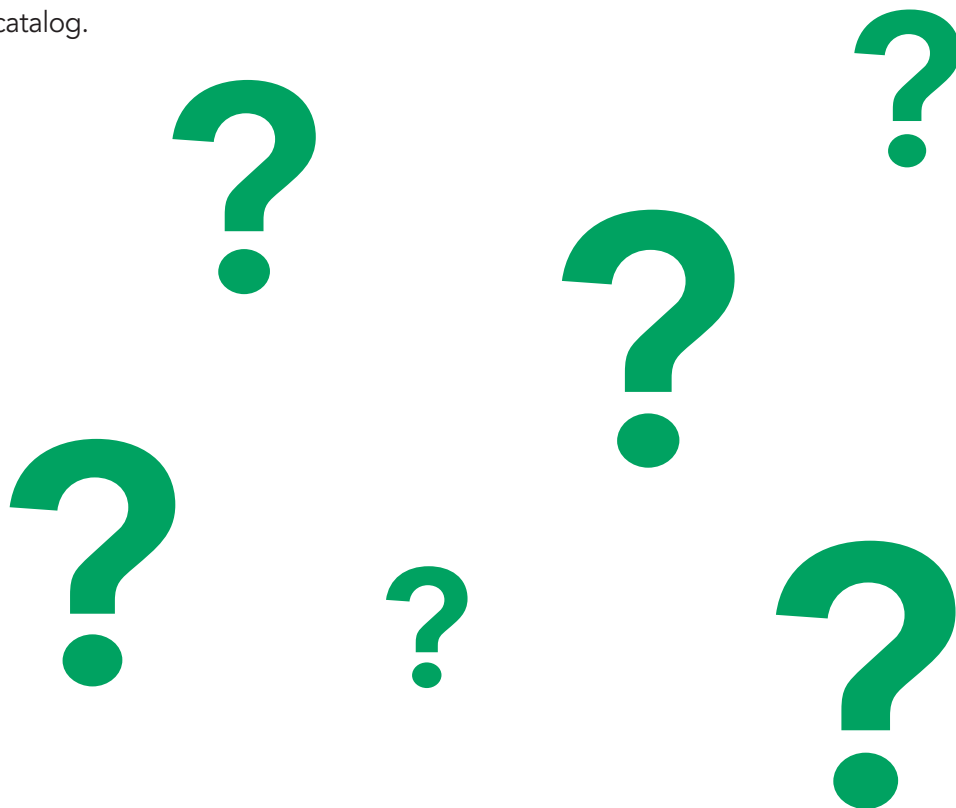
## DISCUSS SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The interview is a good time to explain a hitch in your transcript or discuss any personal circumstances that affected your studies. Problems that you may find difficult to write about in the application are often easier to discuss with a sympathetic admissions counselor. For example, perhaps:

- You may not be the best math student, but it never stopped you from taking AP® Calculus—tell the interviewer why you persisted despite such difficulties.
- During sophomore year, your parents divorced, and your academic work took a downturn.
- You have a learning disability and need to make extra effort with every assignment.

## IT'S OKAY TO ASK QUESTIONS

Asking questions shows that you're interested in the college and what the admissions officer has to say. You should always have a question in mind about the college or your major field to show that you have a deep interest in attending the school. The interview is your chance to be your own advocate. You can also ask a general question, such as, "Do you have any advice for me?" If an interviewer asks, "Why did you choose Florida University?" ask back, "What do you think draws students here?" Plus, asking questions can help you discover characteristics that colleges can't convey in a catalog.



## THINGS TO AVOID

### Don't ...

- Be late
- Memorize speeches—sound natural and conversational
- Ask questions covered by the college catalog
- Chew gum
- Wear lots of cologne or perfume
- Swear or use too much slang
- Be arrogant—there's a fine line between being confident and boasting
- Lie—it will come back to haunt you
- Respond with only yes or no answers
- Tell the school it's your safety
- Be rude to the receptionist or any other staff you meet
- Bring a parent into the interview
- Refuse an interview—this is usually noted

FMI visit [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)