

Cary Academy College Advising Handbook

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are many guides to finding colleges and many manuals and books giving advice (much of it good) about how to go about finding and being admitted to colleges. There are also many guidebooks that describe colleges. The fact is that college admission has become a big-time business with major publishers investing heavily in preparing, publishing, and selling guidebooks, books of advice, manuals to improve students' essay writing, and everything else from how to work with a counselor to how to get ready to move onto campus.

In the midst of this, it is important for Cary Academy students and their parents to know that help is available, that the school is heavily invested in helping its students investigate, apply to, and be ready to be successful in college.

This handbook is to be used in tandem with the "College Site" on the Cary Academy intranet. There you will find information about, and links to, a variety of web sites that will further aid you in your college search. Because of that, this booklet will not attempt to cover every topic or even specify all procedures used in the college counseling office. The Handbook, the College Site, the College Resource Room, and the College Counselors together provide virtually all the resources students and their parents might need to negotiate their way through a successful college search.

Although this booklet is addressed to Cary Academy's students (the "you" referred to on many pages), parents may find it useful in understanding how the process is designed and who is responsible for what in the process.

Applying to college is, in a sense, an educational journey of its own. We hope this Handbook will serve as a guide to help you along that journey to a successful outcome. Along the way you might experience a type of roller coaster of expectations, highs, lows, questions, stumbling blocks, and successes. We hope you take the journey seriously and, although it may seem to be a daunting task at times, the system *does* work and students *do* get accepted at colleges, and they *do* have success in college and in the life which follows.

So, let's get started ...

2. A NOTE TO PARENTS

Let us start by acknowledging that the entire process of choosing colleges, applying, being admitted, and all that goes with it is difficult. It can try everyone's patience and good humor. It can sometimes strain the relationship between parents and students. Parents sometimes find themselves frustrated and confused, wondering what they should be doing to help their children through the process. It is difficult to know when to step back and let the student take the next step on his or her own terms. There are times when parents have the feeling that their children's decisions aren't based on the best available information or logic. Students sometimes feel that way about their parents' decisions as well.

At Cary Academy, we believe that parents are major partners in the process of choosing, applying, and going to college. Although your student may not acknowledge it, your opinion matters (and there are studies which show that it does). That is why we encourage parent participation in the college selection and application process.

Having said that, it is necessary to be reminded that going to college is about the student, not about the parents. Stepping back from one's own needs, concerns, anxieties, and hopes and looking at what is best for the student is paramount. Not everyone is a scholar; not everyone ought to go to a highly competitive college; not everyone thrives under pressure and competition. What really is best for your student?

We all want our children to do well, even if we have some trouble explaining exactly what that means. We all want our children to achieve at the top of their abilities. The trick here is to recognize that it is *their* needs which should be met, not *ours*.

Because parents are important in their children's lives (even though they might not admit it), how parents respond is important. The off-handed remark disparaging a college suggestion often leads a student to the conclusion that the college is not worth investigating, and it drops immediately from the student's list even if it represents a viable choice.

The College Counselors' top priority is to work with students. We have designed a program and a procedure that, although it places most of the responsibility with the students, is carefully designed to provide checkpoints along the way to help them be sure to meet their deadlines and to help them make informed choices.

Your opinions, questions, and support are critical to the success of the process. If you have questions or want to talk about how things are going, please call us or set up an appointment. We will make the time for you.

One of the major parts of the process is the list of colleges that the college counselors prepare with the student in the junior year. *It is important to understand that the list should not be seen as containing the implicit suggestion that the student should go to one of the colleges on the list.* It is, rather, a place to start. As students research the colleges on the list, they can begin to refine their interests and choices. There will be a variety of schools on the list. Some of them are there to test boundaries and some are there because you or your student wants them to be on the list.

How parents react to the list is important. Dismissing colleges on the list simply as unacceptable is not helpful. Indeed, it can be damaging to the process. Our suggestions are not made without forethought. They are made on the basis of years of experience with colleges and students and with the idea that by investigating different colleges, students will become more aware of their own criteria and thereby make good, informed decisions. If you have questions or do not understand our suggestions, please tell us so we can discuss the reason for the suggestion. Colleges continually change and few colleges are the same as they were twenty-five or even ten years ago.

Despite the preparation a Cary Academy education provides and all of our combined efforts, some students will not be admitted to the college of their choice. When a college admits 9% of its applicants and when over 80% of those applicants are in the top 10% of their graduating classes, it is very likely that even some of the very best students will not gain admission. If your student is one of them, that doesn't represent failure; it represents terrific competition. Even the strongest applicants must use care and spread their risk by applying to colleges with a range of selectivity.

It is important to remember that students must be seen for who they are and not where they go to college. For most students, the college search and application process is the first time they may be denied in a system they cannot control. This is a difficult reality to deal with and to absorb. We all should strive not to add to the burden by making students feel that they have failed us or themselves.

Many parents ask if there is a book or books about the process we recommend. While there are many fine reference works available, three, which are refreshingly candid and challenge some common misperceptions are *The College Admissions Mystique* by Bill Mayher, (New York, Noonday Press, 1999), *Looking Beyond the Ivy League* and *Colleges That Change Lives* by Lauren Pope (New York, Penguin, various dates).

We look forward to working with you and with your son or daughter. The process is a learning experience, and we thank you in advance for your support in this process.

3. GETTING A JUMP START

What follows is an exercise, which may help you focus on what is important to you, the student who is going to college, and to your parents, who are intimately concerned with your progress and your decisions. You will want to complete the exercise sometime between the end of 10th grade and the winter of the Junior year.

An Exercise for Parents and Students

Separately provide no more than 2 pages of written response to the following:

Design a college that fits your needs perfectly. What is it like? Include such elements as:

Size of the campus	Size of the student body
Size of the average class	Location of the college
Academic atmosphere	Majors offered
Social Life	Athletics
Ethnic and geographical composition of the student body	

What type of college is it? a liberal arts college? a technical institute? large school with graduate programs? all male or all female? historically Black? a military academy? Why is it that type of college?

In describing your perfect college, think about how it would address your dreams and your strengths and your weaknesses. Why does this college suit you?

For the assignment you may not pick a real college and describe it. You must make one up.

You might want to follow the format laid out in one of the major college guidebooks to help you get started. Good resources to use for this purpose include: [The College Handbook](#) (College Board), [Peterson's Four-Year Colleges](#), Princeton Review's [361 Best Colleges](#), or [The Fiske Guide to Colleges](#).

4. PREPARING FOR COLLEGE DURING YOUR JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEARS

Before laying out an "ideal" planning calendar, it is important to remember that each college search is as unique as the student who is going through it. That is why we must understand that, in spite of all the guidebooks, each of which presents its own system, there *is no one* ideal system and method. But there are better and worse approaches and there are more and less efficient ways to proceed. That is why so many of the guidebooks have college planning and search calendars that essentially are variations of each other. Cary Academy's curriculum for the 9th and 10th grades has adequately prepared students to embark on a college search. Cary Academy's graduation requirements assure that all students meet minimum college entrance requirements.

NOTE: Beginning with entrance in Fall 2006, the university system of North Carolina requires a minimum of four years of mathematics. The fourth unit should be one that requires Algebra II as a prerequisite year of mathematics beyond Algebra II. Students who complete Algebra II in 11th grade and who elect not to continue with mathematics in 12th grade will not meet that requirement. While this will not prevent a student from attending literally hundreds of colleges, it will mean that student will not have met the requirements to apply to a university in the North Carolina system. Students who wish to enter any University of North Carolina school should plan to take mathematics in their senior year instead of “opting out” of math.

While some parents and students like to begin their college search in 10th grade, there is no over-riding reason to do so. There is sufficient time in the junior and senior years for the process. However, it might be a good idea to have some sense of what the differences between types of colleges are, and if your thinking runs in that direction, visits to different types of colleges during the summer between 10th and 11th grade can be very useful.

If you do decide to visit colleges between 10th and 11th grade, it is often helpful to pick *types* of colleges rather than *specific* colleges to visit at that point. Doing so gives students a much better idea of what different types of colleges are like, and this provides an invaluable touchstone when investigating particular colleges.

Fortunately, living in the Triangle gives us the opportunity to make some college visits without a major investment of time and money, as so many universities are within a short drive. Here are some examples:

- A “national” private university: Duke University, Durham or Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem
- A “national” research university: University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
- A “national” large research university with a technological slant: North Carolina State University, Raleigh
- A small liberal arts university: Elon University, Elon, NC
- A women’s college: Meredith College or Peace College, Raleigh or Salem College, Winston-Salem
- An historically Black university: North Carolina Central University, Durham or North Carolina A&T University, Greensboro or Shaw University, Raleigh
- A national liberal arts college: Davidson College, Davidson, NC
- A regional liberal arts college: Guilford College, Greensboro
- A regional state university: University of North Carolina-Greensboro

There are other examples, and the College Counselors will be happy to suggest alternatives both in and out of state.

To schedule a visit, simply check the college’s website (usually under one of these headings: “Visitors”, “Visiting the Campus” or “Prospective Students”). Universities quite often don’t offer individual appointments, but they do tend to have information sessions and tours at scheduled times. You should call to make an appointment for either one. The website generally provides instructions if the college requests that you do so.

Here’s a hint: If you visit a college, always fill out the card in the admissions office. That way the school has a record of your visit and you will be added to the mailing list. Some colleges will use this information as “demonstrated interest” in their college in the admissions process.

Interviews during the summer between 10th and 11th grades serve little purpose and generally are better saved for the end of 11th or during 12th grade. In general, though, the summer between 10th and 11th grade is a time to do something exciting, and to explore a major interest. Take on a community service project. Go to a special interest camp. Be a counselor. Take a trip. Do something, anything, which interests you.

The Junior Year

College admissions officers are quick to tell you that the single most important part of a student's application is the transcript. Now is the time to pay particular attention to it.

The junior year contains three of the six most important trimesters in your high school career. (The three terms of your senior year are the others.) While a good junior year won't erase problems you may have had earlier, colleges pay serious attention to trends in your grades and this is the time to see improvement if it is going to happen. At the same time, if you have a strong record in 9th and 10th grade, you need to continue it.

When college admissions officers look at a transcript, they look for "transcript quality." There are three parts to transcript quality: breadth, depth, and performance.

Breadth:

This is shown through a combination of continued study in the basic areas of English, history, mathematics, science, and foreign language. Students handicap themselves by focusing only on minimum graduation requirements – competitive colleges are interested in students who maximize their academic studies.

This does not mean that students should not take electives in courses that focus on their interests, whether in math, science, the arts, or computer science. It does mean that colleges expect electives to demonstrate a student's interest in a subject area and not just meet graduation requirements.

Depth:

Colleges want to see that students have challenged themselves in some area(s) and have taken advantage of opportunities to challenge themselves in Honors and Advanced courses.

This raises the question about the appropriate number of Advanced courses. While colleges always prefer "A's," they also want to see if you have the willingness, confidence, and ability to take an academic challenge. There is no simple formula for calculating how many and which Advanced courses to take, but there are two general guidelines which can be helpful:

1. Cary Academy recommends no more than two Advanced courses during the Junior year unless a student's advisor and teachers recommend otherwise.
2. Students who do not make a grade of at least a "B" in an Advanced course are not helping themselves meet the "depth" expectation by the colleges. A poor grade does not show academic ability, even in an Advanced class.

Performance:

In all cases, better grades are preferable than lower grades. It is important to realize that a lower grade does not necessarily keep a student out of a college, but if a student's grades are average within the school or if there is a downward trend, that will be taken seriously by colleges. Conversely, upward trends are noted and often, slow starts can be overcome by improvement over time.

Effort grades are important in assessing how a student is doing. While colleges do not see Effort grades, they are an indication of how diligently a student is working and often forms part of the School Recommendation.

All colleges publish minimum course expectations as part of their admissions literature and in their catalogs. Students should check these documents. A good rule of thumb is that students should take as challenging a curriculum as possible and still be successful, with five “core” courses each year. While Cary Academy does count arts courses as full courses, not all colleges agree with that philosophy, and students who want to point toward selective colleges should understand that substituting a course for one of the five “core” subjects (English, history, mathematics, science, and foreign language) may result in a lower rating of their transcript by a college. Of course, there is no reason not to take any other course in addition to “core” courses or, if a student has a particular interest, to take any elective course in any academic area.

Students should consult with their advisors and the College Counselors about their course selections for their junior and senior years. Course choices are important and students should seek guidance about balancing the ideal pre-college curriculum and following their own interests.

It is important for students to continue activities outside of class, whether that involves sports, music, theater, working, service, or any other activity you enjoy and from which you receive satisfaction. Remember, an in-depth focus on a limited number of things is better than a scatter-shot attempt to participate in everything. Colleges want to see what interests you and how deep that interest goes, so sticking with something is important, as is attaining positions of leadership.

Consider some kind of summer experience, perhaps something different from the experiences of previous summers. An internship, an extended community service, a summer program, or something that shows initiative on your part is an indication to a college that you are a person with interests and the initiative to pursue them.

The Senior Year

Seniors are beginning the most important year of their careers at Cary Academy. Don’t make the mistake of thinking it’s over except for the application process. Quite the contrary, this is the time when you must give your best effort to school and to balancing school demands with all the other demands that choosing and applying to college will place on your time, energy, and patience.

You may be tempted to “slack off” on your course load or your level of intensity in class. **Don’t do it!** Keep working. Even after you’ve been accepted, remember that offers of admission are always contingent on completing the year at about the level you were at when you applied. If you have been wait-listed, a drop in performance between the time when you applied and the time the college goes to its wait-list can be fatal. What about your major? Do you really know what you want to study? Here are two interesting facts:

- More than *half* of the students who enter college do so with an “undeclared” or “undecided” major.
- On average, most students who enroll in college will change their major – and many more than once.

So, if you don’t know what you want to study, don’t be afraid to say so – and don’t pick a major just because someone says you should be interested in it.

If you really are interested in a specific major such as electrical engineering or computer science or business, use the catalogs of the colleges you are considering to find out exactly what is required for that major. You may be surprised. You may discover that you really don't want the major you thought you did or you may discover that colleges you are considering have very different requirements for completing the same major. You can find this information in college catalogs in the College Resource Room and on-line at the colleges' web sites. Look under "Academic Program."

5. CHECK LIST FOR ELEVENTH & TWELFTH GRADES

Eleventh Grade

- August:** Fill in the dates for PSAT, SAT I & II, ACT, AP exams on your personal calendars. These test dates appear on the school's master calendar and on the College Page. Bookmark www.collegeboard.com on your favorites list.
- Fall:** Concentrate on your schoolwork and your activities. There is plenty of time to worry about college after your first term.
- October:** Take the PSAT/NMSQT in October. All juniors (and sophomores) are automatically registered for the exam. Results arrive at school in mid-December.
- Attend the Junior College Night meeting for juniors and their parents to preview the college selection process.
- December-January:** Attend class meetings to analyze PSAT results.
- Make plans for summer programs, work, or internships.
- January-March:** Schedule a meeting with your College Counselor as soon as possible to discuss your record and your goals and to develop an initial list of colleges to investigate and a plan of action.
- Begin researching the list of colleges developed by you and your College Counselor.
- Plan college visits during spring break.
- Register for the SAT I and/or II exams in March and May.
- Continue planning for summer programs, work or internships.
- March-June:** Take at least one SAT I, preferably in January or April. Take SAT II exams in May as appropriate. (Discuss this with your College Counselor.)
- Continue researching colleges. Meet with the College Counselor to review your progress and findings before the end of the school year. A second, refined list of colleges to investigate often follows this meeting.
- Take AP exams in May.

June: Take SAT II exams as appropriate. (Most juniors will be away on foreign language trips on this date.) Discuss this with your College Counselor.

Summer: Continue college visits. Keep accurate notes. Narrow your choices to six to eight colleges, including colleges in each category (Reach, Target, Probable).

Twelfth Grade

All Year: Keep your grades up! Remember, college officials review final transcripts.

Fall: Fill out and return Transcript Release Form (requires parental signature). When you know the colleges to which you will be applying, see Mrs. Akers to fill out each college's information on the Transcript Release Form and turn in a Secondary School Report for each college, if applicable, along with a large, addressed envelope for each college.

Meet with your College Counselor to review progress, check strategy, finalize your college list, and decide on teacher references.

Request teacher references; give addressed envelopes and a list of colleges with due dates and pertinent forms to teachers.

Attend college information programs (fairs and regional college-sponsored receptions).

Attend meetings held at Cary Academy with college representatives.

Register and take SAT I, SAT II, and ACT in October and/or November, if indicated.

BY OCTOBER 1: Make decisions about whether you will be applying to any college under the ED or EA plan and begin work on the applications. Release test scores for ED/EA colleges no later than October 1. As soon as you know, formally notify your College Counselor of your decision to apply ED/EA with due dates. *

*They are not all the same. For example:
EA at UNC-Chapel Hill is November 1
ED at Duke and UPenn is November 1
Priority Admission due date at NCSU is 11/1
ED at Davidson is 11/15 and 1/2
ED at George Washington University is 11/15 and 1/15

Attend sessions with the College Counselors on essay writing. Choose essay topic(s) based on your college list and begin to work on the essays.

If financial aid is a consideration, inform your College Counselor. Obtain information on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.fafsa.ed.gov and the CSS PROFILE form, if needed, at www.collegeboard.com.

Begin preparation of regular applications to colleges.

November: Finalize your list of colleges and list all with due dates on the Transcript Release Form.

Send test scores to colleges as soon as possible. Allow 4-5 weeks for official scores to reach colleges from ETS or ACT.

December 1: *Final date to request Transcript and Secondary School Report forms be sent to all colleges with application due dates prior to January 15. (You must sign the Transcript Release Form.)*

December: If applying for financial aid you can find FAFSA form on the web. The College Counselors have a limited number of paper copies.

January 5: *Final date to request Transcript and Secondary School Report forms be sent to all colleges with application due dates due after January 15.*

January: If applying for financial aid, complete and submit FAFSA and PROFILE, Part II.

ALL YEAR: Tell your College Counselor the results of the college' decisions on your applications.

April: Send a deposit to the college of your choice prior to May 1 (Candidate's Reply Date).

Inform your teacher references of the results of the colleges' admissions decisions and thank them for their support.

May: Take AP exams as appropriate

May 15: Request that a final transcript be sent to the college that you will be attending.

6. SIX POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

There are lots things to consider and lots of things to do when investigating, applying to, and choosing a college. It is easy to get lost in all the questions, problems, decisions, procedures, and pressure to get into just the right college. One way of not getting overwhelmed is to keep your mind clear about some of the larger things which can be a type of guidepost as you deal with classes, activities, applications, essays, interviews, campus visits, publications, videos, CD-ROMs, telemarketing, direct mail, and parental concerns. Here are six major points to keep in mind. Remember them; they'll help you stay on course.

THE FIRST POINT: Keep asking yourself: What do I want from college?

- Why am I going?
- Whom do I need to please?
- Do I know what I want?
- Does this college offer what I want?
- Do your homework. What credentials does the "average" freshman have?
- Do I meet or exceed requirements?

THE SECOND POINT: *Quality versus Selectivity*

There is a big difference between "Quality" and "Selectivity." Selectivity is the ratio of applications to students admitted. Some lesser-known colleges have selectivity ratios as high as some of the better-known colleges, but they may be the better choice for a particular student. Just because a college has more

applicants than spaces, does not mean that it is the “best” college for you. Also, it is not the only mark of quality. Many highly rated colleges have large classes and use teaching assistants (normally graduate students, some in their first year of graduate school) to conduct the “discussion” sessions of large lecture classes.

Don’t be fooled by the “student:faculty ratio.” It is much more important to know the average class size of Freshman English, Introduction to Psychology, and Biology or Chemistry. Just because the faculty: student ratio looks low does not insure quality of instruction or availability of faculty or even that classes are small enough for you to get your questions answered.

THE THIRD POINT: Do your best work in school.

The single most important thing in your application is your transcript. Work with the College Counselors and your advisor to develop a course plan that will help you to explore and to show off your strengths. All colleges want students who have challenged themselves and who have succeeded. Don’t confuse quantity with quality.

THE FOURTH POINT: Understand what you bring to the college.

We are all special with different interests, backgrounds and experiences. Each one of the almost one million students who will apply to college next year is special too.

THE FIFTH POINT: Have a life.

Don’t worry about trying to prove your superiority by doing everything. Colleges want students who are:

- Interested in something
- Good at something
- Have a passion and follow it
- Interesting people

THE SIXTH POINT: Present yourself properly

- Set up an email address that is appropriate for use when contacting colleges. Make it a part of your daily routine to check for email at that address until you enter college. Many colleges continue to send important information to their students in the summer before they enroll at the college.
- Demonstrate interest
- Visit the campus if possible
- Does your application reflect well on you or is it completed with a minimum of care and effort?
- What does your essay tell people about you?
- Have you followed the application guidelines and instructions?

7. USING THE COLLEGE COUNSELORS AND THE COLLEGE RESOURCE ROOM

The College Counselors are here to help students (and parents) through the maze of finding the right college, getting through the application process, and selecting the college that meets your goals.

To do this, students and parents are encouraged to think of the College Counselors as a resource, consultants who can help you through the process in a number of ways:

- Helping students clarify what they are looking for when they look for a college
- Helping students understand how to search for a college
- Providing guidance about possible schools to investigate
- Helping students understand and complete the application process
- Helping students with essays, applications, and preparing for campus visits
- Preparing the school recommendation which accompanies applications
- Reviewing curricular and course decisions with students to help them be as well-prepared and as competitive as possible
- Arranging for college representatives to visit Cary Academy to meet with students
- Providing information for financial aid and scholarship searches
- Suggesting, urging, explaining, and supporting

The College Counselors consider each student an individual with a particular set of goals, needs, strengths, desires, and wishes. The college counseling program is designed to help students arrive at their goals as much as is possible. While no one can guarantee a particular outcome, the goal of the program is to help students make good selections, to go through the process, and to have choices.

The actual college search and application process begins with parents and students completing their respective questionnaires, which will be mailed home in the winter. They should be returned promptly. When they are received, we will begin to meet with individual students and use the information to begin our conversations.

During that meeting, goals and aspirations are reviewed, general criteria and particular colleges are discussed, standardized test results are reviewed, the student's transcript is reviewed, special circumstances are discussed, and a general plan for conducting an effective college search is outlined.

At that time the College Counselors normally prepare with the student a list of colleges that meet the search criteria agreed on at that meeting. The list is intended to be a series of suggestions of schools to investigate and suggestions regarding how to do the necessary research of the colleges on the list. Students bring the results of their investigations back to their College Counselor by an agreed-upon date so that a refined list can be developed before the end of the junior year and plans for summer can be reviewed.

As soon as the student has met with his or her college advisor, parents are encouraged to make appointments to talk with the Counselor about any questions on the college process. At the beginning of the senior year, another meeting with your College Counselor is scheduled to review progress and findings and to make mid-course changes if appropriate. The goal is to have a list of no more than six to eight colleges. Normally students are urged to apply to no fewer than four colleges and no more than eight colleges, with six being the average.

The College Resource Room has a wide array of materials available to help you learn more about colleges in general and about your college choices in particular. The College Site on the Cary Academy intranet provides links to sites that take you directly to college web sites, search engines, financial aid information, career and college major programs, and application engines. It is likely that no matter what your particular learning style, either the College Resource Room or the College Site will have information you can use. The College Counselors are available to help students learn to use the resources to help them with their searches.

Representatives from college admissions offices visit campus, most often during “travel season,” September through mid-November. Students are urged to meet with visiting college representatives and arrangements have been made to enable seniors and juniors with their teacher’s permission to be excused from class to do so. Additionally, local college fair information is posted on the College Site. Students are asked to help with this process by:

- Checking the College Site information on the Cary Academy intranet as a part of their normal school routine
- Sharing information about college information sessions and campus visit days. (The fact is that students often receive this information directly from the colleges before the counseling office, and often colleges choose not to send that information to the college counseling office, preferring to deal directly with students.)

8. RESEARCHING COLLEGES

Start your research with some facts:

1. Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map? Is it too close? Too far?
Is it too cold or too hot there?
2. What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
3. What is the college’s selectivity ratio?
4. Does the college offer majors that interest you?
5. Is the college coeducational or single-sex? How much does that *really* matter to you?
6. How many of the college’s students graduate in 4 years? In 5 years? In 6 years?
7. How many of the college’s freshmen return for their sophomore year?

Where do you fit in on the college’s campus?

1. What is the middle 50% of test scores for students for both Critical Reasoning and Math? Where does that place you?
2. What is the mean grade point average of the entering class?
3. Are freshmen guaranteed housing on campus? If not, where do people live?
4. Are extra-curricular activities that interest you available?

Visit the college’s web site, read the guidebooks, and look at the college’s literature.

1. What are the college’s strong academic programs? (Fiske Guide and Princeton Review’s “Best Colleges” are helpful here.)
2. What courses are required to graduate?
3. Does the college have academic programs that interest you (for example, cooperative education, internships, study abroad, interdisciplinary majors, 3-2 programs, etc.)
4. What is the school’s social life like?
5. Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you? Why or why not?
6. What do students at the college say about it? (The guidebooks by Princeton Review, Fiske, and The Insider’s Guide (Yale) are helpful here.) Do you know someone who actually attends now as opposed to fifteen years ago or someone who visited a friend there?
7. What is your general impression of the college?

What is the admissions process at the college?

1. What are the application deadlines?
2. What does the application contain? Is an essay required? Two? Three?
3. Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
4. When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits? Overnight visits?
5. Can you visit classes or just take a tour? What classes are you interested in visiting?

If you want to continue to consider a college, answer these questions:

1. Am I a strong candidate for admission at this college?
2. If I am, what does the selectivity ratio tell me?
3. If I am not a strong candidate for admission, what are my chances?
4. Do I want to visit this college?
5. What additional information do I need?

Keeping a file with results of your research with a page or folder for each college is strongly recommended. Later, when you have narrowed down your choices, keeping a file or folder on each college (information, applications, etc.) is a good way to stay organized.

9. WHAT ARE COLLEGES REALLY LOOKING FOR?

It used to be simple: Everyone knew that colleges were looking for good students who were well-rounded people and who may have had a special talent the college was looking for.

It isn't simple any more. Colleges, selective colleges in particular, don't admit students; they build classes. Admissions officers are increasingly interested in helping to build a community of students who make up the college. Therefore, they look for students who bring a variety of gifts and interests and experiences to their institutions. Most selective colleges could fill their freshman classes with straight "A" students and still not admit everyone who is qualified. (The Ivy League colleges admit one or two of every ten applicants.) In this situation, admissions officers look for students who not only have great academic credentials but also will make the college a more interesting place. This is what it means to say that colleges don't just admit students; they build classes.

Primarily, colleges are looking for diversity. Diversity does not mean a single emphasis on ethnicity but refers to a wide variety of factors students bring with them: academic interests, geographical balance, ethnicity, economic backgrounds, religious beliefs, special interests (from sports to arts to website creation), lifestyles (city, country, suburban), place of origin (international students), political interests and beliefs, accomplishments, commitment to community service, and many other categories and factors. The reason colleges value diversity is that they believe (and recent research suggests the belief is well-founded) that a diverse community provides greater opportunities for all students, including the opportunity to expand their awareness and interests and to learn from each other.

Different authors list different groups of students colleges look for, and there is lots of room for variation including very conservative or religiously affiliated colleges, which have particular missions which students are expected to support. In general, all admissions officers recognize seven categories, whether they are stated or not.

- *The Academic Star*: No matter what else an admissions officer is looking for, an outstanding student always has an edge. Faculty like academic stars, especially if the student has a demonstrated passion for a particular subject.
- *Special Talent*: Special talents come in a lot of forms. Athletic talent may come to mind first, but equally important are other talents such as excellence in music or drama or visual arts. This category also might include students with particular commitments to community-building and community service.
- *Legacies*: It is still true that being the son or daughter of an alumnus or alumna can be important, especially if the college is a private college. Significant family involvement with the school's fund-raising activities will probably be noticed and appreciated as well.
- *Special Backgrounds*: Most colleges pay attention to under-represented minorities and students from different cultural, ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds. They also pay attention to applications from students from other areas of the world.
- *Regional Diversity*: Most colleges are interested in enrolling students who are not from their own backyards. Thus, being from North Carolina could be a plus at a college in Oregon or Maine.
- *Academic Interests*: College admissions committees are asked to fill classrooms. Depending on the size and relative strength of the applicant pool in engineering, chemistry, or classics, a student's academic interest may provide a boost in any given year.

There is a seventh, almost overlooked, category as well. That is the category of good students who bring an interest in life and engagement in activities to campus. Since most students fall into that category, it may be the most competitive. Nonetheless, it does make up the largest category of students on campus.

10. VISITING COLLEGES--CAMPUS VISITS AND INTERVIEWS

When to visit: It is customary to visit colleges during the last half of your junior year, the following summer and during the first half of your senior year. Since the real purpose of visiting is to learn enough about the college to know whether or not it is right for you, a visit when school is in session is desirable. This might mean missing some school, but careful planning should minimize that problem.

- Juniors can use spring term break to visit colleges. Juniors are not eligible for excused college visit days.
- Seniors can use the fall term break and other fall holidays to visit colleges.
- Seniors also are permitted to miss two days (total) of classes during the first two trimesters in order to visit colleges **but** they are responsible for all work missed and they must provide a written request from their parents to be absent from school and complete the required paperwork at least two academic days before they visit. Students who miss school for college visits without prior notification will be considered as having an unexcused absence and faculty are not responsible to help them make up missed work. One additional excused college visit day may be taken during trimester three.

What about summer visits? Even though you can't see the college as it really is when it is alive with students, it still is better to visit during the summer than not to visit at all. You can always return in the fall or winter to talk with students and/or to stay overnight.

One major piece of advice: Do not enroll at any college if you have not visited it. While there are occasionally exceptions to this, it is vastly preferable to spend the time and money to visit before making a commitment so significant without actually seeing the school. It is very difficult to know that a college is right for you if you haven't seen it in person.

Colleges have different procedures about visiting. Some offer personal interviews, some do not. Some give large group tours at specific times during the day with general information sessions before or after the tour.

Some give tours as often as needed. Check the college's website to be sure of its procedures. You can always call the admissions office and ask. It is a good idea to call at least 2-3 weeks in advance to be sure of the college's procedures and to register if there is a limit on the number of visitors the college can handle on a given day. It is not a good idea to just "show up." You might be disappointed.

What to do on a visit

Most of the time, the college will set up the structure of the visit, including a tour. Tour guides are usually students who work for or volunteer in the admissions office. It sometimes happens that a tour guide just doesn't "click" with you. You should not use your response to the tour guide as a reliable indicator of the nature of the school or whether you will be happy there.

There may be a public information session or an individual meeting with an admissions representative. If so, take advantage of it. It will help you to understand how the college thinks of itself and you will also have the opportunity to ask general questions about the college.

If you have the opportunity to meet individually with someone from the admissions office, take it. Parents, remember that although the college will be solicitous of your questions, the visit is about the student and the college, so don't be surprised if the admissions officer wants to talk with your student alone and then invites you in for questions. Make sure that you have questions prepared to ask of the faculty whom you have arranged to meet.

If you have the opportunity to visit a class, take it. Often, the college will require that you set this up in advance of your visit. You will have a better idea of how things work at that college if you do that. Never miss an opportunity to meet faculty or coaches if it can be arranged. It is important to remember, however, that these people will almost always be encouraging, so don't come away from a meeting with a faculty member/coach sure you will be admitted because he/she thought you would fit in well.

If you have the opportunity to eat on campus, do so. Remember, food is an important part of your four years at the college. Check out who is in the dining room or snack bar. What do people look like? How do they act? Are they all the same or is diversity apparent? Sit with some students and ask questions. You'll get a sense of what it is like to be a student there.

Stay overnight in a dormitory if the college allows it. This is especially important for Early Decision students. You will have the opportunity to see what it really is like to be a student there. Normally colleges want at least two to three weeks advance notice for an overnight visit, sometimes more. Check with the admissions office to get their requirements.

If you have the opportunity to read the campus newspaper, do so. It will tell you a lot about what is and what isn't happening on campus. For the same reason, check out the bulletin boards. What's going on—or not?

Visit the bookstore. What is for sale--just textbooks and cool college stuff? What about food to take back to the room? What about computer supplies and general reading or books about the things you study in the required reading?

Don't trust your memory. Whenever you visit a campus, jot down your impressions. It is a simple fact that if you are visiting several colleges over several days, someone (you or your parents) will get something mixed up.

Interviews may be the most misunderstood part of the admissions process. Many colleges, especially large colleges and universities, do not offer personal interviews. Some offer interviews by alums only. Some recommend interviews and some require interviews.

The best rule of thumb is to check the admissions web site or application checklist to see what the college's procedures are. *If an interview is available, seize the opportunity!*

The days when interviews were used to separate those students who would be admitted from those who would not be admitted are long gone. The real purpose of the interview is threefold:

- Interviews give admissions officers a chance to give you information.
- Interviews give admissions officers a chance to get to know you as a real, live person, not just on the basis of the papers which make up your application.
- Interviews give you a chance to ask questions.

Interviews also show that you care enough about the college and the process you are going through to extend yourself. As more and more colleges are factoring in "demonstration of interest," interviews become a good way to show that interest.

Interviews usually are not comprised of scintillating conversation where you are expected to demonstrate your superiority as a student and a leader whom the school cannot live without. They tend to be relatively matter-of-fact in tone and helpful to both you and the admissions officer who will make notes about your questions, interests, and general attitude. So, while you shouldn't go into an interview unprepared, you also shouldn't think of an interview as a test you need to pass.

Some basics:

- Be on time. If you are going to be late, call the office and tell them. Show that you are considerate and courteous enough to make the effort.
- Dress naturally. Jackets and ties for males and dresses and heels for females are probably overkill and will be viewed that way. Be neat, clean, and tucked in. Tie your shoes or sneakers. This isn't a time to be cool and it isn't a time to show off.
Parents: "Business casual" is perfect. You can be sure that the tour guides will be dressed comfortably, even in shorts in very hot weather.
- Practice your listening skills before you open your mouth. And, answer the question. If you don't know the answer to a question saying so can often keep you from getting into trouble.
- If you are a bit of a smart aleck, curb it. Humor can backfire if the other person doesn't get it.
- If you are shy, try not to answer a question with a one-word answer. The interview is a conversation. You need to do your share of the talking.
- Don't forget eye contact.
- Don't chew gum.

- Remember this is a semi-formal situation. “Like, you know....” isn’t appropriate but neither is a display of your complete vocabulary.
- Don’t try to “oversell” yourself. Admissions officers see too much of that and are rarely impressed. The purpose of the meeting is information, not sales.
- **Parents**, please remember it’s your student’s interview, not yours. Stay in the background.
- What does “prepare for the interview” mean? Simply, it means that you should have enough knowledge about the college to ask a few questions which aren’t obvious from the school’s literature or website. You might ask:

- What are the most popular majors on campus? Which ones would you consider the strongest?
- Where do most of the students come from?
- What type of student doesn’t do well here?
- What colleges does your school overlap in applications?

Tip: The answer to this question tells you what the college’s real competition is. (It probably is not an appropriate question at an Ivy League school.)

- Would you describe the campus as conservative or liberal?
- What about diversity? Would a _____ student (fill in the blank with ethnicity, religion, or another category) feel comfortable here?
- I have a special need. How can the college meet it?
- I’m interested in pursuing _____ (medical school, vet school, etc.).

How many students here do that? Where do they go to graduate school? Is there a special advising program for my interest?

- What is the average size of a freshman (English, psychology, biology) class? Do fulltime faculty teach all of the classes? If there are discussion sections of large lecture sections, who teaches them? Who reads the tests and the papers?
- What’s the biggest problem for freshmen in adjusting to this campus?
- What percentage of students stays on campus for the weekend? If the answer is less than 80%, ask why. What do students do for entertainment during the week and on weekends?

Tip: This is an important question. You really can’t trust your neighbor or friend’s opinion, especially if they leave campus often. Get the facts before you make up your mind, not just someone’s opinion.

- When and where do students study?
- When and where do students party and hang out?
- What’s the school’s policy on alcohol and drug use? (You can be sure they’re against it, but what you want to know what the reality is on campus.)
- Tell me about Greek life on campus. When is rush and how is it conducted?
- Tell me about housing and whether students really can get any work done in their rooms.

There are dozens of other good questions based on your interests, needs, and desires. Don’t worry about seeming naïve or foolish – this is an important decision and colleges tend to respect people who ask thoughtful questions about whether this is the right place for them.

Questions you should be ready to answer:

- What are you looking for in a college?
- Why did you pick this college? Why are you considering this college?

Tip: “It’s a good school” is a lame answer. “You are well known for your international focus in the curriculum” is not.

- What do you hope to gain from college?
- What other colleges are you visiting? What other colleges are you considering?
- Do you have a first-choice college? (“Not yet” is an acceptable answer.)

- Do you know what you want to study? (“Undecided” is an acceptable answer. A major that the college does not offer *is not* an acceptable answer.)
- What courses do you like best?
- What courses do you like least?
- What is your favorite thing to do outside of school?
- What are you reading?
- What is your favorite book? movie? band? music? why?
- What have you done that you are most proud of?
- If I asked your friends about you, what would they tell me?
- If I asked your teachers about you, what would they tell me?
- What was the biggest decision you ever made?
- If you could take a year off and do anything you wanted, what would you do?
- What kind of person do you want to be?
- Who do you most admire? Why them?
- If you could change one thing in your school, what would it be?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
- How do you expect to change as the result of going to college?
- Tell me about your interests outside of your academic work. Which is the most important? the most meaningful? the most satisfying?
- Describe the perfect weekend.
- If you had the power to change something about our society, what would it be?
- What else should I know about you? (Silence should not be your answer. Think, in advance, of one or two adjectives which describe you and be prepared to give an example.)

Finally, don’t read anything into the length of the interview. Sometimes 15 minutes is the right length, sometimes an hour is the right length. Be respectful of the interviewer’s time; he or she might only have a half-hour with each student.

11. WHAT ABOUT EARLY DECISION?

There are three types of “Early” programs:

Early Entrance (EE) is a program in which the student enters a college at the beginning of the senior year in high school and completes both the senior year of high school and the freshman year of college at the same time. Most colleges do not offer this option but it may be the right option for some students. Only a very few students use this option and they are often students of extraordinary talent and achievement who have exhausted the curriculum at their high school.

Early Action (EA) is a program which allows a student to apply on a given date before the normal application date and receive a quick decision (usually within four to eight weeks). Early Action programs normally are not binding but give the student increased options. Colleges with “rolling admissions” have a type of Early Action program already built into their system. (This usually allows students to apply by a certain date and colleges make admissions decisions as the applications arrive.) Usually (there can be exceptions to this), colleges with Early Action programs allow students to make simultaneous applications to more than one college or university. It is advisable to read the fine print very carefully.

Early Decision (ED) is a program which allows a student to apply on a given date before the regular application date and receive a quick decision (usually within four to eight weeks). *Unlike Early Action programs, Early Decision programs are binding and exclusive.* What this means is that students who apply

ED are making a commitment to that college and, if accepted, they will enroll. Since this is a commitment, only one ED application can be active. *Students who are applying for financial aid should be very cautious about applying under an ED plan. Since this is a commitment to enroll, if you are accepted, not knowing whether the financial aid package will be sufficient for you to attend, makes this a risky venture.*

Some colleges do, in fact, give students who might be in the middle of their applicant pool a boost if the student applies ED. This is not true of all colleges, however. Students should check this out carefully. Admissions officers usually are very candid about this issue. However, ED is not a means of boosting your chances if you are not particularly competitive at that college.

There is a great deal of pressure to “go Early Decision,” especially at a very selective college or university. Our advice is simple: Think about Early Action only if you would really like to go to that college. Don’t apply using the Early Decision option unless you are totally prepared to go to that college since it is binding.

12. WHAT ABOUT STANDARDIZED TESTS?

Standardized tests are an important part of the college admissions process. The exact weight is somewhat difficult to determine. Some prestigious colleges no longer require them. A few colleges refrain from counting the tests heavily, preferring to rely on an analysis of a student’s transcripts and other factors. For the vast majority of colleges, however, tests are still required and play an integral part in the admissions process.

Colleges and universities use tests differently. Some very large universities use test scores in combination with other statistical factors to create an admissions index. At colleges which use that system (largely because they have too many applications to deal with individually) tests may count more heavily than at colleges which use tests as a way of validating other information.

How important are scores? If a college asks for them, it will use them. But colleges do use them differently. Almost every college admissions officer will say that scores are used to verify what the transcript says or to help them spot an over-achiever or an under-achiever. In general, the larger the school, the more mechanical the process is and the more important the scores. At large universities that do not request letters of reference or essays, scores certainly are important.

At very selective schools, scores play a different role, usually confirming what the application, essay, transcript, and recommendations tell the admissions officer. To quote the Dean of Admissions of one Ivy League university: “High scores alone won’t get you in but low scores are a flag we cannot ignore.”

Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT)

The PSAT is a mini-SAT I and takes 2 hours and 10 minutes. It consists of two 25-minute critical reading sections, two 25-minute math sections and a 30-minute writing skills section.

The PSAT will be administered at Cary Academy on Wednesday, October 17, 2007. All juniors (and sophomores) take the test and information about the test day will be given to the students the week prior to the test. There is no registration process. The school takes care of that as part of administering the test. The cost of the test (\$12) is billed to the student.

“The 2007 PSAT mirrors the SAT I with some differences. Since the SAT I includes topics from third-year, college-preparatory math, which most people know as Algebra II, the math content level of the

PSAT/NMSQT will also be raised, although not to the same degree. It is not reasonable to test juniors and sophomores on subject matter they have not yet taken.

And, the SAT I will include an essay, but the PSAT/NMSQT will not. Here's why: Nearly 2.7 million students take the test, and not enough readers are available to grade this number of essays with sufficient speed to allow timely delivery of score reports to students and schools. Also, the additional time it would take on the test day for students to write an essay (80 percent of schools test on the midweek test date) could seriously disrupt instructional schedules in the secondary schools. And finally, the cost of scoring an essay would significantly increase the cost of this currently inexpensive test." (Source: College Counseling Sourcebook: Advice and Strategies from Experienced Counselors, The College Board, first edition, 2004.)

Each section of the PSAT is scored on a scale of 20-80. This is a practice test for the SAT I and does not appear as part of the student's application to college. Colleges may purchase the names and addresses of students based upon certain information that the student has provided (scores in certain ranges, major interest, gender) so they can begin the process of identifying potential applicants and mail information to those students. If a student does not want to participate in that process, permission does not have to be given. It makes no difference in calculating your scores.

The PSAT is usually taken in October of a student's junior year. The PSAT is used as the qualifying exam for the National Merit Scholarship program in the student's junior year. Taking the test in tenth grade provides an opportunity to practice taking standardized tests and become familiar with the testing situation. Students are allowed to use calculators on the mathematics sections of the PSAT.

Because the PSAT is a practice test, opinion about preparing for it is divided. Certainly, a good night's sleep and a good breakfast before the exam is essential. The College Board provides a practice test that all students taking the test should use to be more comfortable with the test and the type of questions that are asked on the actual PSAT. This practice PSAT is sent to all schools and will be distributed to Cary Academy a week or two prior to the October 12 test date. Students are asked to take this practice test at home under simulated test conditions. They are able to score the test themselves.

In the past several years, some of the test preparation companies have mailed flyers home encouraging parents to enroll their students in PSAT prep courses. At this point, it is our opinion that the practice materials that are provided to each student are sufficient. Students can familiarize themselves with the test with the free information and sample tests from the College Board provided by the school each fall.

National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT)

The NMSQT is the same test as the PSAT. Only the PSAT taken in the student's junior year counts as the NMSQT. The results of the PSAT are used to select entrants for the National Merit Scholarship, National Achievement Scholarship, and National Hispanic Scholarship program. More information about this program is found in the PSAT information flyers given to all juniors and sophomores. The information is also available at www.collegeboard.com.

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT I): Reasoning Test

The SAT I is a 3 hour and 45 minute examination given seven times each year. The SAT I tests critical reasoning, mathematical reasoning and writing. Scores range from 200-800 in each area. Students take it at the high school test center of their choosing. Cary Academy is not a test center for the SAT and, therefore, does not administer the test.

Students are responsible for registering for the SAT I. Cary Academy cannot register students. Only students (or their parents) may register. There are three ways to register:

- Online: at www.collegeboard.com: Recommended for all students.
- By phone: students may re-register (register for a second or third SAT) by phone at 1-800-728-7267 (1-800-771-7600) for an additional \$10 fee.
- By mail: use the form provided in the SAT Registration Booklet.

How many times should a student take the SAT I? Most students take the SAT I in spring of the junior year and again in early fall of the senior year. For example, students might want to take the SAT I in January or April, the SAT II in May, and retake the SAT I in October. (Most juniors will be participating in the foreign language trips and will not be able to take any tests on the June testing date.)

The Educational Testing Service and College Board studies indicate that more than three tests tend to fall in a very predictable range and that there is usually no advantage to keep taking the test. Remember that ETS policy is that when one SAT test score is reported, *all* previous test scores are reported.

Some students have taken the SAT as part of the TIP or CTY programs, usually in 6th, 7th, or 8th grades. These scores are not considered by colleges for admission and quite often do not provide an accurate method of predicting a student's likely score in 11th or 12th grade. There are just too many variables involved.

Use of approved calculators is allowed on the mathematics sections of the SAT I.

SAT II: Subject Tests

SAT II's are one-hour tests measuring knowledge and skill in particular subject areas. Students may take up to three tests on the same test date but may not take SAT I and SAT II on the same date. There are 20 SAT II exams offered six times a year.

Many colleges require one to three SAT II exams. Because there is so much variation regarding what exams different colleges require, it is very difficult to give general advice as to which exams should be taken. It is your responsibility to check the requirements of each college. If you have questions about which tests to take, please speak with your College Counselor.

Students completing physics or chemistry in 10th or 11th grades with grades of B or better may want to consider taking the corresponding SAT II exam at the end of that academic year.

NOTE: Some colleges accept ACT exams (see below) in lieu of the SAT I *and/or* SAT II exams. It may be in the student's interest to explore this option. You must check with the individual college about their requirements or recommendations for testing.

AP (Advanced Placement Tests)

AP exams are given in May and each exam lasts about three hours. Scores range from 1-5, with 5 being the highest score. Colleges often award credit for scores in the 3-5 ranges, but credit policies vary widely among colleges. Sometimes a score of 3 will exempt a student from taking a required course but not exempt the student from the credit-hour requirement in a subject area. Sometimes a score of 5 will be counted for college credit, reducing the number of courses a student must take to graduate. Students are responsible for understanding and pursuing a particular college's policy.

At Cary Academy, students who take Advanced (ADV) courses have the option of taking the corresponding AP exam, if applicable. The cost for the exam is billed to the parent. We urge seniors to take AP exams only if they intend to do their best; low scores reflect badly on the school and can hurt the college chances of future classes.

ACT (American College Test)

The ACT is an alternative to the SAT exams. It is a four-part test of English, mathematics, reading proficiency, and science reasoning. Scores range from 1-36. Unlike the SAT I, the ACT is more like a subject test. Students who perform at a high level in the classroom but whose SAT scores are low may find that their scores improve by comparison when they take the ACT. Additionally, some colleges accept the ACT in lieu of SAT II exams and others in lieu of SAT I and SAT II exams. ACT offers an optional "Writing" section. If you plan to take the ACT you should check with each college in which you are interested to learn whether they require the ACT Writing exam. You can learn more about this test and the ACT test at www.act.org.

TOEFL

The Test of English as a Foreign Language is designed for international students whose first language is not English and who have not been in English-speaking schools for more than a few years. See your College Counselor for advice about taking this examination. The TOEFL is meant to help colleges assess whether the student's English skills are adequate to understand college-level texts.

Sending Test Scores to Colleges

It is the student's responsibility to send official test scores from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to colleges. Cary Academy cannot do that for you. You may do this by entering the college's code at the time you register or at the time of testing. You avoid charges for sending scores to up to four colleges if you use this method. If you release scores to colleges after the examination date, there is an extra charge for each SAT I and SAT II score or ACT score that is sent. Contact the Educational Testing Service or ACT either by telephone or on the web to send scores to colleges.

Tests and Early Action/Early Decision Applications

If you think you might be a candidate for an Early Decision or Early Action application (normally an application which is sent to a college by a specified deadline, usually by November 1), you will want to plan your program of testing to allow for that change in the normal calendar of events. For example, you might want to take the SAT I in March, the SAT II in May, and retake the SAT I in October. (Many juniors will be participating in the foreign language trips and, therefore, will not be able to take any tests on the June testing date.) Taking any exam in November may result in the score reaching the college too late to be taken into consideration for Early Decision or Early Action.

Test Preparation

Students should not go into a testing situation without some preparation. Certainly, students who have taken a PSAT in the sophomore and junior years and have worked on the practice tests prior to these should feel comfortable taking the SAT I. For students who feel that more practice is necessary, there are a variety of test preparation methods, ranging from books to short courses to extensive courses.

English classes keep the SAT I vocabulary in mind and students normally are well prepared for the critical reading section of the SAT exam. Students will also be well prepared for the writing section of the SAT I. The mathematics program is more than adequate preparation for the subject matter of the mathematics sections of the tests.

Test experts agree on one thing, students who read outside of school perform better on both the critical reasoning and mathematical sections of standardized tests than students who do not.

At the very least, a student should study the test preparation material supplied by the College Board in its PSAT booklets that are distributed to juniors and sophomores just prior to the administration of that exam in October. There is SAT preparation information found at www.collegeboard.com, including the “SAT Question of the Day.”

Testing Q&A for Juniors

Q: When should I take the SAT? How many times should I take it?

A: We recommend that students take the SAT between 2-3 times total, at least once in the junior year and once in the senior year. Research indicates that scores tend to plateau after the 3rd testing, so we rarely advise a student to take the SAT more than 3 times. Almost all students, however, will take the SAT twice, as most students see an improvement on at least one section between first and second testing. As many colleges indicate that they like to see a senior year score, it is generally advisable to take the SAT a final time in the fall of 12th grade.

Q: How do I register for tests?

A: Students must register for the SAT and/or ACT themselves. We cannot do that for students. CA is not a test site for the SAT or ACT, so select the test location that is most convenient for you. Online registration is preferred: www.collegeboard.com and <http://www.actstudent.org/index.html> Cary Academy's school code is 340601.

Q: Do colleges receive all SAT scores?

A: Yes, a score report to a college will show all previously taken SAT scores. Students cannot select which scores to send. However, most colleges do mix and match scores and will take the highest Critical Reading, the highest Math and the highest Writing score available.

Q: When should I take the SAT in 11th grade?

A: That depends on your schedule and commitments. Our advice, in general, is to sit for the SAT for the first time in January or March of Grade 11. However, you should review the test dates for the SAT this spring and decide which date works best for you and which gives you the best opportunity to prepare. For a calendar with dates and information, go to

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees.html>

Please note: The March I test date is at the beginning of the trimester break.

Also, if you are in Algebra II this year, conventional wisdom is to wait until March or May to take the SAT, as the test covers math material through Algebra II.

Q: Who takes the SAT Subject tests, and when should I take those?

A: Not all colleges require the SAT Subject tests, and not all students take them. It is generally the more selective colleges that ask students to take these tests. None of the UNC system colleges, for example, requires the SAT Subject tests for admission.

If you are interested in applying to more selective colleges, then you should plan to take 2-3 Subject Tests on the May 3 test date. The tests are 1 hour in length, so students may take up to 3 tests in one sitting. Please see the complete list of Subject tests offered here.

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about/SATII.html>

Again, not all students will need to take the Subject tests. The college counselor will discuss this with the juniors during individual meetings in the winter/early spring. Students can look at college's websites to see what their requirements are.

Q: What is the ACT? How is it different from the SAT?

A: The ACT is accepted by virtually all colleges and universities in the U.S. The ACT is a subject-based test, and it differs from the SAT in a few ways:

1. The ACT includes a section on Science, which is not on the SAT.
2. The ACT also has sections on English, Math, Reading, and an optional section on Writing which virtually all colleges now require.
3. The ACT is scored on a 1-36 scale.
4. The ACT does not penalize for incorrect responses, while the SAT deducts a fraction of a point for wrong answers.

The ACT seems to be a better test for students who have consistently high grades in CA classes, but whose PSAT and SAT scores are not at the level one would expect. There is a wealth of information (more than we can include here) on the ACT at their website, including test dates, test tips, etc.

<http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/index.html>

Q: If I take the ACT, when should I take it?

A: Calendar of ACT dates: <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/currentdates.html>

We would recommend either the February or April test date for juniors. But again, consider your own schedule and commitments in planning. If your PSAT scores are strong and you feel comfortable with the SAT, you do not need to take the ACT as well. It is simply another option.

Q: How should I prepare for the SAT and/or ACT?

A: All students should take some time to prepare. At a minimum, students should review their PSAT Score Reports in preparation for the SAT. Students should also take at least 1 full-length practice test before taking either the SAT or ACT. Most of the test prep businesses offer free full-length practice tests which simulate an actual test. They will score it, and although they will obviously try to sell families a program after it, there is no obligation to sign on. Visit the primary test prep websites (Kaplan, Princeton Review, etc) and look for "FREE" prep information.

Q: Should I take a prep course?

A: That is an individual decision for families, based on time, expense and personal preference. The College Board has some information regarding effects of 'coaching' on their website

http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/highered/ra/sat/coaching.pdf

Some students want a structured environment in which to review. Others will take time to do review on their own. Again, it's a personal decision and one answer is not right for all students. Prep courses take considerable time and can cost a lot. Families should consider the pros and cons of the time and money invested in making their own decision.

Q: Any test day tips?

A: Yes, both the SAT and ACT are nearly 4 hours long. Get a good night's sleep before the test and eat breakfast before going. Also, take a snack and some water. Parents, drive your son/daughter to the test site, so that they are not stressed by parking congestion, etc. Review other tips on the many online resources, as well.

Q: Do all colleges require the SAT or ACT?

A: No! A number of highly selective colleges in the US do not require SAT or ACT scores. Most of these are smaller, private colleges, such as Hampshire, Bates, Holy Cross, Mount Holyoke, etc. For more information, please see <http://www.fairtest.org/>

13. WHAT DOES A COLLEGE APPLICATION CONTAIN?

College applications may range from three or four pages to over fourteen pages. Each college determines what information it wants, but applications contain several things in common.

The School Record

Your transcript shows what courses you have taken and what grades you received at the end of each course. It is the single most important piece of information the college admission officer has and tends to correlate most strongly with college performance.

The Cary Academy Profile (included with every transcript) is a key document that tells the admissions officer what courses are available, how the School grades, the proportion of students who attend college, where Cary Academy's students have been admitted and where they enrolled, standardized test information, information about Advanced Courses and AP exam results. Admissions officers use this information to compare your transcript against what is in effect the School's transcript.

The Cary Academy Profile is an essential piece of information for the admissions committee because it is the source of their knowledge of how you have done in relation to other students at Cary Academy.

Increasing numbers of independent schools and many competitive public schools no longer provide colleges with rank-in-class information for their students. All colleges are accustomed to receiving transcripts from schools that do not rank. (At least one highly selective college reports that over 40% of its enrolled students attend high schools that do not provide a rank-in-class information.)

Standardized Test Scores

Like it or not, most colleges and universities still require test scores. They are useful because they do provide a standardized common denominator to help admissions officers measure you against all the other applicants.

In all cases, *you are responsible for arranging to have "official" test scores sent to the colleges to which you are applying.* Contact the College Board at 1-800-728-7267 (1-800-SAT-SCORE) or www.collegeboard.com (or www.act.org for the ACT) and request that the scores be sent. You will find the college's code number at the College Board or ACT web site or in the registration information for the exam.

The Application

At larger universities, and at many regional state or public universities, the application is purely factual, asking only for biographical information, addresses, and other data. State-supported universities also ask for certification of address and other residency information. Complete this information only if you are applying for in-state resident fees. A college with a more personalized admission process is more likely to have a longer application, request a more detailed list of activities and involvements and an essay.

The Common Application

Over 160 colleges and universities are members of The Common Application group. The Common Application is a single application accepted by all of the members who agree to treat the Common application as their own in the admissions process. For an increasing number of colleges the Common Application with a supplement *is* their application. The Common Application is a great time-saver. You complete it once and send copies to other colleges that accept it.

You must check the college's application information to be sure whether or not a college-specific supplement is needed. All of this information is available at the Common Application web site, www.commonapp.org

Essays

Many colleges request essays, others do not. Some ask for two essays and some even ask two or three short answer questions in addition to essays.

When you know that you will be applying to a particular college, you should begin thinking about writing an essay. You can call a college in late summer and ask what the essay topics will be. If a college is a member of the Common Application group, you can review the topics found there. Most of the applications essays fall into certain categories.

Typical College Essay Topics

1. The personal statement (tell us about yourself)
Alternate versions: What else do we need to know about you?
What did we not ask that we should have asked?
Write page 127 of your autobiography.
Describe your 25th high school class reunion biography.
Reflect on a picture or object of significance to you.
2. Significant experience, achievement, decision, activity
Subcategory: Leadership experience/opportunity
3. Influential person or event
Alternate versions: Interview with a person in history
Great book/movie/painting/other art form
4. Reflect on a quotation – this question is really about whether you have thought about an issue deeply and have reached a conclusion.

5. Important Issues

Alternate versions: Social movement – *subcategory:* “Diversity”
Ethical issue
Political issue/movement

6. Predict the future

7. Other topic of your own choosing

Essay questions from the most recent “Common Application:”

1. Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, or risk you have taken or an ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
2. Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
3. Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you and describe that influence.
4. Describe a character in fiction, an historical figure, or a creative work that has had an influence on you and explain that influence.
5. 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.
6. Write about a topic of your choice.

If you look at these questions you will see that *they are all about you*. The essay is your opportunity to let the admissions committee get to know you, to give or amplify information requested in other parts of the application, to give some insight into the depth and complexity of your thinking and to demonstrate your writing style. **It should go without saying that your essays represent you and that they should represent your very best work.**

Some colleges ask to see a graded piece of academic work – usually a history or English essay with your teacher’s comments and the grade on it. A photocopy is acceptable, but not if it looks as if you tried to change or correct something on it.

Your Transcript and the Secondary School Report Form

Your transcript is the key document you present to the college. It is sent directly from the Upper School office. The Secondary School Report Form provides other information that the college wants accompanies it. Whenever a transcript is released, a copy of the Cary Academy Profile goes with it so the recipient knows how to interpret the information on the transcript.

Counselor’s Recommendation

Many colleges ask for a Counselor’s Recommendation or a School Recommendation. Your College Counselor writes this. It is important that your College Counselor is able to talk knowledgeably about you, and much of the information about you comes from not only discussion with your teachers, coaches, and advisors but also from the questionnaires and resume which are requested to start the college counseling process in your junior year. Take them seriously.

Teacher Recommendations

Some colleges ask for teacher recommendations, some do not. Some ask for one recommendation, some ask for two recommendations. Some ask for recommendations from a particular teacher (English and math are the most common), and some let you choose. What they are interested in is information about you in school, such as do you show interest in the subject or just in your grades? Do you accept criticism and work on improving? Are you consistent? Are you an inquisitive student or just argumentative? Are you active in class or do you do just enough to get by? The College Counselors will be happy to help you make the decision about which teachers you want to ask to write recommendations.

Some students feel the need to include teacher recommendations if the college doesn't ask for one. Our suggestion is if you want to do that, go ahead, but understand that the college may or may not read it.

Should I waive my right to see the recommendation? Yes. The simple fact is that most admissions committees look for that waiver because it not only tells the college that you trust your recommenders but it also gives them the sense that they are getting the real story from your recommender.

How you should request a recommendation: Contact the teacher and ask if he or she is willing to write a recommendation. Do not assume the answer will be yes. Many teachers simply receive too many requests to respond to them all positively. Sometimes teachers do not think they can be honest and helpful to you at the same time. Always remember that the teacher is doing a service for you – you do not have the right to demand that any teacher write a recommendation.

When you ask a teacher for a recommendation *requested by the college*, be sure to:

1. Give the teacher any forms the college may want the teacher to complete. Even if the teacher writes a letter, that form, properly signed by the teacher, should accompany the letter.
2. Give the teacher a large envelope with the list of the colleges to which you are applying and the deadline due dates.
3. Give the teacher an addressed envelope for mailing the recommendation at the same time that you provide the list of colleges and the accompanying teacher recommendation forms for each one.
4. Thank the teacher for writing your recommendation.

Other Information

Students should feel free to include a more complete resume as an attachment. But be sure to complete the application sections which request information about activities, interests, sports, etc., as well. Remember to put your name, address, etc., *on the top of each page* that you submit.

Extra recommendations may be useful *if* there is someone in the community or an employer who knows you *very well and can provide information that is not available* in another part of your application. Even if the recommendation is from a politically important person or an important alumnus of the school, if the recommendation doesn't talk about you as an individual and about something particular you have done, it does not need to be a part of your application.

If you are an *accomplished* musician, artist, writer, etc. you might want to send samples (a tape or slides for art portfolios). But remember that you will not get these materials back and only do this if you have reached a point in your level of accomplishment that you are truly outstanding. If you have taken part in a summer activity or taken a course, consider including a transcript or recommendation if that is appropriate.

Most students will not need any “extra” pieces. Sending too much can be as big a problem as sending too little – always check with your College Counselor before making that decision.

14. PREPARING AND SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

In the current admissions climate competition for available spaces is keen and even excellent students with interesting resumes will find themselves in greater competition than they expected. The number of high school seniors in the country is on the increase and they all seem to be submitting an increasing number of applications. This has led to more competition for each space. The “selectivity index” is often a student’s biggest hurdle, not his or her preparation or school record.

In this situation, it is not wise to limit yourself to a small number of college choices, especially if you are applying to highly selective or very popular colleges and universities. Perhaps the best strategy is to spread your applications over a range of selectivity and entrance difficulty. While students are encouraged to “think big” and to try for entry at any college they believe best suits their needs, realism is essential also.

Based on this, we recommend that students identify 6-8 colleges to which they will apply. These colleges should fall in to three categories:

- “*Reach*” colleges: Colleges that admit fewer than 40% of their applicants). The lower this percentage drops the more competitive the admission. Reach colleges also include colleges where you are not in the top 25% of the profile of the freshman class.
- “*Target*” colleges: Colleges that admit more than 40% and where you are in the middle 50% of the profile of the freshman class.
- “*Probable*” colleges: Colleges that admit no less than 65% and where you are in the top 25% of the profile of the freshman class.

How many in each group? That is a decision based on your college search and your academic, testing, and extra-curricular records. In any event it is a smart strategy to select at least one college in each category and even smarter to select two. We suggest 2-3 Reach, 2-3 Target, and 2-3 Likely colleges.

The hard part in this is to take an honest look at your record. How many A’s are on your transcript? in what subjects? Remember, colleges still look at transcripts first and the first thing they look for is depth, breadth, and performance. If your “A’s” are not in the “core” or “solid” courses in English, foreign languages, history, math, and science, your transcript is not as competitive at highly selective schools as the one that does have “A’s” in those areas.

What about “safe” schools? Please do not make the mistake of thinking of a “Probable” college is not one that needs to be researched thoroughly. “Probable” schools exist for every student, but the goal should be to find the best match of college and student, not to find a college you don’t want to go to but will apply to anyway “just to be safe.” *Experience shows that students who follow the strategy suggested above are successful in their college searches because all of their colleges meet their criteria.*

Where do I find applications? Applications are easy to find. They often are part of the materials you receive from colleges when you call, write, or e-mail a college for information.

If you want information from a college, you can get it several ways:

- Use the college’s website. Look for the section labeled “Admissions” or “Prospective Students.” Most contain a “contact us” button to request admissions information and applications. Most also contain both printable and on-line versions of their applications.
- Call the college admissions office. The number is available on the college’s website or in the many handbooks available in the College Resource Room. *The College Handbook*, published by the College Board, lists all accredited colleges alphabetically by state and lists their mailing addresses, telephone and fax numbers and e-mail addresses.
- If you have the time, you can write to the admissions office. A simple post card is sufficient. All it need say is:
“I am a junior (senior) at Cary Academy and I would like to have information about admissions and an application for admission. Please send the information to (use your formal name-not your nickname, your mailing address, and your phone number). If you have a specific major in mind or are interested in a particular program or want to be contacted by a coach or band director, etc., it is customary to state that you want information about that program.

The College Site of the School’s website provides direct links to several sources of applications. Feel free to use them. Colleges pay or take other positive steps to have their applications on these websites, so feel free to use them instead of the college’s printed version.

Common Applications are available from www.commonapp.org. If you use the website, you can either download the form (and the school supplement if it is available – sometimes colleges prefer to send you their supplement after they receive the basic Common Application) or send it directly via the Internet. Be sure to print out a copy of the Secondary School Report and provide enough copies (with the appropriate college name circled on the masthead) when you list colleges on Transcript Release Form. Many colleges make it possible to apply directly through their websites. Be sure and print a copy of your on-line application before you hit the “send” button. If there is a problem later you can easily send another. In fact, most colleges now prefer to have you apply on-line.

Be sure and print a copy of your on-line application before you hit the “send button”. If there is a problem later you can easily send another.

Can I fill in the application by hand? While it is preferable to use a method of preparing applications which results in clean, typed pages, handwritten applications are perfectly acceptable provided they are legible. If your handwriting is not clear, try to use one of the other methods of preparing your application such as one of the web-based application sources. Remember, an admissions officer reads many applications in a day and, in a sense, the application *is* you. If your application is sloppy or difficult to read, it sends a poor message to the reader about your commitment to the college.

It is recommended that you photocopy the application and fill out the photocopy. Make your mistakes there, not on the original that goes to the admissions office. It is also highly advisable that you retain a copy of the completed application for your files. If, for any reason, your application does not arrive at the admission office, you can fax a copy immediately.

Any part of the application that is not on a form (such as essays and other personal information or statements) should be neat and legible. Each page should have the student's name, address, etc., on the top of each page.

What is due when and where? Transcript Release Form: The first week you are in school during your senior year, you will be given a Transcript Release Form to have your parents sign and for you to return immediately. This form is used to alert your College Counselor to the colleges to which you will be applying and the deadlines by which your transcript, the Secondary School Report Form, and the counselor's recommendation must be sent.

When you know where you will be applying, you are to bring the Secondary School Report Form (part of the paper college application or download this part of the college application form) with the top portion completed to Mrs. Akers who will have you sign and list the college's deadline due date on the Transcript Release Form. You should also bring a large, addressed Cary Academy envelope for each college. **You must provide this information no less than a minimum of three (3) weeks in advance of the college's deadline due date** in order for your College Counselor to gather all of the information necessary to complete the forms and write your recommendation. It is your responsibility to know the deadlines for your applications and to complete all the requested information in a timely manner.

NOTE: For students with application deadline due dates of January 1-January 15 all requests for transcripts must be made no later than December 1.

If you are applying electronically, print a copy of the completed application before you send it. Your college counselor will be happy to look it over, if you wish, before you push the "send" button.

When you have decided to apply to a college, do the following:

1. Remember to let your College Counselor know what your plans are about your applications and, if you have questions, make an appointment to review the application to be sure you understand how to complete it or to have the College Counselor read essays, etc. Keep in mind that suggestions for change are not intended to be criticisms but positive suggestions to make your work better.
2. Ask your intended references if they will write a letter for you and give them the appropriate materials and deadlines.
3. If you know you are going to apply to a college, there is no need to wait until the deadline. Take the Secondary School Report Form and the addressed large Cary Academy envelope to Mrs. Akers and fill out the Transcript Release Form.
4. Complete your application on time or mail the application, essay, and all other sections you are responsible for.
Tip: Make a copy of your application. Applications can be lost or misfiled, especially at colleges with a high volume of applications.

Recommendations and References: When you ask a teacher for a recommendation *requested by the college*, be sure to give the teacher an addressed envelope with a list of the colleges to which you are applying, the deadline due dates, and any forms the college may want the teacher to complete. (If there is a

confidentiality waiver, you should sign it. Colleges place more value on a confidential recommendation.) Even if the teacher writes a letter, that form, properly signed by the teacher, should accompany the letter.

Sending Grades: If you apply Early Decision or Early Action, it is likely that you will do so on the strength of your grades through the end of your junior year.

Grades are sent at the end of the first term of the senior year. Since Cary Academy is on a trimester system, grades for the first trimester constitute “Mid-Year Grades” that colleges will ask for.

*Occasionally, second trimester mid-term and end-of-term grades will be sent to your colleges if your college advisor believes they will help you **or** if the college asks for them. If you receive a letter of deferral, you should be prepared to have these grades sent to your colleges.*

In other words, do not slack off at the end of first term. Second term mid-term and final second term grades often make the difference.

A final transcript is mailed in June to the college where you plan to enroll. It is your responsibility to notify your college advisor as soon as you send your enrollment deposit to the college.

Admission deans review all final transcripts of incoming students to make sure that students have maintained the same academic level on which they were offered admission. Do not jeopardize your admission by presenting declining grades for your senior year.

15. APPLICATION ETHICS

It is unfortunate that over the past 10 years college admissions officers and college counselors have seen a growing number of students and parents who, in an attempt to manipulate the system to their favor, are crossing the boundary between doing smart things to help assure a desired outcome and doing things which are inappropriate.

The College Counseling Office at Cary Academy takes a firm stance on certain ethical issues. The admissions process is not a “game” to be won at any cost. It is a complex process that demands a great deal of integrity on everyone’s part.

Here are some examples of what we consider crossing the boundaries:

- Applying to binding Early Decision programs to more than one college or university. The whole point of a binding ED program is to make a contract: “If you accept me, I will withdraw all my other applications and attend your university.” Many colleges now require that the college advisor sign the application along with the student and parents. Cary Academy will not send transcripts to more than one ED school or to any other schools once a student has been admitted under a binding ED program.
- Failing to withdraw your applications to other colleges when you have been admitted under a binding Early Decision program. It isn’t fair to those colleges or to the students who have applied to them for you to continue in the process “just to see what happens.”

- Attempting to gain release from an ED decision because you have changed your mind. The only acceptable reason for requesting release from your contract with your ED College is the inability to work out appropriate financial aid. You and your parents should factor this into your decision to apply ED in the first place.
- Having someone else write or “heavily edit” your essays. When you sign an application, you are indicating that it is *your* work.
- Submitting deposits to more than one college. If you are admitted to a college which requires a deposit by May 1 and wait-listed at your favorite college, you can send the deposit to the college to which you were offered admission . If you then are offered admission from the Wait List at your first choice college, you should send in the deposit to the latter college and immediately notify the first college that you are withdrawing and why. Your College Counselor can advise you about this conversation and what is the appropriate behavior.
- Stating an intended major that you have no intention to pursue because you think it might help your admission chances.
- Describing inaccurately your activities and accomplishments. Putting things in the best light is one thing, fabrication is something else.
- Stating to more than one college that it is your first choice.

Reporting Violations of Student Conduct to Colleges and Universities

An increasingly difficult area of concern is the situation in which a student has gotten into social or academic difficulty in school and wants to keep it off his or her record. If you have done something serious enough to warrant suspension or dismissal, that record will be a part of your school history. The College Counselor is honor-bound to report that if asked by the college, as are you. Other, minor infractions generally are treated that way by colleges: as minor infractions. Suspensions and dismissals need to be acknowledged and dealt with forthrightly.

16. FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Financial assistance comes in several forms.

- *Financial aid*, which is based on “need.” “Need” is a technical term, not a judgment. Need is based on an analysis of your family’s ability to contribute to college costs. That analysis yields a dollar figure that your family is expected to provide. Need is the difference between the “Expected Family Contribution” and the cost of attending the college. Because college costs vary, need may vary from college to college.

Colleges have different strategies for meeting need. Some meet all need with loans and work programs. Some meet all need with a heavier concentration of grants than loans. The best advice is to ask questions about the school’s financial aid policies. Call the school’s financial aid office and ask – you are entitled to clear answers.

Need is established by filing two forms:

1. **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).** This form, available in the fall, is the basis of all financial aid. The easiest way to file is to do so on the web at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Your College Counselor will have a few paper copies in the office. We recommend filing it as soon as possible but no later than January 30, even if you are using estimated income and expense information (there is a check-off on the form to indicate that). It takes approximately four (4) weeks to process this information and send it to the colleges. Delays in filing the FAFSA may have adverse effects.
2. **PROFILE.** Many private colleges and a few state universities want more information than the FAFSA requires. PROFILE is the form used to obtain that information and you can fill it out on line at www.collegeboard.com. Part I of the PROFILE goes to the College Scholarship Service (CSS) in Princeton. You should file it as early in the fall as you can once you have developed your list of probable college applications. You will receive Part II of the PROFILE to complete which is returned to CSS. When the form has been processed, the suggested family contribution is sent you and the colleges. This is particularly helpful since you can get an early read on your family contribution, before the information from the FAFSA is available. (Since the information requested on the PROFILE is more detailed than the FAFSA, the family contribution can be different.)

How is need met? Need-based aid breaks down into three types: Work-study (job), loans, and grants.

What about merit aid? Merit-based aid is based on the recognition of special skills, talents, or past academic success. Merit aid sometimes is tied to need as well. Occasionally, students will be asked to file a separate scholarship application, but in the past few years, the application for admission is used for awarding special scholarships based on merit.

Although the vast majority of financial assistance is in the form of need-based aid, there are a number of scholarships, grants, and other forms of financial assistance available. The College Resource Room has books with information and advice to students on how to obtain that money. Additionally, colleges are happy to provide information about grant and scholarship programs they maintain. Some of these programs are highly competitive. Some are virtually automatic if a student has certain academic credentials. Consult the college's admissions literature for information.

There is an excellent website, fastweb.com, which is a major source of information about scholarships. It also has warnings about the many scams that unfortunately exist. Companies that, for a fee, promise to locate a specific number of sources of financial aid may approach you via the mail or internet. Do not respond. You should not pay to apply for a program or to be registered with a financial aid service.

Tip: If financial aid is critical, consult with the college admissions office before applying for ED. Be sure you understand their policies regarding meeting need and whether you can be released from your part of the contract, if the aid is insufficient.

Tip: There are several sources of information that can give you a ballpark figure for your Estimated Family Contribution. Financial aid estimators are available through a number of websites such as www.collegeboard.com

17. STUDENT ATHLETES

Students who are interested in playing sports in college are encouraged to speak with their coaches and with the Athletic Director.

If you want to participate at either the NCAA Division I or Division II levels, you must complete the NCAA Clearinghouse Initial Eligibility form. This form can be filed at any time in your senior year, but we suggest that you file it before the end of September.

You can find information about the process at the NCAA website, www.ncaa.org. Coaches from Division I and II colleges prefer that you have filed the form early so they can be sure of your academic status.

18. STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

If you have documented learning differences, have used those accommodations in the classroom, have filled out the SSD (Services for Students with Disabilities) Eligibility Form, and have received approval from the Educational Testing Service (for the SAT) or from ACT as someone who is eligible for accommodations, you are entitled to those accommodations in standardized testing.

Colleges are not allowed to ask if you have learning disabilities, but it can make a difference in your ability to learn at an optimal level in college. Our best advice is to self-disclose this information so that the college has the opportunity to fairly estimate your chances of success and whether it is able to offer you the range of support you require.

Please remember that neither the College Board nor the ACT will grant accommodations which students do not receive on a normal basis during school, regardless of testing or recommendations by educational professionals.

19. CONCLUSION

This handbook covers a great deal of information. If you read it and heed it, it should help you stay on track during the college search process. Yes, there is work to be done—research to do, essays to write, deadlines to meet—but try to keep the process in perspective, and remember that things will work out! The College Counselors are here to help. Be in contact with us whenever you have questions.

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