

COLLEGE PLANNING

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What do seniors need to do to prepare for college?

Choosing a college is a personal decision that can be very confusing and stressful; therefore, it is best to start this process as early as possible. Students should consider the following steps when choosing the college that is right for them.

STEP I. Develop a list of factors that are most important to you. Here is a list of questions that you should consider asking yourself and prospective schools during your college visits.

Academic Programs & Resources – Does the college have the major in which you are interested? If you are undecided about a major, does the college offer enough options?

If you are undecided, please schedule an appointment with Ms. Staples in Guidance. She will schedule you to take a career interest inventory.

College Size – Do you like being in places where you know everyone, or do you like the anonymity of a crowd? Is gender and diversity balance important to your college decisions? Would you be more comfortable learning in a small classroom or in a lecture hall?

Geographic Location, Housing, and Campus Life – Do you prefer an urban or rural environment? Do you want to stay close to home or are you ready for a change? What about climate, recreational options, culture, and housing options?

Type – Some differences also include whether schools are single sex or female student, if they have religious affiliations, and whether they are public or private.

Public colleges and universities are subsidized by tax money from the state in which they are located and are generally less expensive than private colleges. However, the lower rates are typically only available to residents of the state.

Private colleges are funded through endowments, tuition, and donations; therefore, the cost of attending a private college is usually higher than a public college. However, do not rule out private colleges based solely on cost. Private colleges often offer financial aid options that make their cost lower, and often competitive with a state funded college.

Pennsylvania has 14 state universities: Bloomsburg University, California University, Cheyney University, Clarion University, East Stroudsburg University, Edinboro University, Indiana University, Kutztown University, Lock Haven University, Mansfield University, Millersville University, Shippensburg University, Slippery Rock University and West Chester University.

Cost/Scholarships and Financial Aid – Colleges vary in their cost. Generally, community colleges cost the least and private colleges cost the most. However, there are different types of scholarships and financial aid packages available at different schools, which can offset the cost. Therefore, it is important to research the cost of each perspective college.

Licensing & Accreditation – Is the school accredited by the appropriate organization? If a school is accredited, it means that the school meets the minimum standards of the accrediting organization.

Student Population – Larger schools and schools located in larger cities, tend to have students from a wide range of ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds. Where as smaller schools, or schools in rural areas, tend to have a relatively homogeneous student body. Other things to consider are whether most students live on campus or commute; do students living on campus generally go

home for the weekends, how old the average student; and how many students are in the Greek System (Fraternities and Sororities) if there is one.

Programs – How long is the program? Programs may be 1 year, 2 yrs, 4 years or more. Is the program accredited (if applicable to your field of study)?

Check Admissions Policies and Deadlines – Some schools strictly base their admissions' criteria on specific scores and GPA averages, whereas other schools will consider applicants whose scores fall below the norm.

Check the School's Academic Track Record – How many freshmen return their sophomore year? How many students complete their program in 4 years? What is the graduation rate? What percent of students go on to graduate school? What is the transfer out rate?

Academics – What is the average class size? How difficult is it to register for classes? How is student advisement handled? Are there honor classes? Are tutoring options available?

Campus Security – How safe is the school & surrounding area? What are the crime statistics? What are the policies for reporting crimes & emergencies on campus?

Transportation Issues – Are freshmen allowed to have cars on campus? Is public transportation available?

Living Arrangements – What is the school's policy regarding living on or off campus? Can freshmen live off campus? Are the dorms same sex or co-ed?

Campus Resources – Are the labs, library, bookstore, health center, and computer access adequate for the number of students enrolled? Is the equipment and resources up to date? Are there special services and facilities available for disabled students?

Placement Options – Does the school offer a career center that assists students with job placement? Are there internship and research options available? Are there co-op programs?

Faculty – What is the teacher to student ratio? Are professors available for individual contact? What credentials do faculty members have? For example, will classes be taught by full-time doctoral qualified faculty or by graduate students?

Athletics, Events, Activities, And Special Programs –What extra curricular activities are available? What clubs or organizations are available? What sports are available, and what level of competition (division) does the college participate in, if any? (Intramural and/or extramural sports) Are there opportunities to study abroad? Are work-study programs available?

STEP 2 **Perform a college search using the factors determined in Step 1, and compile a list of possible colleges and universities.**

There are numerous resources available to you, such as college information books, college related websites, family, friends, teachers, and guidance counselors. You should also consider attending college fairs, where you can gather important literature, as well as talk with college representatives from various schools. College representatives are present at these fairs to explain their programs, admission requirements, and answer questions. College representatives are also available to visit with students in the high school setting. The Guidance Office assists college representatives with scheduling these visits, and maintains a calendar of all scheduled visits. Students must sign up in advance in order to meet with the representatives scheduled at the high school.

STEP 3 **Research each college discovered in Step 2, and use the criteria from Step 1 to narrow your list of colleges to a manageable size.**

STEP 4 Visit as many colleges as possible after narrowing down your initial list in Step 3.

You can learn a lot about a college by spending a few hours on campus. The best way to get a feel for a school is by visiting the campus, taking a tour, attending class, talking with current students, eating in the cafeteria, and spending a night in a dorm, if possible. It is important that you feel comfortable. If you feel uncomfortable, no matter who wants you to go there or how good the school looks on paper, it is probably a wrong choice.

Remember that when you visit a school, you are looking for a perspective home for a minimum of 4 years, a physical home as well as an intellectual home. When planning a visit to a school, you should call ahead to arrange a tour. Some schools have regularly scheduled visits, and others arrange tours by appointment only. Many schools also host open houses throughout the year.

STEP 5 Determine which colleges you wish to apply, and apply to them during the Fall/winter of your senior year.

- 1) The process of applying to college can be an expensive, time consuming, and complicated.
- 2) The number of schools you apply to depends on you. Most students generally apply to 1 or 2 “reach” schools, 2 to 4 colleges where they would like to go and can expect to be accepted based on a realistic appraisal of the schools’ admissions criteria, and 1 to 2 “safety” schools. A “reach” school is a college where a student has little chance of being accepted based on a realistic appraisal of the school’s admissions criteria. A “safety” school is a college where a student clearly meets the school’s admissions criteria. It is recommended that students apply to at least 3 or 5 colleges of different levels of selectivity. However, students need to choose the number that is right for them. This decision may partly depend on your financial situation, since most colleges have application fees. Some colleges waive their admission fees when students apply on-line or obtain an application from a college representative at a college fair or high school visit. Be sure to write down and adhere strictly to all college deadlines whether for applications, financial aid, scholarships, campus housing, etc.

STEP 6 Make a final choice among the colleges that accepted you.

If cost is a major factor and you applied for financial aid, be sure to review the offers. You will not know how much a college will cost until the end of the financial aid process. If the college you really want to attend gave you a low aid offer, you should consider contacting the college’s Financial Aid Department. Some colleges are willing to negotiate their offer.

We have scheduled a financial aid night at 7PM at Pius X on January 7, 2010 (Snow date: January 28, 2010). All seniors and senior parents are encouraged to attend. Juniors and junior parents are also welcome.

Additional reminders:

- Admission counselors are looking for serious students. Don’t let a lighter senior schedule your senior year or senioritis hurt your chances of being accepted to the college of your choice. There have been times that students have had their offer of acceptance withdrawn, because they slacked off their senior year. Don’t forget all colleges will get a copy of your midyear report and a final transcript is sent to the college you select to attend.
- Prepare a résumé. Collect and list all of your extracurricular involvement in high school, and a brief description for any activities that are not self-explanatory. It often helps to include a résumé in your application packet, and some colleges require it. Students are encouraged to also share their résumés with Ms. Staples, as well as Ms. Basso. They help Ms. Staples write stronger letters of recommendation for students, and Ms. Basso to update your activities on your transcript. Students who have not yet met with Ms. Basso to review and update the activities listed on their transcript cards are encouraged to do so prior to submitting a transcript request card.

- Write your essay(s) if required or suggested by the college. Don't assume that one generic essay can be used or modified for all colleges; you may have to write more than one. One of the most common mistakes students make is submitting an essay that does not answer the question asked on the application.
- Take any remaining SAT/ACT tests you need, and have the scores sent to the colleges where you are submitting an application.
- Use the same name on all of your application materials. For example, if your legal name is Anthony, use Anthony when you take your SAT/ACT and complete your application, and as your teachers and counselor to do the same. Matching Anthony's application with Tony's test scores and Ant's recommendations can delay the review process.
- Ask the principal, teachers, and school counselor for letters of recommendation. Requirements will vary by college.
- If applicable, register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). NCAA requires that all Division I or Division II college athletes register with the NCAA Clearinghouse. Failure to do so will mean that the student will not be NCAA Certified. If a student is not NCAA Certified, the student will be unable to receive any athletic scholarship money, and will be prohibited from playing college sports. It is the student's responsibility to make sure they are properly registered with the NCAA Clearinghouse. All fees, except the cost of an official high school transcript, associated with the NCAA Clearinghouse are set and collected by the NCAA. Students should register with the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse AFTER THE COMPLETION OF THEIR JUNIOR YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL. At this time, a transcript that includes six semesters of grades should be sent to the clearinghouse from the high school. REGISTER ON-LINE AT: www.ncaaclearinghouse.net

What do seniors need to be considered to most colleges?

Most 4-year colleges have specific requirements for admission; and entrance requirements may vary greatly among colleges. For example, colleges that have an open admissions policy generally accept any high school graduate who applies; where as, highly selective colleges usually only accept students who have high grade point averages and high ACT/SAT Scores. Although academic requirements differ across colleges, the admission requirements listed below are typical of undergraduate colleges:

- 4 years of English
- 3-4 years of Math (including Algebra I, II, and Geometry)
- 3 years of Sciences (with laboratory experience),
- 3 years of Social Studies
- 2-3 years of the same Foreign Language

Students who do not meet a college's admissions criteria are sometimes offered conditional acceptance, and may be required to take additional courses in college.

The information listed below is some of the information that colleges may consider when determining whether or not they are willing to accept an applicant. Colleges, however, differ in how they evaluate this information.

- GPA (grade point average)
- Strength of subjects
- ACT/SAT Scores
- Class Rank
- Interviews
- Essays
- Activities (Extra curricular)
- State of Residence
- Work/Extra Curricular
- Personal Qualities
- Recommendations
- Special Talents/Awards

There is no general agreement about which factors are ranked more important. However, most admissions officers place the most weight on your high school academic record. Keep in mind colleges may have other priorities that affect student admission such as minorities, geographical mix, talent mix, athletes, and diversity of student body. Because there are so many differences among colleges, and so many things to consider parents and students should research the colleges they are considering.

When should applications be handed in?

Students are encouraged to apply to prospective college as early as possible in their senior year. In most cases, each college will have an application deadline designed to fit that particular institution's needs. Since competition at the Universities that comprise the State System of Higher Education (Bloomsburg, Kutztown, East Stroudsburg, etc.), and the State related universities (The University of Pittsburgh, Temple University, Lincoln University, and Pennsylvania State University) has become very keen, it has become increasingly important that a student file applications to these schools as early as possible in the senior year. Therefore, the Guidance Department strongly encourages students to apply to their selected colleges no later than the Thanksgiving holiday of the senior year. Students planning to apply for admission to Penn State, University Park, are encouraged to apply in September of their senior year, and students planning to submit applications for any Penn State branch are encouraged to submit their applications by the end of October of their senior year.

If applicable, students should also request College Board/ACT to send their scores to the prospective college. Students should not postpone applying to college, because they are waiting to take a SAT or ACT test, unless the prospective college suggests something different. For example, Kings College gives applicants the choice of submitting their SAT/ACT scores or a graded paper. Once students make a decision and submit their application they cannot request to change their decision. Therefore, Kings College suggests that students opting to submit SAT/ACT scores wait until they have taken their last planned SAT/ACT test to submit their applications. Each college has the right to establish their own application requirements and deadline. For example, some colleges have rolling admissions with no established deadline dates; where as other colleges have deadline dates as early as November 1. Therefore, it is the student's responsibility to check college deadlines and application requirements. Additionally, the Guidance Office has their own application processing deadlines for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday. The reason that the Guidance Office has established the deadline dates are to assure the students that their application packets will be processed prior to the school closing for the holiday break. The Thanksgiving deadline is Tuesday, November 10 and the Christmas deadline is Tuesday, December 8.

About how long do students have to wait to know if they are accepted to a school?

There are basically, three different college application timelines: regular admissions, rolling admissions, and early application. Students who apply regular admission typically apply by a midwinter deadline and hear a decision by early April. Students then have until May 1 (known as the universal candidate reply date) to make their decision and notify their perspective colleges as to whether or not they will attend. Students who apply to a college with rolling admission generally hear a decision within two to six weeks from the time that they submit their application. Early application, falls into two categories: early action and early decision. Early action is a nonbinding agreement that requires students to submit their applications in early fall (usually by November 1 or 15) and the college informs the applicants of their decision by early January. Students maintain their right to wait until May 1 before responding as to whether or not they will accept the college's offer. Early decision is considered a binding agreement, so it is imperative that students be certain that they want to attend the college before applying. Generally, students must submit their applications in early fall and sometime between mid- December and the beginning of January the colleges begin notifying students as to whether or not they have been admitted, deferred to the pool of regular applicants for a spring decision, or denied admission to the college. Students who are accepted surrender their right to wait until May 1 to make a decision. Reneging on your agreement after being offered early decision admission could result in other colleges refusing to admit you.