



Bishop McNamara High  
School  
College Handbook  
2015-2016

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# **HOW COLLEGES ADMIT STUDENTS**

## **Anatomy of an Admission Decision**

Admission officers are charged with the responsibility of selecting students who will meet the challenges of the college or university classroom while contributing to the academic, cultural and social climate of the institution. Different institutions place varying emphases on the criteria they employ to admit students, but the vast majority of colleges consider all or most of the following factors:

### **Achievement in College Preparatory Studies**

A strong academic record in challenging courses throughout the high school experience will be the factor most likely to influence an admission decision in your favor. Your cumulative grade point average (GPA) will be viewed in light of the breadth and difficulty of the courses on your transcript and is regarded as the best predictor of the kind of success you are likely to have in college.

### **SAT, ACT and Related Test Scores**

As a rule, admission test scores alone are not likely to result in either your acceptance or rejection. Admission officers usually view scores as a “snapshot” of the more complete person. One exception, however, is the large university that uses test scores to reduce large numbers of applications down to a manageable number for a more thorough review. Test scores may also be used for placement in some freshman classes.

### **Extracurricular Activities and Work**

These experiences present a picture of the student outside of the classroom, a facet of the individual that is very important to some colleges. Involvement in some extracurricular activity – publications, clubs, leadership, athletics, music and drama, community service, community and youth groups, and work – is important.

### **Teacher and Counselor Recommendations**

These firsthand observations by educators who have worked with you during your high school experience can go a long way in emphasizing your abilities, aptitudes and interests. They often allow the writer to present information about your personality, motivation for learning or personal philosophy that may not become known in any other way.

### **Essays and Writing Sample**

The colleges that require a student essay consider this creative work to be an important ingredient in their admission decision. Strong admission essays result from careful planning and allowing adequate time for writing and editing.

### **Interview**

Some colleges require or recommend a personal interview. The staff member or alumni representative conducting the interview will prepare a report that becomes an official part of the admission folder. Successful interviews require that you be yourself and display genuine interest in the college.

### **Special Talents and Characteristics**

If you have a particular talent or ability (e.g., artistic, athletic, musical), that can be influential in your gaining admission to a college, you will need to showcase or present those special skills to the professors, coaches or admission officers responsible for evaluating your talents. A portfolio of your art work or tape of your performances can be used. Colleges may also give added consideration to members of a particular ethnic group, children of alumni or individuals with other characteristics they hope to attract.

Each of these criteria may be considered by the college or university in making its admission decision. Just how much weight will be placed on a particular factor will vary from college to college. Ask an admission counselor at the colleges you’re interested in attending to tell you how they make their decisions. Obtain a freshman class profile and compare your more quantifiable features (e.g., GPA, test scores) with those of admitted students. Remember, too, factors such as demographics, number of applications and other things totally outside your control may be influential in the colleges’ decision-making.

# **COLLEGE EXPLORATION**

## **Getting Off On the Right Foot**

The student has an incredible amount of control in the college choice process, a factor that is not understood by some and not acted upon by others. A veteran admission officer once remarked that there are ultimately three decisions made in the college selection process, and the student gets to make two of them. The choice of where to apply and where to enroll, if accepted, are in the hands of the student. The college decides what students it wishes to admit.

The future college student must respect the power that he/she possesses in the selection process and use it wisely in order to ensure the desired outcomes. Timing is a critical factor in gaining and maintaining control over the admission process. By starting early, allocating appropriate attention to all of the information-gathering, decision-making and application-filing tasks, the student is exercising the type of control that will produce the best results.

If there is a preamble to the college selection process, it is that there is no single “right” college for you...there are many. Avoid the anguish of trying to decide “the” college that is right for you. With that bit of philosophical guidance, consider the following as you begin to explore the educational opportunities before you.

### **Academic Fit**

Since institutions differ in the scholastic requirements they make of their students, you will want to look for a college that “fits” well academically. “Fit” means being challenged and being able to meet that challenge. Don’t place yourself in an academic environment where you will simply coast for four years, and don’t sentence yourself to constant pressure about whether you’re going to succeed. Academic fit should be your number one criteria in the selection of a college.

### **Environmental Fit**

Choosing a college is very much like looking for a new “home”. The truth is that a college campus is going to be your home for a significant portion of the next two, four or more years. Try to find an environment where you will feel comfortable as a citizen; a place that presents the social, cultural and lifestyle comfort that you desire. Don’t go looking for Utopia University. It probably doesn’t exist. The important element here is to look for things you want and things you want to avoid. When you find the right balance in those elements, you probably have found a college worth a closer look.

### **Affordability**

The cost of college today cannot be dismissed as a factor in the selection process, but students and parents should attempt to separate, to the extent possible, financial issues from the academic and social factors. There was a time when the affordability issue was only a concern of the poor. Today, that concern casts a shadow across families in many different economic categories. Before dismissing a college or university from consideration in the exploration process, the student should gather information about the availability of all forms of financial aid. When all financial aid options are considered, some institutions which appear unaffordable may, in fact, be more reasonably priced than others.

Your initial journey into college exploration can be an exciting time in your life ... part of that “coming of age” that your parents, teachers and other adults often talk about. Avoid the anxiety and discomfort that some students experience during this time by setting a course that is characterized by good planning and the use of all of the resources at your disposal.

If you have engaged in a thorough examination of your abilities, aptitudes, goals and interests, the chances are very likely that you will apply to colleges that will meet your needs and will offer you the opportunity to continue to grow academically and socially.

Enjoy the journey!

## **THE FIRST STEP**

### **Taking a Look at Yourself**

As you embark on your study of educational options, it is important to begin by taking a long, hard look at yourself. Who are you? What are your likes and dislikes? Your strengths and weaknesses? Why are you going to college? By gaining a full understanding of yourself, you can personalize the entire college exploration and selection process. When it comes time to make decisions, you'll be making them in full consideration of the person that will be called upon to implement them ... you!

During childhood and adolescence, you have no doubt become aware of the individual characteristics that you possess that are similar to and different from your peers. These characteristics include **aptitudes, achievements, interests, personality traits, values and goals**; elements that will impact your educational and career development.

Awareness of these characteristics will allow you to make decisions that are consistent with your individuality. Failure to conduct periodic audits of these traits is an error that can have serious consequences on your future success. To get started, complete the personality profile in the "About Me" section of Naviance.

**APTITUDE** represents your capacity for learning, your natural ability to do something. When someone makes the statement, "He's a natural", when referring to one's ability in music, athletics or some other area of endeavor, they are really speaking of his exceptional aptitude in these areas. Others may have an unusual capacity for learning in science, mathematics, writing or other studies.

**ACHIEVEMENTS** are the measured accomplishments in your life, those things that you have done well. In school, progress is measured regularly and reported to you in the form of grades or academic awards. In athletics, performances are measured by a stopwatch or statistics. In music, art or theater, your achievements may result in recognition or praise for a job well done. It is possible to achieve or become accomplished in something for which you have little or limited aptitude. This is usually the result of concentration and hard work.

**INTERESTS** are the things you like to do, commanding your time and arousing your curiosity. Sometimes, interests are "spin-offs" of your aptitudes and achievements as they represent areas where you have devoted study and attention and earned some degree of success. Other interests are outlets or diversions, things you do simply for fun.

**PERSONALITY TRAITS** are those characteristics that make one person different from another. In psychology, personality is defined as the total physical, intellectual and emotional structure of a person, including his aptitudes, abilities and interests. Words like outgoing, quiet, inquisitive and intellectual are often used to describe people. Knowing your own personal traits can help you define educational **VALUES** that are the aspects of your life that you hold in esteem, things you would prefer if you had a choice. They are the principles or ideals that you stand behind. A sense of self-awareness would be incomplete without some analysis of the values you possess and how they relate to your development. For example, prestige and status may be important to you, but mean very little to a classmate.

**GOALS** represent what you hope to accomplish in the future. Have you ever stopped and asked yourself why you're going to college? The response should **not** be that everyone else is going. The real answer, in part, represents your educational goal and may be tied to your long term career goal. While some students have definite educational and career objectives, others may be less exact. Some simply choose to go to college to grow intellectually. Others want to learn about things that interest them. The more your college choice allows you to move toward the realization of your goals, the more satisfying the experience may be for you personally.

Students have a greater chance of succeeding in their educational pursuits if they find a learning and living environment that is compatible with and supportive of their aptitudes, achievements, interests, personality traits and values, one that will assist them in realizing their educational goals. To help you define your goals, complete the Game Plan in the "All About Me" section of Naviance.

## **MOUNTING THE SEARCH**

### **Getting Answers to Your Questions**

During the exploration process the student will have an opportunity to ask a lot of questions in order to find the colleges that meet the academic, environmental and financial requirements that he has established as important. The decision whether or not to apply to a college will result directly from the information that is collected and the impressions that are made during this evaluative process.

Below are a number of questions that you, the student, should ask as part of this exploration. The list should not be viewed as exhaustive (you will certainly think of others), and they are not presented in any kind of priority order. Use the information sources on Page 6 to help you find the answers to these questions.

**Program of Study/Academic Philosophy** Does the college offer the academic specialty you wish to pursue? What is the academic reputation of the institution in general and the program (e.g., journalism, engineering) in particular? Does the college have a strong library and use the latest tools and technology to educate its students? What are the requirements for success in the classroom? Does the institution ascribe to a particular philosophy of teaching or learning? What is the typical class size? Do the best professors teach classes at the undergraduate level?

**Admission Requirements and Competition** How will your abilities, aptitudes and previous achievements stack up against other applicants and enrolled students? How have students with your academic credentials fared in the admission process? What is the profile of the typical student at the college? What percentage of admitted students graduate? In how many years? What success do graduates have in finding jobs and gaining admission to graduate school?

**Location/Setting** Are you interested in going to a college nearby, in the state or region or anywhere in the United States or the world? Do you have a preference regarding the type of community (e.g., large city, small city, rural) where the college is located? How important is the campus setting (e.g., open spaces and tree filled lawns versus high rise buildings)?

**Institutional Characteristics** What type of institution best suits your academic and environmental needs? Do you prefer a large university with multiple academic venues, a small liberal arts college or something in between? Do you want to study at a two-year or four year-college? Do you prefer a public or private, coeducational or single-sex, church affiliated or career oriented institution?

**Accommodations** Are the dormitories comfortable and well furnished? Will the food service respond to your dietary needs? Can your physical fitness and recreational interests be satisfied? Is living on campus mandatory? What percentage of students lives off campus?

**Social/Cultural Extracurricular Atmosphere** What social, cultural and leisure time opportunities are available? Do you have interests outside of the classroom (e.g., music, sports, drama, community service) that you would like to maintain while at college? If so, will the college or the community allow you to pursue those interests?

**Special Needs/Considerations** Can the college respond to tutorial, counseling, health or other special needs that you might have? Does the campus and surrounding community present a secure living environment?

**Cost** What is the cost of tuition, room and board and fees? What personal (e.g., transportation) costs will be required? What financial aid opportunities exist, and what are the qualifications? Is financial need factored into the admission decision? Are there opportunities for part time work on campus or in the community?

It will be next to impossible to find any college that gets a five star rating in each of these areas of exploration. In the final analysis, does the college present you with a good feeling? Is it a place where you see yourself learning and living over the next four or more years? If the answer is yes, the next step is to get an application for admission.

## **HIGH SCHOOL COURSE SELECTION**

### **Relevance for College Admission**

If there is a single factor that will influence your success in getting into the college of your choice, it will likely be your record of academic achievement and the quality of the courses in which that achievement was earned. Survey after survey of college admission officers points to a strong academic record in a challenging program of studies as the applicant's strongest ally in the college admission process.

All during high school you have been or will be given the opportunity to select or elect courses. This is a point of empowerment in your education, a time when your immediate action could have a significant influence on events in the distant future.

Throughout the high school experience you should design a challenging curricular experience – one where you are able to address the challenges and graduate with a strong academic record, as reflected in your final grade point average (GPA). And make no mistake about it ... college admission officers know the difference between an advanced or higher level mathematics course and one that requires less study and personal attention.

There are no guarantees or so-called “locks” in the college admission process...even class valedictorians and students with seemingly invincible GPAs are routinely turned down by highly competitive institutions. In these situations, criteria other than the academic record and quality of curriculum are influencing the admission formula.

As a rule, competitive or selective colleges want to admit students who have experienced success in a rigorous academic environment and appear capable of continuing that success at the collegiate level.

Anytime one's academic abilities allow him or her to participate in Advanced Placement (AP) level classes, taking such a course will undoubtedly be viewed positively by those reviewing the admission application.

With respect to academic record and individual achievement, you should not minimize the importance of work taken in the senior year. If for no other reason than the maintenance of a strong work ethic, this is not a time to reduce one's load or cut back on effort.

Consider your education like the conditioning associated with an athletic endeavor. Once a peak level of performance is achieved, you must go into a maintenance mode. Otherwise, you will fall out of shape and not be able to achieve at the same level. The so-called “senior slump” represents a break in conditioning and could result in unnecessary difficulty in college and, in extreme cases, may even result in the reversal of a previously favorable admission decision.

Think of the college admission formula as a recipe. Most institutions factor the same ingredients into their admission decisions – academic achievement, test scores, teacher or counselor recommendations, etc. But, as is often the case with culinary recipes, the chef (in this instance, the college) may rely a bit more or a bit less on a particular ingredient.

The main ingredient in most college admission recipes, however, is the level of student performance in a strong curriculum. Translated into simple terms: “Study challenging subjects and achieve the best grades possible.”

# LEARNING ABOUT COLLEGES

## Information Sources

When it comes to gathering information about colleges, students will find a bountiful array of sources. The College Counseling Center is a good starting point. Talk with your counselor. Use the college search resources available on Naviance, use published references and visit websites. These materials will aid in your general study of colleges and answer the specific questions that you have about particular institutions and their programs.

In these times of high tech communication, Internet websites, videos and on-line systems are also used to get college information to the prospective student.

As you acquire information about colleges, be sure to consider the following:

**Accuracy** Colleges are changing, dynamic places. You will want to make certain that you're using the latest edition of any publication or information source.

**Bias** College generated viewbooks and videos generally present a positive view of the institution. Your exploration will need to reveal the complete picture.

**Moving from General to Specific** Be sure to use a variety of information sources. Some are great for general information; others are better at presenting details. Multiple sources allow accuracy cross-checks.

**Information Overload** Spread out your exploration activities so that you can consume all that you are learning. Too much information acquired too quickly can lead to confusion and frustration. Enjoy the college exploration venture. Use the following information sources in your personal search:

**Guidance Publications** Spend a little time at the beginning of the search examining the general guides in your College Counseling Center and using the college research applications available in Naviance. These resources, along with websites such as [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) or [www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com), will help you form questions and structure your college exploration.

**College Guides/Directories** These are the big, telephone book look-alikes and are produced by publishers like Peterson's, Barron's and the College Board. They contain a page or a column on upwards of 2,000 or more colleges and are great for fact finding (e.g., college costs, location, majors, size), but don't judge a college solely by what's in these publications.

**Viewbooks and Catalogs** Generated by individual colleges, these publications provide in-depth information about admission criteria, programs of study, student life and much more.

**DVDs/Videos** Also produced by colleges, these programs afford students an opportunity to take a tour of the campus and check in on a variety of campus activities without ever having to leave home.

**Computerized Guidance Information and Internet** Use of Naviance and the Internet permits students to conduct their college search by matching their needs and interests with the offerings of particular colleges.

**Ratings and Rankings Publications** Be very sensitive to the evaluation criteria used to create "best" listings. These publications often lack the specificity and objectivity required for effective exploration. Besides, you need to apply your personal contact to create a ranking of colleges that is relevant to your needs.

All of these resources can provide good information that will contribute to quality exploration and sound decision-making. They should not, however, be the only sources. Students can personalize their information quest when they interact with the college admission representatives at information nights. Computer search engines like Google and College Board have college information database features that let you ask questions and request information. Seize every opportunity to interface with reliable sources. Finally, as you refine choices, campus visits become a "must" on your exploration agenda. College visits are a reality check of sorts, your firsthand opportunity to see and feel the college...to try it on for a "fit". Don't miss it!

## MAKING THE MOST OF THE COLLEGE FAIR EXPERIENCE

During your high school years you will most likely have an opportunity to participate in a college fair, an event where representatives from a number of colleges and universities gather in one place to meet prospective students and present information about their institutions and programs. Interaction with college representatives allows you to get answers to your personal questions and clarify or correct information that you acquired from other sources.

College fairs come in various sizes. Small events of 10-30 colleges may be held at local schools. Larger fairs are often sponsored by a school district or group of schools and are held at a central location. The biggest fairs, attracting 200 to 450 colleges, are those sponsored by the National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC). The NACAC fairs are typically held in large civic centers and are attended by students from a large city or metropolitan area. Participate in more than one fair if they are available to you.

College fairs provide a unique opportunity for you to talk directly with admission officers or counselors or with alumni or student representatives who assist the college in its admission efforts. A bit of preparation on your part will allow you to gain more from the experience than if you simply walk into the fair “cold”.

*Consider the following:*

1. Do your fair homework. Study the roster of participating colleges (if available) and prepare a list of questions. Take your list to the fair and don't be shy about asking your questions.
2. Be prepared to complete lots of student inquiry cards. To expedite this process, you can prepare preaddressed labels that can be affixed to the college's card or cards with your name, address, academic interest and desired information (e.g., viewbook, application) to leave with the representative.
3. Allow sufficient time to talk with as many college representatives as possible. If you are undecided about where to apply, use the fair to continue your exploration. While many colleges will be familiar to you, others will not. If you have narrowed your list of colleges, the fair will permit you to be more directive in your information quest, but you may wish to engage in discussion with some colleges that are not on your list.
4. Allow time to attend the admission and financial aid seminars that may be offered as part of the fair program. Presented by experts in the field, these seminars offer valuable guidance to aid you in the decision-making and application processes.
5. Bring pencils, paper or a notebook and take time to jot down the answers to your questions and other information that you deem important. Carry a backpack as many of the colleges will have information that they wish to leave with you.
6. Note the name of the admission representative with whom you spoke and take some time after the fair to write follow-up notes or letters to those colleges for which you have special questions. Targeted letters get faster responses than the “to whom it may concern” variety.
7. Talk with your fellow students after the fair and compare notes regarding the information you received and the impressions that were created. Comparing your insights and experiences with others may generate perspectives that were not apparent before. Your counselor can also help you to digest all of the information you have acquired.
8. Present yourself in the best possible manner. The college fair is an opportunity for you to interact face-to-face with college admission representatives, individuals who eventually may be involved in reviewing your application and contributing to the admission decision. Make the most of the very first impression you make with this individual.

# HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE CALENDAR

## Junior Year Activities

You've reached the middle of your high school experience. While college may seem like it is way off in the future somewhere, your junior year is the time to give more structure to your exploration so that you fully match your educational achievements, aptitudes and interests with all viable options.

*Consider the following:*

1. Continue to apply yourself in the classroom. Junior courses, especially those in a college preparatory curriculum, are more intensive and teachers may be expecting more of you. However, the academic and personal skills that you are now learning to master will serve you for a lifetime and are essential for success in college.
2. Meet again with your counselor to review your academic schedule and the progress you are making. As you begin to create a list of colleges that interest you, compare your academic profile with the specific admission requirements at those institutions. Remember that admission officers see many applications from prospective students that "meet" their requirements. Therefore, your best chances for admission will be if you "surpass" the basic requirements.
3. Review the results of any preliminary tests that you have taken and schedule the next round of the ACT or SAT. Consult with your teachers and counselor about how you might improve your scores. Continue to take subject tests and Advanced Placement exams as you complete the appropriate courses.
4. Mount a serious information gathering campaign, one that allows you to match prospective colleges to your personal abilities, achievements, interests and learning objectives. Our Naviance application, college guides, websites and viewbooks are an excellent way to initiate your research. Take advantage of information available on Internet websites and college DVDs at the Counseling Center or library. Attend college fairs and special seminars offered by counselors to disseminate information about the admission and financial aid processes and assist in completing applications.
5. Arrange a personal meeting with your counselor to get the individual attention that you might need to gather information and consider educational options after high school. Your counselor can direct you to appropriate resources and then assist in the evaluation and use of the information you have acquired.
6. Begin building a list of the colleges you are interested in on Naviance. Try to visit the colleges that are at the top of your interest list during the spring of junior year. Arrange to tour the campus, sit in on a class, attend a concert or athletic event and meet with admission counselors to get the answers to your specific questions and learn more about each institution. Make every attempt to visit colleges when they are in session. Stay in a dorm if possible. Look around the city or community in which the college is located. Continue your campus visits into the summer and fall.
7. Interact regularly with your parents to keep them informed about where your exploration is taking you and allow them to track your progress and define ways in which they can be supportive. Encourage them to read the guides, websites and viewbooks, accompany you to college fairs and campus visits and participate in counseling programs designed for parents.
8. Begin the process of refining your list on Naviance and learn as much as you can about these colleges. It will soon be time to identify a final list of colleges where you will file applications.
9. Consider using the summer between your junior and senior year to enroll in a class at a local college or to participate in a special seminar (e.g., creative writing, science, or music). Otherwise, work at a summer job, relax and prepare for that final year.

Can you believe it? Only your senior year stands between you and the college experience. You continue to evolve and grow as an individual as do your expectations for your future. Get ready! Your senior year lies just ahead.

# HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE CALENDAR

## Senior Year Activities

You're in the countdown year – the final year of high school. In just a short time you will be making final decisions and applying for admission to college. It will be a very exciting and busy year, a time for you to address the following tasks:

1. Refine or reduce your Naviance list of colleges you have under consideration to a manageable number, somewhere between five and ten. Only keep colleges on the list that you are really interested in attending. Get the applications and financial aid forms that you will need to apply to these colleges.
2. Meet once again with your counselor to review your academic record and current courses in light of the list of schools where you want to file applications.
3. Determine what admission, achievement and related tests you will need to take during the coming months and register immediately. Consult with your counselor regarding the benefits of repeating a standardized test.
4. As you begin to review the admission applications and financial aid forms, create a check list and calendar for each important milestone and deadline. Note that applications for early decision and early action must be filed by early November. Review and update your checklist on a regular basis.
5. If you will be applying for any type of financial aid, you will need to acquire and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Some colleges will require that you submit the CSS Profile Financial Aid Form and/or their institutional aid application. Go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) for forms and information.
6. Set some time aside for the orderly completion of college applications and “forms”. Pass along any teacher and counselor recommendations that must be completed in support of your application. This process should begin in early September. Note that some colleges will request an essay or writing sample. Address this task early so that it receives the necessary attention. If you are applying for private scholarships or participating in academic competitions, be aware of their requirements and deadlines.
7. Continue to communicate with your counselor. Your school will be required to send an official transcript of your academic record and related information to the colleges. Once you are certain that you are going to apply to a particular college submit your transcript request form to the College Counseling Center so they can move the college from your ‘Colleges I’m Interested In’ list in Naviance to the “Colleges I’m Applying To” list.
8. Along with your parents, gather the information required to complete the FAFSA, CSS Profile and other financial aid forms. Meeting deadlines is most important. Since you and your family may not have filed your federal tax forms, you may wish to estimate figures so as to file the appropriate aid forms and applications. Check deadlines and file forms accordingly.
9. Continue to devote the required attention to your senior classes. Your acceptance will be conditional upon the satisfactory completion of your senior classes. Don't slack off!
10. If you have applied to more than one college, rank your preferences so that you can address multiple acceptances when colleges inform you of their admission decisions. Your decision can be complicated by placement on the wait list at a particular college. If you are not accepted at the college(s) where you have applied, a visit to your counselor will allow you to review your options.
11. Once you have made your final decision about where to enroll, send your deposit, housing forms and related materials. Review the freshman orientation packets and college course selection forms as they are received. Say “thank you” to everyone that helped you, especially those teachers and mentors who wrote letters of recommendation for you.

Finally, take a bit of time to consider what you have accomplished and be proud of the fact that you are about to enter a new phase of your life ... the freshman.

## **CAMPUS VISITS**

### **Getting Ready to Go**

Choosing a college is more than choosing a place to study and learn. You are also selecting the home where you will live during the next two, four or maybe more years. Some admission officers express concern that as many as one-fourth of their freshmen students do not set foot on campus until they have arrived to start classes. This lack of “hands on” investigation may contribute to the dismal retention statistics at some colleges.

To this point your exploration has probably been concentrated on the information that you have been able to garner from guidance resources and from interaction with people. As the list gets smaller and your exploration becomes more refined, the remaining colleges merit the scrutiny of a campus visit.

Whether or not your campus visit will be productive may depend on the tasks that you complete in advance of your departure date.

*Consider the following:*

1. Let the admission office know that you are coming. This notice will allow you to visit a class or two, participate in a guided tour, take part in an admission interview (if required) and meet with representatives of the financial aid office. By planning ahead, you may also have an opportunity to stay overnight in a dormitory. If you arrive without notice, these options may not be available to you.
2. If you have friends or know alumni from your high school attending the college, arrange to meet with them during your visit. Your counselor may be able to identify some students for you to contact.
3. When trying to determine the “best time” for a college visit, there are a number of factors to consider. To get the true feel of a college, it is best to visit while it is in session and, therefore, alive with activity. Ideally, you will have refined your choices and be prepared to conduct some visits during the spring of your junior year. If not, set some time aside early in the senior year.
4. Some colleges hold “open houses” or special admission orientation programs. There are pluses and minuses associated with these events, and you will need to determine if what you are trying to find out about the college will be served by your participation.
5. Arrange a schedule that allows parent or guardian participation. Colleges welcome parental involvement and often will provide special activities for them.
6. Create an itinerary that allows you to visit more than one campus on the same trip. *The Rand McNally Road Atlas*, which lists American colleges, is an excellent tool for trip planning. If you are traveling long distances, ask the admission office if they have arrangements with airlines for discounted student travel fares. Take advantage of seasonal and special airfares.
7. Make certain that your schedule affords you not only ample opportunity to visit the college, but also to check out the community in which the college is located. Even if you love the college, you don’t want to become a campus “prisoner” or be required to exit on weekends in order to have a social, recreational or cultural life.
8. Prepare for the visit by making a checklist of the specific things you want to view and by creating a list of questions you wish to ask. Take your camera along to shoot some informal shots of the surroundings to serve as a reminder of the visit.
9. Call the admission office in advance to confirm your visit and schedule.

Remember, you wouldn’t buy a jacket or pair of slacks without trying them on first or a car without a test drive. Don’t commit to a four year collegiate experience without a similar trial. This is your chance to play detective and get the answers to all of your important questions. Try each college on to see how it “fits”. It may save you from a day when you look back and say, “I wish I had known.”

## MAKING THE MOST OF THE CAMPUS VISIT

You've arrived on campus ... it's bigger than you thought it would be. No, it's smaller. Which buildings are the dorms? Which are the classrooms? There is a "buzz" of excitement about the campus. It's rather sedate. The students appear friendly.

All, some or none of the above may greet you when you make your campus visits, but each contributes to the "personality" of the college, a personality that you should try to define while you are there.

The mission of your campus visit is twofold. First, you want to get answers to the specific and general questions that you have determined are important to you in your college selection. In some instances, you will be looking for reaffirmation of information that you have acquired from other sources. Second, you are conducting a test or trial of sorts. This "up close and personal" view of the college will allow you to get the feel of the place – to "try it on for fit."

During each visit to a campus, you should attempt to have as many of the following experiences as possible. Otherwise, a return visit may be warranted.

1. Sit in on a class or two. If possible, find a class whose subject is of interest to you. While the time will be very short, you can assess the level of student enthusiasm, the degree to which they seem prepared and some sense of teaching styles.
2. Talk with a professor, department chair or academic advisor. Ask about the academic requirements, program of studies, class size, instructional strategies and other academic matters. Inform them of your academic experiences in high school and collegiate goals and invite their appraisal or comment.
3. Check out the library, computer and science labs and other support facilities. If you have particular learning needs, talk with those providing that assistance or service.
4. Examine the total living environment, including the dormitories, dining halls, recreational facilities, student center – all of the places where you will spend time when not in the classroom. Are these facilities clean, comfortable and attractive? Do the facilities offer privacy when desired? Sample the food and determine if your dietary needs and preferences can be met. Are there places to relax, play and enjoy some "down time"?
5. Talk with students. Let them know that you're considering applying. Do they seem friendly, enthusiastic and responsive to your questions? Ask what they would have liked to know before enrolling, but didn't.
6. Participate in a guided tour. Listen to the guide's presentation and ask questions that it may generate. Take your own informal tour. Go back to those places that aroused your curiosity or where you didn't get to spend enough time. Wander away from the campus to see what the community surrounding the college is like.
7. If the college requires a personal interview as part of the admission process, schedule this activity while you're on campus. Prepare for the interview, including making a list of questions you wish to ask. If you're interested in the college, let that interest show!
8. Keep your eyes and ears open. What is the general physical condition of the college? Is the campus atmosphere to your liking? Are there lines and crowds? How do students dress? Bulletin boards and posters tell many stories about campus life or the lack thereof. Take notes. Pick up things (e.g., student newspapers) along the way. Take some pictures. Write a few notes right after the visit while information and impressions are fresh and clear. Use all of your senses!
9. Send thank you notes to your hosts and those that took time to help you and answer your questions.

Very soon you will be refining your list of prospective colleges even more. Each campus visit will contribute to the two decisions you will soon be making: where to apply and where to enroll if admitted.

## ADMISSION PLANS

### Modes of Admission Access

When the time arrives to apply to a college or university, the student will find that institutions offer a number of plans for the submission of applications. Depending upon where you are in your personal exploration and decision-making, one of these plans may suit your particular application requirements.

Review and consider all admission plan options. Consult with your school counselor or the admission counselor at the specific college if you have any concerns or questions.

**ROLLING ADMISSION** – The colleges and universities that review student applications as they are received and make immediate admission decisions use what is called a “rolling admission plan”. Institutions that receive a large number of applications use this approach simply to manage the volume of application activities. Student notification of the admission decision can usually be expected in five to six weeks following application.

Students that apply to a college under a rolling admission plan can apply to other colleges and consider all offers of admission and financial aid before being required to declare their intention to enroll or file the required admission and housing deposits.

**EARLY DECISION** – This plan was created to help the informed and committed student apply to the institution that he has identified as a first choice. For the student who engaged in quality exploration and arrived at a sound decision, this is an excellent plan. It has the benefits of bringing closure to one’s personal application activity early in the senior year while others are still completing forms.

This plan, however, places certain restrictions on the student. Under an Early Decision plan, the student agrees to abide by the rules of the plan, have only one Early Decision application active at a given time and **commits himself to enrolling at the college or university if admitted** and the financial aid award (if required) is adequate. Under Early Decision, a student may be admitted or may be told that the decision is deferred until more information (e.g., mid-year grades, senior test scores) is received.

**EARLY ACTION/NOTIFICATION** – Under this plan, students can file multiple applications according to an expedited timetable and learn of an institution’s admission decision early in the senior year.

The concern with Early Action may be that the student can be denied admission unless the information submitted (mostly junior year grades and test scores) is highly competitive and clearly meets admission standards. In other words, the options under Early Action are admit, defer, or deny.

**EARLY ACTION/SINGLE SELECTION (Non-binding)** – If a student selects this plan **he cannot file any other early action or early decision applications**. However, students are free to apply elsewhere for regular admission.

The plans described here may work for you or they may not! Don’t succumb to any pressure (real or imagined) to prepare and file a college application before you have engaged in good exploration and identified the college or colleges that are best for you. This may not happen until you are well into your senior year.

Most colleges adhere to the **universal reply date of May 1<sup>st</sup>** as the deadline given to students to consider offers of admission and declare their enrollment intention. Students, however, may feel pressure to commit earlier. If this happens, you should contact the appropriate admission or financial aid counselor to explain your circumstances and where you are in the decision-making process. They will most likely honor the May 1<sup>st</sup> date.

## **DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY**

### **Understanding Admission Competition**

Will I be accepted? That's the question that you have probably asked yourself a hundred times as you look at colleges and consider applying for admission. According to an annual study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, more than ninety percent of college freshmen surveyed said they were attending their first or second choice college. This is the result of good exploration and decision-making. As you refine your options and move in the direction of making application, you need to evaluate your prospects of acceptance at the college or colleges that you have determined are right for you.

When it comes to the consideration of your application, colleges fall into one of several competitive categories. Understanding these categories will help you to file applications that improve your chances of being admitted.

**SELECTIVE COLLEGES** – The great majority of colleges and universities are selective, meaning that they require students to meet specific selection criteria in order to be considered for admission. The rigor will vary, but students that match or exceed the criteria stand the best chance of admission.

**COMPETITIVE COLLEGES** - When more students apply than the college can accommodate, the result is heightened competition for limited space. There are many stories about the Ivy League colleges that reject the applications of dozens of valedictorians each year. You probably know some very capable students who weren't admitted to highly competitive colleges.

**OPEN ADMISSION COLLEGES** – “Open” admission colleges, like community colleges and technical institutes, invite applications from interested students possessing a high school diploma or its equivalent and admit most of the students that apply. Admission to specific programs within these institutions, however, may require more stringent criteria.

Students that successfully complete their high school's college preparatory program are likely to be admissible to many colleges. Remember, even if you are denied admission to a college, you have other avenues to the same goal. Don't be afraid to try to be admitted.

How do you determine the selectivity or competitiveness of the colleges you're exploring?

*Consider the following:*

1. Examine the characteristics of the students the college is admitting, the students that you'll be competing with in class each day. This information is contained in the annual freshman class profile.
2. Review the application, acceptance and enrollment statistics of the most recently admitted class. This information is published in many of the general college guidebooks and on college websites.
3. Use the Scattergrams and Acceptance History applications in Naviance to see how BMHS students fared when applying to the colleges you're interested in.
4. Talk with students and former students of the colleges. They know firsthand what the academic climate is like. Ask counselors, teachers and admission officers. They've worked with students that have preceded you.
5. Examine the retention statistics. Many college graduates received their degrees from a college that they found after they experienced academic difficulty at their first college. The reasons for transferring can be multiple (e.g., living environment, finances), but you should never invite difficulty by trying to gain admission to a college where your prospects for academic success are not reasonable.

This information, coupled with a realistic assessment of your personal abilities and interests, can point you toward colleges where you are most likely to be accepted and, more importantly, be successful. Your goal is to find a college where you have the greatest chance of enjoying academic achievement in a satisfying living environment. Aspire to succeed and don't invite failure by attempting to get into a college where you won't succeed.

# COLLEGE ADMISSION TESTS

## Strategies for Preparation

A student once said that the two most fear provoking acronyms in the English language were SAT and ACT. The SAT and the ACT are standardized admission or entrance tests and represent one of the criteria that most colleges use in making their admission decisions.

The operative words above are “one” and “most”. According to numerous studies, academic achievement or success in a strong curriculum carries the most weight among all admission factors, but even a 4.0 grade point average isn’t a guarantee. Your GPA and test scores, along with a number of other factors (e.g., essay, recommendations, extra-curricular activities, interviews) are mixed together into an institutional admission formula that guides admission officers.

You should also know that a small number of colleges have chosen to abandon test scores or make them optional. Your counselor should have a list of those schools.

The important thing is to give admission tests their appropriate attention. Too much attention may result in rising anxiety that often results in the distortion of the importance of the tests. Too little attention means that you have failed to recognize the role of these standard tests in the admission process and your responsibilities in preparing for them. Aim for balance.

NOTE: Consider taking subject tests (SAT II) at the end of courses in June of your junior year. Although only a few colleges require subject tests, many encourage them. Ask your counselor about SAT II: Subject Tests.

Can you prepare? Do test prep courses work? Are prep guides and computer software programs useful? How much will my scores improve? The following tips will guide you in your test-preparation and test-taking experiences.

1. Pursue the most challenging studies possible all during the high school experience. A prophetic counselor once stated that you can’t cram into eleven weeks what you should have learned in eleven years of school.
2. Read as much as you can. Whether study related or just for fun, reading is a habit that will pay dividends on test day.
3. Participate in extracurricular activities that are an extension of the classroom experience such as activities that will enhance your language and mathematics knowledge and skills.
4. Acquire and review old editions of the actual admission tests. Many experts believe that your best preparation lies in becoming comfortable as a test taker and familiar with the instruments. What better experience than to take a number of old tests? Your counselor or librarian can help you locate the old ones.
5. If your scores aren’t where you’d like them to be, consider taking the test again or taking the other test (SAT or ACT and vice versa). Talk with your counselor about retesting.
6. Use the Method Test Prep application in Naviance. You’ll find it as a link on the left hand side of your College tab.
7. For some students, a test prep course may be in order. These courses are offered at BMHS several times each year. You may also wish to use the test prep manuals and computer software materials that have been created to improve scores. Before enrolling in a test prep class or acquiring these tools, seek the recommendation of your counselor or students who have used the materials. The bottom line is not to expect miracles, and don’t fall for outrageous claims of score escalation.

As the formal test date approaches, relax and take the experience in stride. It’s an important event, but it’s not the “life and death” experience that some build it up to be. Test scores alone won’t get you in or keep you out of the vast majority of colleges. Good scores will enhance your prospects for admission if the other criteria have been met. Low scores may cause the admission officer to look for an explanation or look deeper into the other admission requirements.

## ADMISSION ESSAYS

### Putting Forth Your Best Effort

Just how important is the essay? How is the essay used by the college in making admission decisions? Like most other admission criteria, the weight given to the essay will vary from institution to institution. However, if the college requires an essay, you must treat it with importance and use it as an opportunity to strengthen your application for admission.

A great deal of the college application process is controlled by the questions asked by the college in its application and your ability to answer those questions in a manner that suggests that you're the kind of student they are seeking to admit. They ask. You answer.

Your opportunities to be creative in your response to the college application process are somewhat limited. If the college requires or recommends an interview, you will be able to put a face and a personality with the application, academic transcript and test scores. But, while a limited number of colleges require interviews, more and more are asking students to write essays.

While the essay is first a measure of your writing abilities, it also provides insight into your intelligence, expressiveness and thinking skills. Like the interview, the essay provides you with an opportunity to answer unasked questions and to communicate directly with the educators and officials who have a voice in your admission.

*In preparing the essay that accompanies your college application, consider the following:*

1. Set aside some "special time" to organize your thoughts and do the actual writing and editing of the essay. Avoid times when school and social activities are extremely demanding. Use the information you gathered about yourself to write a strong personal statement. The summer between your junior and senior years or the very early part of the senior year is the best time to tackle this project.
2. Make certain that you understand the essay assignment and directions (e.g., length) and respond appropriately. Some topics are open-ended and allow you reasonable freedom in shaping your response. Others are more structured and ask you to address a specific issue or topic. Write the essay the college is requesting.
3. If the essay is autobiographical, begin by developing an audit of your relevant personal traits and experiences. Be reflective without being boastful.
4. Follow the practices that have worked for you in writing essays, compositions and research papers in high school.
  - a. Develop an outline.
  - b. Determine the best format to present your message.
  - c. Prepare a draft.
  - d. Review and edit the draft for grammar, spelling, punctuation and word usage.
  - e. Evaluate your writing style and treatment of the topic.
  - f. Rewrite and edit as necessary.
  - g. Type, proofread and prepare for submission.
5. Critique your final draft. Did you address the topic? Were you thorough? Did you provide the proper details? Does it flow well? Is it interesting and focused? Does it hold the reader's attention throughout? Have you conveyed your personal position or feelings about the topic?
6. Seek the impressions of others about your draft essay, but do not ask them to write or rewrite your essay. The essay is to be an example of your creativity and ingenuity and the work needs to come from you. Factor these impressions into your final essay.
7. Essays are read by human beings, people who read hundreds (or thousands) of essays. Be sure that yours is "reader friendly." Further, it would be a mistake to write what you think the reader wants to read. Be yourself!

College essay readers are looking for thoughtful and sincere content, creative expression and good writing technique. When you've reached that point, put down your pen or back away from the keyboard. You have a quality essay!

## **NARROWING THE CHOICES**

### **Deciding Where to Apply**

You've engineered an effective exploration campaign and now know far more about the colleges you're considering and the educational opportunities they present. Along the way some new colleges were added to the list. Some were removed.

There are more than 3,500 two- and four-year colleges in the United States. You have placed a small number of these institutions under your personal microscope. Hopefully, that intense examination has produced a refined list of colleges and universities. Now you must study that list (possibly narrowing it even more) and begin the formal application phase of the high school to college transition.

At this point, a number of new questions emerge. How many applications should I submit? What do the colleges need to know about me in order to consider my candidacy for admission? What are my chances of admission? What is the admission competition like this year? Are there ways that I can increase the odds that I will be admitted?

Review the refined list with respect to those features that you deem important in the selection of your college. Two rules should guide this final review.

**Rule Number One: Your objective is not to find a single college but rather a list of colleges that meet your selection criteria.** Surely, you have your favorite or favorites, but try not to be so exclusive in this refinement process that you omit viable opportunities. In other words, there is no solitary "right" college; there should be a number of "right" colleges.

**Rule Number Two: Don't apply to any college that you would not attend if offered admission.** If the exploration process has taught you anything, it should have helped you to define your educational goals and how the various colleges measure up to the criteria that you feel are important. Is the college the right place for you to learn? Will you feel comfortable there as a student and member of the campus community? Is the college affordable or will the financial aid offered make it financially feasible? If the answer to these questions is yes, move forward with the application process. If no, consider removing the college from your list.

Counselors and admission officers recommend that you file multiple college applications, but they do not always agree on the number. Most suggest that six to eight applications will be sufficient to vary your exposures and enhance your chances of admission to more than one college.

Those institutions should include: 1) "Safe" colleges where you are highly likely to gain admission; 2) colleges where you have about a 50-50 chance of admission; and 3) "reach" colleges where admission will depend on the level of competition that particular year.

Your need for financial assistance may dictate that you file additional applications to "expose" your academic qualifications to a broader range of colleges and the aid options they present. Remember, too, that there are fees associated with each college application and filing frivolous applications can be expensive.

You will improve your chances of admission by applying to institutions whose admission standards mesh with your academic qualifications and personal characteristics. Devote the appropriate commitment and energy, and you will be satisfied with the results.

# THE COLLEGE APPLICATION

## Making It Work For You

It's application time. Your desk and/or computer screen are covered with a number of application forms, financial aid forms, instruction sheets and related materials. At first glance, that pile of application materials may appear foreboding.

Like all other aspects of the school to college transition, the application phase can produce some anxious, confusing and stressful times. Coming at the beginning of the senior year, it competes with your efforts to sustain or accelerate your academic efforts and enjoy an extracurricular and social life. You can maintain control by doing the following:

1. Gather all of the forms, instruction sheets and support materials that are needed to apply for admission and financial aid to the colleges that you are interested in attending. Have everything that you need before you embark on the application submission journey. If the college will accept the Common Application (distributed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals), you should consider that option and use this form for multiple applications. Most colleges provide the option of applying-on-line.
2. Review all of the applications and create a checklist of what needs to be done, who does it and when it needs to be completed. Consider setting two sets of deadline dates: those required by the college(s) and those that you hope to meet in your personal timetable. *Note:* If you are applying to a college under an Early Decision, Early Action, or are applying for a scholarship the application timetable will be accelerated. Check the colleges' websites or talk with an admission counselor to determine the deadline dates for these special plans.
3. Complete the form(s):
  - a. Read the entire application form before completing any of the sections.
  - b. Make copies of the forms and use the copies as worksheets.
  - c. Follow each direction exactly and provide all of the information that is requested. Don't feel compelled or forced to fill in every space on the form. Answer the questions that are relevant to your application.
  - d. Provide accurate and concise answers.
  - e. Prepare a neat and thorough application. Edit your responses.
4. Make certain that the required materials accompany the application, including:
  - Essays** – Review the essay topics and instructions and devote sufficient time to produce your best work.
  - Academic Records and Transcripts** – Colleges will want copies of your official academic record and transcript to support your application. Direct this request to the College Counseling Office.
  - Recommendations** – A couple of in-depth recommendations from people who know you and your abilities and achievements are better than many from those who have a casual familiarity. Provide guidelines and timetables and don't wait until the last minute to request your recommendations.
  - Test Scores** – Schedule your SAT, ACT and related testing sessions to allow time (normally six weeks) for score reports to get to the college for proper consideration. Be aware of the colleges that require test scores to be sent directly from the testing agency.
  - Interview** – If the college requires a personal interview, it is your responsibility to see that it fits into the admission timetable.
  - Other materials** – The college application lists the information they need to evaluate your application. Don't send extraneous materials (e.g., videos, term papers, newspaper clips) unless specifically requested.
5. **Know the deadline dates** and send your applications to the college(s) on time. Procrastination will be your greatest enemy at this stage of the college admission process. Develop an application submission checklist and timetable and stick to them. Should questions arise, consult with your counselor or the college admission officers.

## UNDERSTANDING COLLEGE COSTS

Paying the college bills has become an expensive proposition for the American student and his family. Like most items that we purchase in America, college costs have risen consistently.

Today, four years at a private college can average between \$120,000 and \$200,000. The cost of four years at a public institution ranges from \$60,000 to \$100,000 for resident students. Out-of-state students will pay more.

At the high end of the scale, a small number of private colleges currently cost \$50,000 or more per year. Public colleges at the other end of the scale may cost as little as \$15,000 annually.

At the same time, more and more students are competing for the financial assistance made available by government, institutions, and private sources to students each year in postsecondary education.

All of these conditions warrant students' and their families' understanding just what they are paying for and exercising control when options exist. College costs fall into two categories: fixed and controllable.

**FIXED COSTS** – These costs are the same for all students. They include:

- Tuition
- Room and board
- Student fees

Tuition is the cost of your education and is set by the institution or by the governing authority overseeing the institution or system of higher education. Room and board costs are fixed if the student is required to live on campus, a situation that is often the case for first year students. Student fees range from the activities fee (providing access to athletic and cultural events) to laboratory and library fees.

*Note:* A number of colleges have experimented with fixed or limited increase tuition plans. In these situations, students entering college at a particular point know the cost of tuition and the adjustments they can expect to see during their total enrollment period.

**CONTROLLABLE COSTS** – These are the costs for which the student can exercise some degree of spending authority. They include:

- Books and materials
- Personal expenses
- Transportation
- Room and board (on-campus versus off-campus)

Book costs can be controlled somewhat by the acquisition of used books. Personal expenses such as entertainment, clothing and sundries are influenced by preference, need and consumption rates. Think about the items (e.g., shampoo, snacks, stamps) you need and consume today. When you get to college, the cost of these things will come out of your personal expenses budget.

Transportation between the student's home and the campus and other travel costs are affected by the method of transportation that one uses to get back and forth and how often the student travels. Room and board costs can be controlled when the student resides off campus or has variable campus meal plans available.

Given the range of expenses and the limited ability that students have to exercise control, it is important that costs, aid opportunities and options be fully examined and understood. Cost should never be used as the factor or criterion that guides exploration, and no college should ever be excluded from consideration due to cost until the student knows what type of financial assistance package might be assembled by the financial aid office.

Understanding college costs is only half of the information that students and their families must possess. You must also understand the college student financial aid system and the various forms of assistance that are available. It is information you won't regret researching.

[www.finaid.com](http://www.finaid.com)  
[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

## TYPES AND SOURCES OF FINANCIAL AID

Education after high school is a major investment for the family and financing of higher education today has become a major challenge. Part of the challenge is to learn how the financial aid system works and the degree to which the various forms of student financial aid will offset the rising costs.

The financial aid system in American higher education operates according to the following basic principle: students and their families contribute to the cost of college to the extent or level they are able. The difference between their ability to contribute and the cost of going to college is referred to as “need”.

$\text{Cost of College} - \text{Student/family contribution} = \text{Financial aid eligibility}$
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Since much of the student assistance in this nation comes from federal sources, guidelines established by the Congress and administered by the U.S. Department of Education provide the structure for many of the other student financial aid programs and policies.

To qualify for federal assistance and for much of the aid offered by related sources, students must demonstrate need. At its simplest level, a student’s financial need is the difference between the cost of attendance and the amount the family can be expected to contribute to the student’s education.

Even though college costs may vary, the family contribution remains constant. The student’s financial aid eligibility increases as the cost increases, one important reason that students should not exclude colleges from consideration simply on the basis of cost.

*There are three basic types of federal student financial aid:*

**Grants** are gift aid and do not have to be repaid. The amount of the federal grant will vary from year to year, dependent on the funds that have been appropriated for the grant programs.

**Work-study** is student assistance in the form of employment at your college. This part-time employment provides an opportunity for you to earn money (at least at current federal minimum wage levels) to offset the cost of your schooling.

**Loans** enable students and parents to borrow funds to meet educational costs. These loans must be repaid with interest.

Beyond the federal aid programs, students will find financial aid available from state governments, private sources and from the colleges themselves. State governments typically require demonstrated need and residency, but may have other eligibility criteria as well.

**Private scholarship programs** are offered by corporations, public service and fraternal organizations, foundations, labor unions and other groups. These are both merit and need based. Once you have narrowed the list of colleges to a reasonable number, inquire about the availability of scholarships and grants from those institutions. Colleges differ in their ability to meet the needs of their students. High cost colleges typically put together larger student aid packages, usually combining grants, work-study and loans

Students and families need to be aware of the terms under which aid is offered and any requirements (e.g., maintenance of a specific grade point average) for its continuance. Don’t let the perception that only the neediest families qualify for financial assistance deter you from applying for aid. All families should examine the various sources of aid and determine the extent to which they can and should participate.

School counselors can provide general information about sources and types of financial assistance and often know about special scholarships and awards that are unique to the school, community or region. College financial aid officers are experts in the federal, state and institution programs and can provide details about the lending opportunities and terms offered at commercial banks. Financial aid websites such as [www.finaid.com](http://www.finaid.com) and [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) are excellent sources of information.

## MAKING FINANCIAL AID FORMS WORK FOR YOU

If completing the collection of college admission forms you've assembled wasn't enough, you'll soon discover that financial aid application forms will require equal time and attention. To apply for financial assistance you will need to file original forms and update or re-file them each year you wish to remain an aid recipient.

The process begins by making certain that you have the right forms. Some will be available from [www.finaid.com](http://www.finaid.com). Others will come directly from the college, agency, firm or organization making the award. Other forms, such as loan applications, must be obtained from the banks or lending institutions. It's a good idea to ask for financial aid forms at the time you are gathering your admission applications.

Once assembled, it is always a good idea to review all of the forms to determine what information you will need to respond to the questions. Since financial aid is often based on need, many of the questions will address family financial matters. Your parents need to be involved in their completion and must attest to their accuracy.

To be considered for the Federal Student Aid Programs (e.g., Federal Pell Grants and Federal Family Education Loans), a student must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This application collects financial aid and other information used to calculate the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) that ultimately determines the student's eligibility for aid.

Since eligibility for the federal program serves as the basis for other financial aid programs, the FAFSA is the first and, in many cases, the only, financial aid form the student will complete. The information that accompanies the FAFSA will direct the applicant regarding the application processing cycle.

FAFSA should be completed as soon as possible after January 1 of your senior year. Approximately four weeks after submitting the FAFSA, you'll receive a Student Aid Report (SAR). The SAR contains the information that you provided on the FAFSA, plus your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). This is the figure that the college will use in determining your eligibility for federal student aid. It is your responsibility to check the SAR and make sure that everything is correct. Also, be certain that your current address is always on file with the U.S. Department of Education.

If you are an applicant for institutional aid, you may be required to complete the CSS Financial Aid PROFILE or a college specific financial aid application. These forms will request information beyond that on the FAFSA, information that the colleges feel is important in their assessment of need.

The college financial aid officer can tell you what forms will be required to apply for institutional aid and offer any guidance you may need in their completion.

For help with the FAFSA contact: **Federal Student Aid Information Center**. Call the toll-free federal student aid information number: **1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)**, or visit their website: [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

In addition to the FAFSA, CSS Financial Aid PROFILE and college-specific forms, you will need a number of other items when you and your parents sit down to complete this important task. These include: 1) your most recent tax return, 2) your parents' most recent tax return, and 3) other records such as W-2 forms, bank statements, business/farm records and investment records.

During the process of completing the various forms, make certain that you answer all of the relevant questions with the most current and accurate information. Sign each form (some require both student and parent signatures) and send them to the appropriate processing agency or office. Be sensitive to deadlines as many scholarships, grants and institutional awards have cyclical application periods or award the assistance on a first-come, first-served basis.

## FREQUENT FINANCIAL AID QUESTIONS

**1. How do I get Financial Aid?** When you are a senior you must fill out the **Free Application for Federal student Aid (FAFSA)** as soon after **January 1** as possible and no later than **March 1** for consideration for state aid.

**2. Are there things I can be doing now to get prepared for financial aid?** Yes! Do well in high school. Many grants and scholarships are merit based (based upon grades and extra-curricular activities). Collect letters of recommendation from your teachers and counselors.

**3. What is the money I receive used for?** Financial aid includes tuition, supplies, books, room & board, and living expenses. Books and supplies average \$1,200 a year, while room and board average between \$7,000 - \$10,500 per year. The average cost at a four year public college is approximately \$15,000-\$25,000; the average cost for one year at a private four-year college is approximately \$30,000-\$50,000. The average cost at a community college is about \$10,000 a year.

**4. How does the government determine how much money I get?** The government looks at how much money your family makes, and from this, determines your family financial “need”. The “need” is determined by subtracting the cost of tuition, books, and living expenses from how much money your family can give you.

**5. What kinds of scholarships are there and where do I find them?** There are scholarships for academic achievement, community service, for students who will be the first person in the family to go to college, students who are of a particular ethnicity, for good grades, sports, and more! You can find scholarships on the Internet for free. Try [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) and Naviance.

**6. Should I pay to get information on financial aid? NEVER PAY ANYONE TO FIND OUT INFORMATION ON FINANCIAL AID.** It should always be for free.

## **AFTER THE APPLICATION WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

When the application for admission has been reviewed by a college, one of four actions can result. If you have explored properly and applied to colleges where the students reflect the academic characteristics and personal qualities that you present, there is a strong likelihood that an acceptance letter will find its way to your mailbox.

If an application is not accepted, there are three other outcomes. Let's look at each.

**Conditional Admission** – A conditional admission means that your admission is dependent upon your meeting some special or additional requirement (e.g., summer study, mid-year enrollment). Contact the college admission office directly to make certain you understand the terms of the admission and your timeline for meeting these requirements.

**Wait-List** – If you're wait-listed, you have a right to know the wait-list history of the institution. In other words, how many people typically move from the list to general admission? If you can review this information for the previous entering class or two, you'll get some sense of your status and whether or not you should hold out hope of enrollment. If your applications result in a combination of acceptances and wait-list responses, you'll need to consider these variables as the date approaches for responding to your offers of admission. Again, it is wise to consult with the admission officers and your counselor for interpretation and guidance.

**Applied Denied** – Some students who are denied admission take it upon themselves to appeal the decision, especially if they feel that the decision didn't take all of the appropriate factors into account. While certainly a long shot, this avenue is open to you and should be taken if there is any indication that the college acted without full information.

If all of your applications are rejected, you should confer immediately with your counselor and map out an alternate course of action. There may be appropriate colleges that are still taking applications, even at this late point in the admission cycle. If you need to strengthen your academic status, you might wish to enroll in a junior or community college or engage in additional preparatory studies and reapply as a transfer applicant.

A student receiving acceptance letters should be prepared to inform the one college that he or she wishes to attend of the enrollment decision by May 1, the date viewed by the collegiate community as the universal reply date. Along with your letter of notification, you may be asked to send an admission or housing deposit to confirm your enrollment intentions.

**Under no circumstances should you declare your intention to enroll at more than one college.**

If you're faced with the situation in which you've been accepted to more than one college, you must once again weigh the criteria that you studied in making your application decisions and determine which one of these colleges will present you with the best learning and living situation. When the academic and social scales are even, it may boil down to cost or the financial aid offer, but avoid using these criteria as your primary guide. After letting the college you choose know that you're accepting their offer of admission, let the others that tendered you an acceptance know of that decision.

Keep your academic work up throughout the remainder of your senior year and begin making plans to be a college freshman. Congratulations. The exploration, decision-making and application journey is now complete. Exciting times await you at the college that you have just selected!

## **PARENTS AND THE COLLEGE ADMISSION PROCESS**

The period of time when students are considering their college options and making decisions about the future is filled with excitement, discovery and sometimes a feeling of being overwhelmed. There is much to be learned and many tasks to complete. Like all of the schooling experiences that preceded it, this is a time for parental support and involvement.

Parental participation can ensure that the student engages in effective exploration and carries out the planning and application tasks in a thorough and efficient manner. Parents can help their children formulate relevant questions and analyze the information that is gathered in response. They can also lessen the anxiety and confusion that often finds its way into the college admission process.

### **GENERAL EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE**

Much of the parental role during the final years of high school must be directed toward the general educational experience, making certain that the student is engaged in studies that are consistent with his abilities, aptitudes, interests and accomplishments.

Parents can also help their child in the development of effective study and time management skills and make certain he has the tools and materials to do an effective job as a student. They must also create an atmosphere or climate that encourages curiosity and discovery and promotes reading, experimentation and expression.

The parent should work with teachers and counselors to track the child's learning experiences and address any issues or problems that could result in the student not realizing his full learning potential.

### **COLLEGE GUIDANCE**

The second parental guidance role deals directly with the college exploration, decision-making and application process.

First, the parents should help their children understand the reasons why he/she is going to college and aid him/her in the formulation of educational and career goals. This will entail the appraisal of personal abilities, aptitudes and interests and relating what they learn about themselves to the educational and career options before them.

This is a time to respect the individuality of the child and the fact that he/she is still growing and maturing. Parents must also respect the child's right to make decisions about his/her personal future. The parent must be careful to remember who is going to college and whose life is being planned. The student who plays a major role in the decisions that affect his/her future has a greater investment in making those decisions work. It is easier to fail or have mediocre success at the decisions that others make or force upon you. Parents should recognize the difference between guiding and steering. Guiding is an open, promoting and supporting parental behavior. Steering is a controlling, dominating and insulting one.

Parents can be active participants in the college exploration and admission process. They should visit campuses with their child and participate in the parent programs offered by admission offices. Supportive parents help the child acquire and evaluate the information needed to make good decisions. Parents should: 1) make certain the student has been thorough in his search; 2) review the admission and financial aid applications and offer information or guidance in their completion; 3) make certain that tasks get completed and forms are submitted on time; and 4) be the calming force when confusion and anxiety enter the picture.

Above all, parents need to be proud, loving and encouraging, and help a son or daughter deal with the outcome of the quest for college admission. When this experience has ended, you'll be the parent of a college freshman.

## **WORLD WIDE WEB RESOURCES**

### **College Information/Financial Aid/Scholarships**

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

College search, scholarship search, test prep, career search, financial aid calculators, SAT registration, score sender, score release, test dates

**[www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)**

Common college application for 190+ selective, independent colleges & universities

**[www.eduinonline.com](http://www.eduinonline.com)**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities common application.

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

User-friendly site that lets you complete FAFSA on the web

**[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)**

College search, financial aid, online applications, test prep, study abroad programs, summer camps, Graduate programs, job search

**[www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com)**

College rankings, scholarship search, financial aid info

**[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)**

Internet's largest free scholarship search database program

**[www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org)**

Official web site of the NCAA Eligibility Center (Athletics)

**[www.scholarships101.com](http://www.scholarships101.com)**

Award-winning site – FREE database of more than 600,000 awards, info on federal and state programs

**[www.review.com](http://www.review.com)**

Princeton Review official site, college search, applications online, SAT/ACT info.

## Standardized Testing

### SAT

Upcoming Test dates	Registration Deadline
01/24/15	12/29/14
03/14/15	02/13/15
05/02/15	04/06/15
06/06/15	05/08/15

Register at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). Set up an account that will allow you to register, check your scores and send scores to colleges. Be sure to upload an acceptable photo during registration and print an Admission Ticket each time you register for an exam. **You must bring your admission ticket and an acceptable photo ID to the test center on the day of the exam.** Keep your College Board account ID and password in a safe place, as it is very difficult to retrieve a forgotten password.

Always use the Bishop McNamara School Code **210532** to be sure a copy of your test results can be included on your transcript.

To choose Bishop McNamara as the location where you take the SAT use Bishop McNamara's Test Center Code: **21291**.

List up to four colleges to receive your scores...any schools above four will cost \$11.50 each. Scores requested after the test date cost \$11.50 each as well. When scores are sent to colleges, ALL previous scores are included. Most colleges will take the highest scores in each area when evaluating the candidate. Do not use "ScoreChoice". It usually is NOT worth the cost to "rush" scores!

### SAT-Subject Tests

Subject tests are required by some colleges and universities and are used for placement. You can take up to three subjects per test date. Some colleges may specify which subject tests must be taken while others may leave that decision to the student. (Pick the subjects you think you will score best in). These are given on the same dates as the general SAT so be sure to schedule accordingly. Tests are available in math, literature, sciences, social sciences and foreign languages. Full-length practice tests are available in the Counseling Center.

### ACT

The ACT is an alternate test to the SAT which all colleges and universities will accept. Usually they will take the best scores from either test. Students who struggle with the SAT may want to try the ACT as well for an additional chance to meet admission standards. Pick up a full-length practice test in the Counseling Center to see if you prefer this test. You must create an account and upload a picture at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) in order to register for the ACT.

There are four sections to the ACT: Reading/English, Math, Science and Social Studies. The Writing portion is optional. If your SAT writing score is OK you can skip this section on the ACT. For more information visit their website.

Upcoming Test Dates	Registration Deadline
02/07/15	01/09/15
04/18/15	03/13/15
06/13/15	05/08/15

## Transcripts

When requesting an official transcript:

There is a \$3.00 fee for each official transcript.

Complete the “Transcript Request Form” with instructions and deadlines.

List the teacher recommendations you want included with each application. Forms are available from your counselor, from Mrs. Mendiola in the Counseling Center, or as a printable PDF on the Counseling page of the BMHS website and on Naviance (click on “Document Library” on the right side of the Home page. Click on “Family Connection Library” then click on the document to print.)

If a college accepts supporting documents only through the mail students should bring any forms from the college (Secondary School Report, Counselor Recommendation Form, etc.) directly to the counselor.

If a college accepts supporting documents electronically the Counseling Center will automatically complete and submit the Common Application Secondary School Report to schools who accept the Common Application and the NACAC Secondary School Report to non-Common Application schools.

Be sure that your “Brag Sheet Survey” in Naviance is complete. Click on the “About Me” tab on your home page then “brag sheet” under the “Surveys To Take” header on the left.

Hand **ALL** materials to your counselor at least **2 weeks** before the application’s due date.

## Teacher Recommendations

Some colleges require a teacher recommendation, others welcome additional recommendations. Please follow the guideline published by each college.

When choosing a recommender look for a teacher:

1. From Junior or Senior year
2. Who taught a core academic subject
3. Who knows you well (not just an easy A) in and out of the classroom if possible
4. Who consents to writing a positive recommendation

Please limit the number of additional recommendations to 2 teachers and your counselor (for a total of 3) and use the same teacher for ALL requests. Do not ask 10 different teachers to write you a recommendation!

Procedure:

1. Personally ask each teacher who will serve as a reference for you if he/she is able to write you a glowing recommendation.
2. See your counselor or Ms. Mendiola to fill out the Teacher Recommendation Request form and to open your Naviance account to the teachers who will write your recommendations.
3. Give the Teacher Recommendation Request and a very BIG thank you to your recommenders!

## Athletes

Athletes who are being recruited to play on the collegiate level should follow the procedures outlined below.

1. In the junior year, complete the BMHS Student Transcript Release Form and return it to the Counseling Center. **Please note this form gives coaches and counselors permission to release a copy of your unofficial transcript to any college or coach.**
2. You may begin the registration process with the NCAA Eligibility Center at the end of junior year. To do so, visit their website at [www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org) and pay the \$75 registration fee. In “My Planner”, go to My Task and click “Open Task”. Click on “Official Transcript Needed”. When the next screen appears click on “Click Here”. It should connect you with “Parchment by Docufide” where you will set up an account. Complete personal and school information on the screens that appear and submit the information.
3. After completing registration the student must **also** see his/her counselor in the Guidance Office to fill out an Official Transcript Request form so that an official transcript may be sent to the NCAA Eligibility Center. **If a student has attended more than one high school he/she must request a separate transcript directly from each high school attended.**)
4. Please note that the NCAA Eligibility Center will not accept transcripts that do not have a student’s junior year grades and the Counseling Center at BMHS will not send transcripts to the Eligibility Center until the completion of a student’s junior year.
5. When registering for the SAT, request that your scores be sent directly to the NCAA Eligibility Center, Code 9999.
6. See your counselor at any time during the process to calculate your core GPA and perform an unofficial preliminary eligibility evaluation.

## Introducing Naviance Succeed

Naviance Succeed is an online software program designed to guide students through the college search and application process and to allow the Counseling Center to manage the flow of paperwork created during that process. Naviance provides a broad array of capabilities that our teachers, counselors, administrators, and students will use on a daily basis to collaborate, to monitor progress in the search and application process, and to guide each student through challenging academic and career decisions.

All current BMHS students have received a Naviance Succeed password, log in instructions and an introduction to the tools available to them in Naviance. They will be expected to use these tools throughout their four years at BMHS, but it will become an integral part of their college search during the summer following junior year and during senior year. The student's home page in Naviance includes three sections: Colleges, Careers, and All About Me.

Applications in the All About Me section include:

- Personality Type – Students can take a Myers-Briggs profile to determine their personality type and what study and career fields might interest them.
- Brag Sheets – Students must complete the Brag Sheet Survey found on their “All About Me” tab. This information is used by members of the faculty as they write letters of recommendation for the students.
- Game Plan – Here students will define their educational goals and create a profile of the type of college he/or she is interested in attending
- Resume Builder – Students may create develop a professional-style resume to submit with college or employment applications.
- Checklist – This tool will help students keep on track as they complete each step in the college search process.

The Careers section uses the results from the student's Myers-Briggs profile to suggest possible career paths. Students can create lists of careers they are interested in pursuing, as well as career clusters and pathways. They will use this information as they search for colleges that will help them to achieve their career goals.

The Colleges section allows the student to research colleges and to create a list of colleges he/she is interested in through College Lookup and College Match. Students can complete a questionnaire to generate a list of colleges that fit the criteria they are looking for in a university. They can also generate maps and graphs that display statistical information and acceptance results for past BMHS students and compare their SAT scores with those of other BMHS students who have been accepted to a particular school. A list of admissions representatives scheduled to visit the BMHS Counseling Center is included here and students must sign up for the visits via Naviance. When a student is ready to apply to a particular college that college will be moved to his/her “Colleges I'm Applying To” list and students will be able to monitor the flow of paperwork, including Secondary School Reports, transcripts and recommendations, to ensure deadlines are met. This section also includes a database of national scholarships, a scholarship match function to help find scholarships for which a student is qualified, and a list of local scholarships that may be of interest to our students.

## Junior Year Tasks on Naviance

- Complete the Game Plan on the “All About Me” tab so that we can help match you with schools, programs and scholarships that best fit your capabilities and interests. This is where you must identify the two teachers you have contacted about writing your recommendations for next year.
- Complete the “Brag Sheet” survey on the left hand side of the “All About Me” tab. Your recommenders and I will use this to help us as we write your glowing letters of recommendation. Don’t be shy – this is your chance to brag about yourself!
- Develop a study plan to help you prepare for the SAT test; you should include the Method Test Prep on a weekly basis. This 20-week course is an ideal SAT preparation course easily accessed on your home computer and free of cost! It can be found on the left hand side of your “College” tab.
- Complete the Myers-Briggs personality test under the “All About Me” tab. Review career suggestions that match your personality profile to help guide you in identifying possible academic majors.
- Develop a list of “Colleges I Am Interested In” as you research, visit and learn about various colleges and universities. This is your working list of colleges – it should be fairly broad and include a range of colleges to include as many as 25-30 schools. As you continue your research you will delete schools that you no longer want to consider and you may add new schools you have uncovered in your search.