



Achieve Your Higher Education Goals

In addition to the challenging academic workload most teens are faced with, many students are simultaneously working, engaged in extracurricular activities and want social time. Compile this busy lifestyle with the time and energy it takes to prepare and apply to colleges.

Step One: Guidance

Applying to college is no easy task. Examine a college application and you will see the various elements required. Universities require more information from students now than ever before to make distinctions and admission decisions. Applications are often difficult if not impossible for students to complete without the proper support and direction.

Most colleges suggest support and counseling, but from whom and how?

Well meaning high school counselors are often spread too thin and many families do not know the current application requirements, options, statistics or what university admissions officers want to see. If universities are requiring numerous components to the college application process, students are entitled to know what to do. Before even beginning the college process, families should learn exactly what is involved and make sure their children have the proper guidance.

Step Two: Stay Current

There are factors in the admission process that change from year to year. What are the different ways to apply? Early Decision, Early Action, Restrictive First Choice Early Action, and Rolling Admissions... What do these terms mean? What is the best strategy? Harvard, Princeton and the University of Virginia along with other select universities have eliminated their Early Admission Plans. How do students and their families become aware of such news? A few ways include:

The National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) will have current college news and updates. Visit www.nacacnet.org

Contacting university admission officers as well as carefully reviewing college websites will provide current brochures and admission information for free

Step Three: Testing

Each year, students face additional concerns regarding the standardized testing process. Families we work with are constantly unsure about what tests to take (ACT and/or SAT I), what colleges require SAT II Subject Exams, when they are given and where and how to register to take them. The testing requirements change as some universities require certain tests and some do not or simply recommend them.

Step Four: The Essay

Since over 800 universities in the United States are test optional, often greater emphasis is placed on the college essay. What are these university admission officers looking for in the student essay?

Although many universities do give a “topic of your choice” there are also those questions that are specific. For example, an essay question may quote legendary philosophers and tell the applicant to decipher the content and connect it on a personal level. To write intelligently anywhere from 100 to 600 words (depending on the institution) is yet an additional skill. Essays should be in story format, creative and wonderfully intriguing. However, students generally do not learn to write first person essays in high school, which makes the process more challenging. Many colleges require three to four essays; some long and some short – but nevertheless all different.

Step Five: Recommendations

The amount of recommendation letters necessary vary per college. Here are a few of the questions I get from students and parents: “How many do I need?” “What information should be included?” “Who should I give them to?” “Should I submit my recommendations with the rest of the application?” “Should I waive the right to see them?” The answer is that universities have different methods of how they want their applicants to submit recommendations.

Step Six: The Activity Resume

The activity resume is essentially a list of extracurricular activities, honors and awards received in high school. Students need to know the best way to state and present their activities. In most cases, applicants are given approximately seven short lines to list years of experience and accomplishments. They are entitled to know how to maximize this space.

Step Seven: Financial Planning

Most families approach college years for their children without having given much thought to how they will finance their children’s college education. Funding college education for your children will probably represent the second largest out of pocket expense that a family will incur in their lifetime. Recently, college financial planning has received its own designation. College Connections Certified College Financial Planning Program assists families in this otherwise complex process. It is essential to begin financial planning for college as early as possible to maximize benefits. The longer the period that funds can compound in a tax preferred education plan, the more cost effective a college education will be.