# **College Planning Guide**



**Finding the Right College** 

#### **Applying to College**

#### Finding the "Right" College

The purpose of this packet is to reduce stress and anxiety over the college admission process. If you understand the process, you will feel better prepared to research and apply for the schools of your choice. If you know what you are supposed to do and how to do it— you can face the task with confidence.

First, the goal is to find the right school for you. Your goal is not to gain admission to the most academically grueling institution in America; it is to find a school where you can grow, learn, and succeed— a school where your special talents and interests will be appreciated and cultivated. You will make your choices with information from a wide range of sources:

- Guidebooks
- Catalogs, websites, and flyers from the colleges
- Reputation, word of mouth, media coverage
- Alumni and other applicants from your high school

- Counselors, teachers, and other professionals
- College representatives at your high school
- Campus visits and interviews

A close look at the admission process may help, too. Colleges are not looking for one type of student. They are trying to put together a diverse community. Their goal is remarkably similar to yours: to find a successful match of school and student. It is interesting to compare the way you choose a school with the way the college chooses a student. The college relies on a much more focused set of resources:

- Grades, class rank, and GPA
- Course of study (course load, APs, Honors, etc)
- Test scores (SAT& ACT)

- Biographical data (summer activities, jobs, special interests, community service, background)
- Recommendations
- One or more essays

Each of these elements contributes to the "big picture" (YOU) that colleges will examine and consider. Of course, the evaluation process is different at every school; every college makes decisions its own way. Generally though, the admissions committee is made up of a group of individuals given the task to read hundreds, sometimes thousands of applications. It is up to you to make your application stand apart from the rest by making it personal and adding your

own creativity. Many things are considered when compiling a new freshman class and different elements make up the admission committee's final decisions.

### **Attractive Qualities: What Colleges Find Attractive**

Before you start, you must select colleges. With your colleges list, you will want to brainstorm the qualities specific colleges find attractive.

- Strong GPAs/Test Scores: Admissions officers look at grades before anything else. If
  your grades are low compared to the applicant pool, you better write an incredibly
  moving and memorable essay.
- **Fitting the Colleges Needs & Involvement:** It is very important to convince the college that you will contribute meaningfully to the campus during your 4-5 years and that you won't drop out. Colleges are looking for people to contribute to campus organizations, be classroom stars, or be sports stars—the key word is **active**.
- **Selflessness:** Admissions officers find selfless people attractive because they tend to volunteer when they are in school and may give alumni donations once they graduate. Also, admissions officers are people; no one enjoys reading an essay that is arrogant.
- Depth: Admissions officers want evidence that you have accomplished substantial achievements outside the classroom, not that you've just occasionally attended meetings.
- **Breadth:** Depth is ultimately more important, but if you are a true Renaissance person, that's even better.
- Consistency: Your application should not have any weak links, but if it does (low GPA or low test scores), your personal statement and teacher recommendations must emphasize why you will excel at your selected college. Select teachers who know you well and will write about your best qualities.
- Extracurricular and Community Involvement: You want to emphasize that you will be a mover and a shaker on campus. You want to convince the admissions office that you will leave your mark on the college campus and community.
- Personality Traits: The following are viewed favorably by most colleges: academic
  ability, athletic ability, honesty, community involvement, creativity, responsibility, goalorientation, curiosity, sense of humor, love for family/friends, commitment,
  perseverance, leadership, empathy, listening ability, love for life, love of nature, careerorientation, a history of success.
- Special gifts and abilities: Colleges are not just looking for well-rounded students. No
  one can do everything perfectly well. Schools are more interested in creating a wellrounded class. Your job is to show how you can help to create that class with your
  distinctive talents.
- **Well-done applications:** Committees are looking for the story behind the story. They have a skeletal picture of you through grades, test scores and recommendations. How

you complete your application will make you stand out. Aim for an enthusiastic, articulate, genuine, and reflective presentation of yourself.

<u>The Bottom Line:</u> You will be compared to other students with similar backgrounds. You want to stand out within a category. Categories are based on gender, race, anticipated major, alumni connections, athletic ability, etc.

## Personal Characteristics Audit: Looking at You

Friends/Peers

Answer the following questions. Review and update your answers periodically.

1. Make a list of five adjectives you feel your friends/peers and teachers/counselors would use to describe you:

Teachers/Counselors

1	<del></del>	1	
2		2	
3		3	
4		4	
5		5	
2. Make a list of the fiv	e adjectives you would us	se to describe yourself:	
	TOTAL	DPTIC	
	2. <del>                                     </del>	DUCATIONAL	
	3F	DUCATIONAL	
	4		
	5		
3. What are your great	est personal strengths or	attributes? –	
4. What are your great	est weaknesses or shortco	omings?	
5. List three academic	subjects or interests you v	would like to continue to study:	
	-	C	
			<del></del>

6. Which high school courses have you enjoyed the most?
7. Which high school courses have been the most difficult?
8. Identify a recent experience that stimulated your intellectual curiosity:
9. How would you describe your academic performance to date? Is your high school record a true reflection of your academic ability and potential? If not, how would you characterize your ability and potential to succeed in college?
Setting Educational and Career Goals  1. What is your immediate educational goal? Why are you going to college?
2. What would you like to study? Have you decided on a college major or specific program of study?
3. What is your eventual educational goal (ex: Bachelor's degree, Masters degree)?

4. Have you set a career goal or identifice you would like to work? If yes, what is t		ommunication, health) in v	which
5. What do you consider to be your stroskills? To what extent do you wish to pu	_		al)
Narrowing Choices: Deciding Where to	Apply		
Insert names of the colleges (in any ord offer an appraisal as to whether the col one that has a history of admitting stud credentials. A "reach" school suggests to competition for admission is greater.	llege is a "safe" or a "reac lents with your kind of ac	h" school. A "safe" school ademic and personal	is
Don't create a list made up entirely of " (ex: strong journalism school, friendly a about the college. These characteristics	tmosphere, affordable, e	tc) that have impressed yo	
College:	Safe:	Reach:	
Characteristics of the college that impress.  1.	essed me during the searc	ch process:	
2.			
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College:	Safe:	Reach:	
Characteristics of the college that impre	essed me during the searc	ch process:	
1.			
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<b>3.</b>		
College:	Safe:	Reach:
Characteristics of the college that impres		
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College:	Safe:	Reach:
Characteristics of the college that impres		
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Once you have completed the exercise a identified for each college. Next rank the preference.		the order of personal
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Now you're ready!

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$lacktriangle$ Complete college applications – apply to $\overline{ extbf{at least four}}$ UC $\overline{ extbf{and}}$ CSU institutio
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- o DO NOT apply to a school you wouldn't actually attend.
- $\square$  Arrange to pay for application fees. Fees can cost anywhere from \$20-\$100 each.
  - When applying to UCs and CSUs the online application will ask if you want to apply for a fee waiver. If eligible, you may receive to up to <u>four</u> UC and <u>four</u> CSU application fee waivers.
- Request that your high school transcripts be sent to all institutions to which you are applying.



